IN SEARCH OF THE ÈLAN VITAL

A Gestalt Exploration of the Role of Self-Regulation in Mastering Work Related Stress
– An Autoethnographic Study using Directed Content Analysis.

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PhD Thesis

Submitted to the University of Limerick, May 2016

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Doctor of Philosophy
Abstract

Contemporary stress theory emphasises the role of individual differences in stress appraisal and coping. Although this view of stress as a process has achieved much scientific acceptance, complexity around the nature of those processes demands substantive further empirical investigation. Despite several identified limitations, architectural stress models that focus on the structure of the work environment still enjoy empirical dominance. My research is an attempt to address this issue by completing a qualitative, process-oriented exploration of the potential from self-regulation in the achievement of mastery over work related stress in my practice of leadership.

Using an autoethnographic methodology, data was collected over a two-year period by way of reflective journal and transcribed academic supervisory meetings. Analysis involved a directed content method, an approach suitable for use when more information is required on a particular phenomenon. Analytical categories were created using the gestalt cycle of experience as a conceptual tool due to its process approach to explaining how needs emerge and are subsequently satisfied or interrupted.

Findings are presented by way of vignette, a preferred approach of the autoethnographic methodology. These included the identification of a number of hazardous environmental work factors i.e. permanent toxicity exposure, holistic work-overload and threat from the uncontrollable environment. A neurotic mode of appraisal resulting in habitual cycles of unhealthy coping mechanisms also emerged. Negative outcomes including damage to work performance, social functioning, morale and life satisfaction, and somatic health surfaced also. By using the gestalt awareness / experience cycle, healthy findings were identified also as potential moderators of work related stress and mediators of self-regulation. This study has a number of implications for work related stress theory and practice, as it has for strategic human resource management, leadership, psychotherapy, and policy makers. A number of recommendations also result from this study aimed at improving my own practice of leadership and well-being. Wider recommendations are offered in the areas of work related stress analysis and treatment, psychotherapy and leadership.
Declaration

I, Morgan Danaher, hereby declare that this project is entirely my own work, and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award, or part thereof, at this or any other educational establishment and all academic works that have informed this thesis have been appropriately acknowledged.

Signature ______________________

Date _____________________
Acknowledgements

Numerous people have supported me in the completion of this study, and without their support and belief; this work would not have been possible.

❖ To my supervisor Dr. Patrick Ryan. I would like to thank you for not only being a wonderful supervisor, but as advised, I have appointed you as a life-long mentor.

❖ To Professor Marie Parker Jenkins. I am extremely grateful for your help and guidance and for the many hours of discussion during the taught component of the program in particular.

❖ To Fiona McAuliffe, Steph Sandoval, Edwina Flannery, Steve Hawley and Ian Walters from Ceridian for supporting me through the Ph.D. and for allowing me the space to complete this valued work.

❖ To the administrative and support staff of the Department of Education and Professional Studies at the University of Limerick notably Ms. Teresa Roche, Ms. Brigitte Clancy and Mr. Michael O’Brien. Thank you for your assistance throughout the programme.

❖ To Mr Gerard Slattery – Director of the Masters in Education Programme at the University of Limerick for helping me to launch my portfolio career and for enlightening me on the world of third level academia and post primary education.

❖ To my previous humanistic psychotherapist – Fiona Quin. Your 13-year investment in me has helped me greatly to believe in my own efficacy.

❖ Finally, to my wonderful wife Trina, and to my daughters Eva and Lucy. Your unquestioning support and sacrifice not only made this research possible, but you give me the motivation to continuously seek growth and improvement.
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<td>Allostatic Loading</td>
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<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td>American Psychological Society</td>
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<td>AR</td>
<td>Action Research</td>
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<td>BHF</td>
<td>British Heart Foundation</td>
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<td>CBT</td>
<td>Cognitive Behavioural Therapy</td>
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<td>COE</td>
<td>Gestalt Cycle of Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>DB</td>
<td>Distributive Bargaining</td>
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<td>EFT</td>
<td>Equine Facilitated Therapy</td>
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<td>EI</td>
<td>Emotional Intelligence</td>
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<td>EISCE</td>
<td>The Survivors Competitive Advantage</td>
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<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<td>Gestalt</td>
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<td>Grounds for Leadership Efficacy</td>
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<td>Grounded Theory</td>
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<td>Humanistic Grounding</td>
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<td>Holistic Work Overload</td>
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<td>ICTU</td>
<td>Irish Congress of Trade Unions</td>
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<td>IGAR</td>
<td>Integrated Gestalt Action Research Model</td>
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<td>ISC</td>
<td>Internal Self-Critic</td>
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<td>JD-R</td>
<td>Job Demand-Resources Model</td>
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<td>MAOI's</td>
<td>Monoamine Oxidase Inhibitors</td>
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<td>MS</td>
<td>Management Standards Indicator Tool</td>
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<td>PPDE</td>
<td>Permanent Personality Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>PTE</td>
<td>Permanent Toxicity Exposure</td>
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<td>RET</td>
<td>Rational Emotive Therapy</td>
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<td>Skills Demand Compatibility</td>
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<td>Schema Focused Therapy</td>
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<td>Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors</td>
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<td>TL</td>
<td>Transformational Leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>UFT</td>
<td>Uncontrollable Field Threat</td>
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When all is taken from us, what alone remains is the last of human freedoms, the ability to choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances.

(Frankl 1964, p. 9)

1.0 Introduction

Although the subject of work related stress has received much empirical attention, the continuing scale of the problem is evidenced by a recent Health and Safety Executive (2016) report indicating that it is responsible for 43% of all working days lost due to ill health in the United Kingdom. Stress at work is also linked with negative health outcomes such as heart disease, anxiety, depression and musculoskeletal disorders (Korosi and Baram 2010; Khamisa et al. 2015). Research also indicates a sharp increase in the prevalence of work related stress throughout the 1990’s, plateauing somewhat in the new millennium, at an unacceptably high level (Health and Safety Authority 2010). In terms of work related stress and leadership roles, certain factors such as work overload, and the amount of personal sacrifice required are argued to make leadership roles particularly stressful (Campbell et al. 2010). Indeed, during economic recession such as that experienced during the tenure of this study, leadership burden has been at it greatest in modern times (Cooper et al. 2015).

Research into stress has developed significantly since the original GAS model of Seyle (1936) that assumed that organisms exhibit the same response to any stressful stimulus (Cox and Griffiths 2010). Stress, including work related stress is now seen as a transactional process between organism and working environment (Lazarus and Folkman 1987). Treatment for work related stress has also developed with cognitive behavioural therapy CBT and pharmacological interventions holding precedence in this domain (McLeod 2011; Lynch 2001). Work place interventions include the practice of
job crafting to ensure the minimisation of environmental hazard to employees (Bakker and Demorouti 2014), and palliative based employee assistance programmes (McMahon and Palmer 2014).

Although now seen as a transactional process between organism and environment, a limited number of transactional studies have been completed due to the complexity and labour intensive nature of such investigations (Houdmont 2009; Cox et al. 2010). This thesis is concerned with addressing that lacuna by considering the role of self-regulation as a tool for achieving mastery over work related stress. It uses gestalt, a process oriented form of psychotherapeutic theory as its conceptual framework (Kepner 2014; Joyce and Sills 2014). This introductory chapter begins by expanding on the context and background for this study. It sets forth the research problem, purpose, aims and objectives, and research questions in this study.

The overall research design is introduced in this chapter along with an explication of the significance of this study. Key terms that permeate this thesis are described, as is the overall structure of the paper. Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) offer guidance on the structure and content of theses introductory chapters, adopted in several contemporary research projects (Taitt 2015; Srivastava 2014). This chapter now proceeds with an overview of my research using their guidance on structure and organisation.

1.1 Contextual Background to the Research

This autoethnographic study is set within my own practice of leadership within an Irish subsidiary of a global human capital management organisation, and as the module leader in a university based entrepreneurship module. It is concerned with my subjective interpretation of living and leading within hazardous work environments in terms of stress. The study was conducted during the period of the most sustained economic global downturn in modern times and Ireland in particular was witnessing a spectacular collapse in fortune. During the 1990’s, the dramatic growth in Ireland’s fortune was the envy of Europe and the wider world (Seguino 2010). Colloquially referred to as the “Celtic Tiger”, a certain amount of mystery accompanied this phenomenon with the historian R.R. Foster suggesting that “it appeared like a miraculous beast in a forest clearing and economists are not entirely sure why” (Lewis 2011 p. 21). That mystery
was soon to be solved however when in 2008, the Irish economy imploded taking with it the dreams and ambitions of its people, including its workers (Fenton 2011).

Whilst academics, economists and journalists voiced concern about the over-reliance on revenue from the construction industry, and the inflated property market, the government refuted their concerns and predicted, at worst, a relative softening of the property market and the economy. They were proved wrong however because what occurred since the demise of the Celtic Tiger is without precedence in Irish economic history. In the third quarter of 2008, economic activity weakened sharply leading to a severe implosion of the Irish economy (Fenton 2011). This was caused by a confluence of factors, namely: a global economic downturn, triggered by the international banking crisis, and an unrelated, but intertwined, bursting of the property bubble in Ireland (Ó’Foghlú 2010).

On 30th September 2008, in an effort to stabilise the indigenous banking sector, the government decided to rescue Irish banks. This decision led to the socialisation of the banking debt and ultimately resulted in the surrender of economic sovereignty to the International Monetary Fund, European Union (EU) and European Central Bank (Kirby 2010). It copper-fastened an era of deep austerity where unemployment rose to 14.8% and in aggregate terms, GDP fell by 3% and GNP by 2.8% in 2008 which was the first annual contraction in economic activity since 1982 and which marked a major turning point in Ireland’s economic history (Power 2009). The impact on the public finances was catastrophic as revenues generated through property taxes effectively collapsed (Lewis 2011). Approximately 40,000 Irish people left Ireland in 2011, 95% of whom were between the ages of 19 to 44 years and 69% of this ‘generation skype’ (McWilliams 2012, p.5) have at least a primary degree which makes them Ireland’s most educated emigrants ever (Fenton 2011).

The reality for those who remained in Ireland was stark. Using interrupted time series analyses, Corcoran et al. (2015) examined the impact of economic recession and austerity in Ireland on national rates of suicide mortality and self-harm presentations to hospital from 2008 to 2012. Their study offers an insight into the impact of five years of economic recession and austerity in Ireland demonstrating a significant increase in
rates of suicide in men, and on instances of self-harm in both sexes. By the end of 2012, the male suicide rates were 57% higher than if the pre-recession trend continued. In absolute terms, there were 476 and 85 more male and female suicide deaths, and 5,029 and 3,833 more male and female self-harm presentations to hospital in the 5-year period from 2008 to 2012 respectively, than if pre-recession trends had continued. This is approximately equivalent to an excess of one complete year of suicide and self-harm.

Just as the economic recession was the result of a composite of circumstances, the background to how this study emerged is a composite of circumstances partly related to that event. In 2009, I had completed a master’s degree in strategic human resource management at the University of Limerick. Immediately prior to commencing that course of study, I had completed a master’s degree in humanistic and integrative psychotherapy also at the University of Limerick. The human tenet of those two programmes points to an epistemology constructed through an interest in human emotions, cognitions, behaviours, values and beliefs. I possess a largely humanistic ontology that places significant emphasis on our ability to create our own destiny. As a gestalt practitioner, this is completed within a relational environment. That environment at the commencement of my study was the same environment of austerity and at this time I became interested in exploring the concept of work related stress in the context of my practice of leadership. The gestalt approach to achieving growth is to increase awareness and therefore a logical mode to completing my investigation was through gestalt empirical research.

1.2 The Research Problem and Purpose

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), a research problem is specific; it seeks to understand some aspect of the general topic. Therefore, research problems are a more concentrated focus on a specific area of a more general area of interest. In this study, my prima facie or general interest area refers to the potential of self-regulation. The specific research problem that this study addresses however is the potential from self-regulation in achieving mastery over work related stress.
A close relationship exists between the research tradition and the purpose statement in research (Corbin and Strauss 2014). In all traditions, the researcher is trying to discover something. In the case of case study, ethnography or phenomenology, the researcher is trying to understand, describe or explore a phenomenon. This is in contrast to grounded theory studies for example where the researcher is trying to develop or generate new theory (Bloomberg and Volpe 2015, p.62). It is important to note at this point that when I discuss stress and its effects, I do so in the context of contemporary stress theory.

Stress theory has progressed over time from stimulus-response theories that viewed stress more in terms of an engineering model based on the notion of strain (Dewe et al. 2010). The general adaption syndrome (GAS) of Hans Seyle (1936) assumed that organisms exhibited as a stereotypical response to a wide range of chemical, biological or physical stimuli (Hickle and Anthony 2013). Today, stress responses are thought of in terms of a transaction between organism and environment. Transactional stress theory points to the mechanisms that underlie and best express the nature of the stress process, and the manner in which those mechanisms provide a causal pathway that expresses the nature of the experience (Houdmont 2009).

Stress is no longer thought of in terms of detachable entities like simply a stimulus and response but more in terms of a process of tracing out the transactional nature of that process (Mark and Smith 2012). This fosters a more focused direction to the specific nature of what is being experienced. Contemporary theory therefore emphasises the emotional quality of experience and the conjunction of a person with certain motives and beliefs with an environment that can pose harm and threat (Brouze 2014; Herbert 2011; Cox and Griffiths 2010). Therefore, when I discuss effects of stress in this thesis, the principal mechanism of understanding same is in terms of my subjective interpretation of discreet emotional appraisal and response.

The nature of my interpretation of those responses traces back to John Dewey’s theory of constructivism and his belief in the unity of theory and practice. Dewey believed that learning was active and that we engage with, and expand experience; through exploration, thinking, and reflection; whilst interacting with the external environment. Dewey advocated an experiential learning process to construct and conditionalise
knowledge. This is the basis of constructivist theory. Neuroscience now supports this form of active learning as being the way people naturally learn (Zull 2002).

Although stress theory has advanced to a process orientated model of organism / environment transaction, there exists a lacuna of empirical studies in this area due to the complexity of the approach, and the labour intensive nature of such research endeavours (Babatunde 2013). In viewing stress as a dynamic process, Lazarus (1995) urged the need to understand individual patterns in stress reactions. Process orientated studies however remain underrepresented in terms of contributing to our understanding of work related stress. In seeking to help address this void, I offer a contemporary gestalt / process orientated transactional stress analysis.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), a purpose statement should be a short, crisp and almost “bite sized” statement that can be retained by the reader and researcher alike (2015, p.65). Because the purpose statement is a critical piece of the entire study, it needs to be given careful attention and must be written in clear and concise language. After much reflection, my purpose statement that encapsulates this study is as follows:

To use gestalt theory as a conceptual analytical tool, in order to understand the transactional processes of work-related stress, in my practice of leadership. In doing so, I aim to create a level of self-awareness that will assist in achieving mastery over work related stress for the betterment of my practice, my health and my wellbeing. The study will also add value to the considerable body of existing knowledge on stress and work-related stress, to inform theory, practice, and policy.

1.3 Research Objectives

The specific research objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To complete a systematic examination of literature relating to work related stress, gestalt psychotherapy and leadership in order to form a theoretical framework in which to complete this study.
2. To collect data over an extended time period within a reflective journal and through relational discussions in supervision regarding work hazards, patterns of appraisal and coping processes, and outcomes of work stress for me.

3. Gestalt seeks to achieve growth through engaging with both healthy and unhealthy aspects of personality. Therefore, the study also aims to identify positive work characteristics, as well as healthy appraisal and coping processes, in addition to healthy outcomes in terms of functioning in work and social functioning, morale and life satisfaction and somatic health.

4. To identify and offer implications and recommendations for the betterment of my own practice of leadership, health and wellbeing; in addition to suggesting transferable implications and recommendations for theory, practice and policy in terms of work related stress, psychotherapy and leadership.

1.4 Research Questions

Maxwell (2012) provides useful guidance on the creation of research questions. He argues that they provide a framework for understanding a phenomenon. Good research questions should be clear, specific, and unambiguously stated. They should also be interconnected—that is, related to each other in some meaningful way. As such, the questions should be displayed in a logical order. Mostly, the research questions must be substantively relevant; they must be worthy of the research effort to be expended. Therefore, careful consideration was given to the nature of my research questions and the kind of understanding they aim to generate. The types of qualitative questions available to me as a qualitative researcher as follows:

1. Descriptive—these ask what is going on in terms of actual observable (or potentially observable) events and behaviour.

2. Interpretive—these seek to explore the meaning of things, situations, and conditions for the people involved.
3. Theoretical—these are aimed at examining why certain things happen and how they can be explained.

Source: Maxwell (2012)

Returning to Bloomberg and Volpe’s (2015) guidance, given that this study is an autoethnographic investigation, I am trying to understand, describe and explore. Therefore, the types of questions available to me as a qualitative researcher appear to be appropriate for this study. In terms of addressing the research purpose, transactional stress theory comprises of three interrelated aspects: (i) antecedent factors or environmental hazards (ii) cognitive perceptual processes that give rise to the emotional experience of stress, and (iii) correlates (outcomes) of that experience (Cox and Griffiths 2010; Lazarus 1995; Lazarus and Folkman 1987). Outcomes in transactional stress theory refer to impacts on (a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale or life satisfaction and (c) somatic health (Lyon 2012). Gestalt investigators seek to identify all aspects of human existence including healthy and unhealthy ones (Day 2015; Corey 2015). My research seeks to identify healthy as well as unhealthy patterns of being in order to form a holistic picture leading to comprehensive conclusions arising from this study. Therefore, the research questions that guide this study are as follows:

(i) What hazardous work (environmental) factors permeate my practice of leadership?

(ii) What are the dominant primary and secondary appraisal patterns used to assess the significance of an event, an encounter, or a situation?

(iii) What are the habitual coping mechanisms employed in response to the appraisal of an event, an encounter, or a situation?

(iv) What are dominant outcomes in terms of a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale or life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health?
What factors mediate healthy appraisal, coping and outcomes and how does a healthy cycle unfold?

1.5 Research Design Overview

A qualitative approach, congruent with my humanistic ontology, seeks to satisfy the aims and objectives of this research. The specific type of qualitative investigation used is autoethnography, an approach to investigating oneself in a larger context i.e. in this case my leadership practice with two organisations, set within an uncontrollable external environment. The autoethnographic approach was preferred over a narrative study (a look at a story of self) or a self-study (a look at self in action – usually confined to an educational setting (Hamilton et al. 2008). Further analysis of the rationale for deciding on autoethnography versus other qualitative approaches such as interpretive phenomenological analysis or grounded theory is offered in chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Data was captured by way of reflective journaling and transcribed academic supervision meetings. In terms of replicating this study, specific information regarding content, volume, frequency and procedural steps involved in data capture is described in detail in chapter 4 of this dissertation. The efficacy of these approaches to data collection in autoethnographic studies is demonstrated by an array of empirical research. In terms of reflective journaling, evidence of same can be found in Larson (2011); Mazzetti (2011); Delamont (2009) and Atkinson (2006). In terms of the use of data captured in academic supervision, Pettifor et al. (2011); Farber (2012); and Kotzé (2014) offer examples of recent studies using this method.

Data analysis was completed by use of a specific method of data content analysis, and much evidence exists linking autoethnographic studies with the use of this method (Storlie et al. 2013; Tidwell et al. 2009; Polkinghorne 2012). The method of data content analysis I selected was directed or deductive content analysis (the rationale for this type of content analysis is dealt with explicitly in chapter 3). The goal of this approach to content analysis is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory (Rosvik et al. 2011). Existing theory or research can help focus the research questions and it can help researchers begin by identifying key concepts or variables as initial coding categories. Using directed content analysis affords a qualitative researcher a
consistent structure for a data sets that can be highly variable and complex (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

Directed content analysis starts with a theory, or relevant research findings, as guidance for initial codes. In the case of my research, the specific codes that were used represented the various phases of the gestalt cycle of experience (the specifics around the generation and use of coding in this study is attended to in chapter 4 of this study). Although my literature review uncovers a significant dearth of empirical contributions from within the gestalt paradigm in general, recent studies such as Blom (2013) and Nevis (2014) do employ the cycle of experience as an analytical framework in their research. In doing so, they demonstrate the efficacy of using gestalt theory in helping researchers to make sense of complex phenomena.

1.6 Rationale and Significance of this study

The rationale for this study is twofold. Firstly, it is concerned with addressing the negative outcomes from work related stress in my practice of leadership. Gestalt theory posits that a healthy person is aware of positive and negative influences in their lives (Joyce and Sills 2014). In terms of outcomes, I experience significant anxiety related issues such as persistent insomnia and heightened blood pressure due to work related stress. I believe that stress related to my role of leadership results in social anxiety, resulting in a habitual turning away from healthy environmental contact.

A second key impetus for this study is to minimise the potential for work related stress to negatively impact on my performance of leadership. Indeed, the impact of work stress on job performance has become an important policy issue, as it is closely associated with reduced work motivation and performance (Chapman 2013; The Teaching Council of Ireland 2011). Higher levels of work related stress have been associated with diminished job performance, heightened absenteeism and increased worker attrition rates (Kyriacou et al. 2009). In addition, due to the economic downturn in recent years, a sharp increase in responsibilities due to reduced resources has increased work load thus threatening individual and organisational performance (The Teaching Council of Ireland 2011). Lerner et al (2011) completed a longitudinal study of over 14,000 US workers employed in the primary care sector. Their study found that depressed employees exhibit more job
loss, premature retirement, on-the-job functional limitations, and absences compared with their non-depressed co-workers.

From a wider theoretical perspective, this study also aims to address a dearth in process oriented studies considering work related stress by undertaking the time consuming, labour intensive and complex analysis that has hitherto prevented more contributions of this type. I aim to achieve this through considering a process oriented phenomenon (transactional stress), through the lens of a process oriented conceptual framework (gestalt psychotherapeutic theory).

There are several practice implications from completing this study also, none more so for my own practice of leadership. For instance, the study aims to identify healthy characteristics of my leadership practice to help me cope better with work related stress. The issue of coping in transactional theory has proved problematic. Cooper et al. (2001) and Cox and Ferguson (1991) have stated that despite the widespread use of the term “coping”, there are difficulties surrounding its definition, as it can be seen as a process, a behaviour, as a stable trait, or as situation specific. Briner and Reynolds (1994) suggest that the conception of appraisal is too simplistic in the transactional model, and doesn’t include an individual’s history, and anticipated futures. Cox (1987) also states that the processes discussed may not be as rational as presented in transactional theories.

The study aims to offer work place practice recommendations to assist various practitioners across an array of disciplines including work place systems and job design, stress treatment, employee assistance programme design and delivery, mentoring and coaching. This study will demonstrate limitations of current treatments and offer guidance on how and why more integrative approaches to tackling work related stress could be more cost effective in terms of treatment, reducing absenteeism, increasing engagement and work place satisfaction. The research will have significance in terms of psychotherapeutic discourse and practice as it adds to a growing movement toward person specific treatment(s) versus the maintenance of allegiance to dominant treatment methods. This is in line with key thinking in occupational health psychology, various commentators within psychotherapy, and various other strands of psychology such as psycho-dynamic and positive psychology.
The study has empirical implications also. Gestalt is criticised for contributing little to the defence of its own efficacy as a scientific method of enquiry (Wedding and Corsini 2013; McLeod 2011). Questions are being asked regarding the relationship between gestalt theory and practice and if theory is holding practice back (Levine 2012). This study challenges this assumption by demonstrating that a lack of empirical contributions has little to do with the underlying theory. A more likely explanation may rest in how the creative tenets of gestalt have gained favour in practice whilst other key facets of theory are being ignored and/or underutilised, thus aligning the movement further away from providing empirically useful contributions.

The study also contributes to contemporary stress theory by offering empirical validation of the organism/environmental transaction process by ‘tracing out’ processes in the context of a real life practice. In the subsequent chapter that includes a critique of extant leadership literature, the significance of this in understanding leadership processes becomes apparent as contemporary leadership discourse also converges around a process oriented model. Current theories such as the leader member exchange (LMX) model are heavily rooted in the notion of relational interaction as a primary concern (Graen 2006; Dulebohn et al. 2012).

There are substantial policy implications from this study also. This study challenges the dominance of certain interventions to the exclusion of others. It does not discount those approaches that are empirically shown to be valid interventions. My research however does highlight inherent limitations in all areas of intervention, and asks if the focus on short term outcome measured interventions is the most prudent way to start reversing the alarmingly high prevalence of work related stress when stress theory now considers work related stress as an ongoing process of organism/environment transaction.

Parties who may consider recommendations from this research pertinent include a variety of stakeholders such as fellow qualitative researchers, mixed methods and quantitative researchers, various gestalt theorists and practitioners, institutes such as the Irish and British Gestalt institutes, integrative psychotherapists, physicians, human
resource professionals, health and safety authorities, various governmental departments and people employed in leadership and senior management positions.

1.7 Key Terminology

Key terms addressed in this study include “Gestalt”, “Work Related Stress”, “Autoethnography”, “Directed Content Analysis” and “Transactional Stress Theory”.

1.7.1 Gestalt Psychotherapy

Gestalt is a psychotherapeutic approach that aims for a person to discover, explore and experience, their own shape, pattern and wholeness (Mann 2010). Analysis may be a part of the process, but the aim of gestalt is the integration of all disparate parts. In this way, people are seen as having the potential to let themselves discover totally what they already are, and also, what potentially they can be. This fullness of experience can then be available to them both in the course of their life, and in the experience of a single moment (Clarkson and Cavicchia 2013).

It is an approach to working with people that places the individual as central to their own healing, and that has a belief in the self-actualisation capabilities and desires of the individual (Corey 2012). Gestalt works by bringing power to the present, and practitioners believe that healthy living results in a state of homeostatic balance (Polster and Polster 2013). The inability to maintain this equilibrium leads to what Perls (1973) referred to in terms of growth interruptions and neurotic disturbances, a state of imbalance resulting in compromised environmental interaction. Neurosis results in inadequate sense of identity, due to maintenance of maladaptive, self-support constructs (Strobel and Brocke 2011). The basis for the advent of self-defeating neurotic behaviours in the here-and-now, often originates in quite healthy coping mechanisms that if used for a brief period of time, or in certain limited situations, may in fact be beneficial. These behaviours however become problematic when they become the organism’s dominant mode of dis-eased contact with its environment (Corey 2015). In other words, what can start out as a novel response to a novel situation can become a normative mode of environmental interaction for the organism. The goal of gestalt
treatment is to allow the organism to self-regulate through awareness in the here-and-now of how these interruptions happen (Evans and Gilbert 2015; Joyce and Sills 2014).

1.7.2 Transactional Stress Theory

As a social-personality psychologist, Richard Lazarus became interested in explaining the dynamics of troublesome experiences (Lyon 2012). He developed and tested a transactional theory of stress and coping (TTSC) (Lazarus 1995; Lazarus and Folkman, 1987). He believed that stress as a concept had heuristic value, but in and of itself was not measurable as a single factor. Lazarus (1990) contended that stress did not exist in the event, but rather is a result of a transaction between a person and his or her environment.

Transactional stress theory is based on a process comprising of (i) antecedent factors, (ii) cognitive perceptual processes that give rise to the emotional experience of stress, and (iii) correlates of that experience i.e. health outcomes (Houdmont 2009; Cox 1987; Lazarus 1995). In contrast to historical stress models, transactional theory emphasises differences between individuals, and how this may affect how they deal with stressors at work (Mark and Smith 2012; Cox and Ferguson 1991). Transactional theories of stress (e.g. Folkman and Lazarus 1980) place emphasis not just on job characteristics, but also on subjective perceptions of stressors, and individual differences in ways of coping, viewing problems, past experience, personality type etc. All these may be important in informing and affecting the workplace – individual stress transaction (Cox and Ferguson 1991; Moos and Holahan 2003; Penley et al. 2002).

In Folkman and Lazarus’ model (1980), individuals are proposed to appraise environmental stressors, including their level of potential threats and costs (primary appraisal), then to make potential plans to deal with stressors using known coping methods and past experience (secondary appraisal), and then to initiate coping. ‘Coping’ has been described as any cognitive or behavioural efforts used to manage, minimise, or tolerate events that individuals perceive as potentially threatening to their well-being (Folkman et al. 1986). Coping does not imply success in dealing with situations and coping responses to stressors can also be maladaptive. Methods may include problem
solving, self-blame, escape / avoidance, wishful thinking, seeking advice and support, etc. (Folkman and Lazarus 1980). Therefore, coping occupies a dual role, both as a process following on from appraisal, but also as an individual difference variable, when people exhibit patterns of coping behaviours (carried out during the coping stage of transactional theory) that many suggest may be stable, or slowly changing over time (Folkman and Lazarus 1980). For the purposes of this study (as in work by others including Folkman and Lazarus), coping is treated as an individual difference variable.

Folkman et al. (1986) claim that problem-focused forms of coping (so called positive coping types) are likely to be associated with lower levels of negative health outcomes, and that coping of an emotional-focused (or negative) type, such as self-blame, wishful thinking, or escape / avoidance are likely to be associated with increased negative health outcomes. For example, Healy and McKay (2000) found that avoidance coping predicted poor mental health in nurses, and problem solving coping was linked to enhanced job satisfaction and positive health outcomes.

1.7.3 Work Related Stress

The Irish Health Services Executive (HSE) offers a formal definition of work related stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressures, or other types of demands placed on them at work" (Health Services Executive 2015, p.14). It can be experienced by anyone at any level of an organisation, and recent research shows that work related stress is widespread and is not confined to particular sectors, jobs or industries (Zhou et al. 2015; Clark et al. 2011; Jaramillio et al. 2011). In addition to evidence demonstrating the ubiquitous nature of work related stress, research is also presented in this study revealing the potential for damaging outcomes on an individual’s health and wellbeing (British Heart Foundation 2014; American Psychological Association 2012).

Although it is not unique to particular organisations, roles or geographical territories; certain professions and job roles indicate higher levels of work related stress. Strong evidence emerged over the course of my research linking higher levels of this in roles with a strong interpersonal tenure. According to the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
(2013) for example, 90% of voluntary sector workers consider their job to be stressful. Teachers (88%) and workers in the health service (82%) also report higher levels. Construction workers have the lowest levels of stress at 63%.

Evidence also shows that work related stress is on the increase worldwide. According to the US National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (2013), more than half of all deaths up to the age of 65 are the result of stressful lifestyles. Over 30% of Americans experience enough daily stress to impact their performance at home or work. According to Houdmont (2009), the impact of work related stress in the UK can be evidenced by such studies as the Self-Reported Work-Related Illness Survey (1995) that linked it with 6.5 million lost working days in the UK per annum. Whilst such studies are useful in gaining an insight into the prevalence of WRS, finding a suitable methodology for analysing my own practice of leadership was necessary for this research. The research methodology chosen was an autoethnographic qualitative approach.

### 1.7.4 Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a self-reflexive approach by which the researcher / practitioner consciously embeds themselves amidst theory and practice, and by way of intimate autobiographical account, explicates a phenomenon under investigation or intervention (Tomaselli 2013). Ethnographic studies involve the researcher studying in-tact a phenomenon in a natural setting over a prolonged period of time, by collecting mainly observational detail (Creswell 2012). The research process is flexible and it typically evolves contextually, in response to the lived reality encountered in the field (Hooper 2013).

Autoethnography is not simply a confessional tale “but is a provocative weave of story and theory” (Cohen et al. 2001 p.6). It is a vehicle that operationalises social constructionist research and practice, and facilitates the establishment of validity and authenticity. This approach to research has grown extensively in social psychology research and practice (Anderson and Austin 2012). It was first developed by Sarbin (1986) and Polkinghorne (1988) and represents an ontological and epistemological
stance grounded in social constructivism. It holds that subjective reality is perpetually formed and reformed in, and of, socially mediated discourse, talk, text, and image. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once wrote:

However far man may extend himself with his knowledge, however objective he may appear to himself, ultimately he reaps nothing but his own biography.

(Nietzsche 1927, p.13)

As for its epistemology, autoethnography goes to the notion of “lived experience”, subjectivity, and meaning within relative contexts. As for axiology, autoethnographers are transparent in the expression of their values and personal concerns, with critical-ideological adherents. It is a hybrid of narrative and ethnographic approaches that afforded a fitting methodology to heighten my awareness of my experiences of work related stress. Ultimately, it is an approach that enables the exploration of “the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual” (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, p. 9). Whilst autoethnography is a particular research methodology, it required the deployment of an appropriate research method for data capture and analysis. The particular method chosen was a form of data content analysis known as directed or deductive content analysis.

1.7.5 Directed Content Analysis

Directed content analysis is a form of data content analysis. Data content analysis is a method used in qualitative research where data is summarised, described, and interpreted. It is used to identify main themes from data and is appropriate for examining experiences and attitudes toward a particular subject (Polit and Beck 2013). Researchers regard content analysis as a flexible method for analysing text data (Ghaedi et al. 2015). It describes a family of analytic approaches ranging from impressionistic, intuitive, interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses (Rosengren 1981). The specific type of content analysis approach chosen by a researcher varies with the theoretical and substantive interests of the researcher and the problem being studied (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Although this flexibility has made content analysis useful
for a variety of researchers, the lack of a firm definition and procedures has potentially limited the application of content analysis (Elo et al. 2014; Tesch 2013).

Sometimes, existing theory or prior research exists about a phenomenon that is incomplete or would benefit from further description. Directed content analysis is the form of data content analysis that is useful in circumstances where theory or prior research exists about the phenomenon. Potter and Levine-Donnerstien (1999) categorised this approach of content analysis as deductive. The goal is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Existing theory or research can help focus the research question. It can provide insight into the relationships among variables, thus helping to determine the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes. This has been referred to as deductive category application (Mayring 2015). Content analysis using a directed approach is guided by a more structured process than in a conventional approach (Elo et al. 2014). Using existing theory or prior research, directed content analysis begins by researchers identifying key concepts or variables as initial coding categories (Potter and Levine-Donnerstein 1999). Next, operational definitions for each category are determined using the theory. Chapter 4 of this thesis explicates how this approach was applied to this study.

1.8 My Research Stance

In chapter 3 of this dissertation, I provide the rationale for how my constructivist ontology influences my approach to research. By way of introduction however, I describe myself above all else as an existentialist (the meta-theory underpinning gestalt) (Ellegard and Pederson 2012). Although existential therapy accepts the premise that our choices are limited by external circumstances, the existentialist position rejects the notion that our own acts are determined (Gabriel 2013). There are a range of choices available to each of us and we are free to choose. Consequently, responsibility for our own choices and actions remains with us and we must therefore create and live within our own individual freedom. I in fact declare my research stance from the outset of this dissertation by offering a quote by Victor Frankl at the top of the first page. Frankl, has contributed significantly to contemporary existentialism through the development of logotherapy etc. (Van Deurzen 2012)
When all is taken from us, what alone remains is the last of human freedoms, the ability to choose one’s attitude in a given set of circumstances.

(Frankl 1964, p. 9)

Freedom means openness, readiness to grow, flexibility, and changing in pursuit of greater human values (Gabriel 2013). It entails our capacity to take control of our own development. With freedom, we must also accept the responsibility for directing our lives. Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand (Corey 2016). The existentialist position encourages the increasing of one's self-awareness. This leads to an emphasis on choice and responsibility, and to the view that a worthwhile life is one that is authentic, honest, and genuine. It takes courage to discover the centre of our being and to learn how to live from the inside. Through our self-awareness, we choose our actions, and therefore we can partially create our own destiny.

My research stance therefore is to favour that which will best assist in the creation of meaning for me in the context of the phenomenon being investigated. I am not anti-quantitative approaches per se, but like Kierkegaard, I rally against considering the human experience solely in quantitative terms, because reality is concerned with the “gritty nature of being human” (Kierkegaard 1978, p.5). Lazarus (1991) advised that in studying stress, we should seek to identify patterns of environmental transaction including appraisal and coping processes deployed therein. Therefore, as a researcher who believes in ‘horses for courses’, my research stance in this context is to prefer a qualitative autoethnographic approach because it best satisfies the approach required to examine the ongoing and dynamic relationship of organism and environment. Therefore, as a proponent of the interpretivist, existentialist view on human existence including meaning-making, in the context of this study, a deterministic approach from a methodological perspective that assumes objective reality, is rejected as a means of achieving the type of holistic meaning that I require. However, my study is well informed by extant quantitative empirical sources that I found particularly useful in considering trends, self-reports of stress outcomes by occupation types etc.
1.9 Research Assumptions

Certain assumptions are inherent to the study; its design, methodology and presentation, and are acknowledged to be present as set out below:

- My belief in the selected design and methodology to adequately address the research questions.

- It is accepted that the findings presented in this paper are the subjective interpretations of the lived experience of the researcher.

- It is further accepted that language cannot present a perfect reflection of the subjective internal experience. However, it is assumed that there is link between language used and subjective experience that enables adequate interpretation of the findings.

- Pre-conceived ideas and bias held by me relating to the area of work related stress are assumed to be present and are understood to have the potential to influence the study, particularly in the context of an autoethnographic endeavour.

1.10 Structure of Thesis

This thesis is presented over seven chapters. This chapter provides an introduction to key terminology, research aims, objectives and rationale. Central research questions are described as well as a brief summary of my research methodology and methods. The literature review chapter follows on from this chapter to critique literature pertaining to work related stress, gestalt psychotherapy, leadership and literature specifically examining the interplay of leadership and work related stress. In the subsequent chapter, the methodological and research methods of the study are discussed in detail, with the rationale for their inclusion being outlined for the reader. This is followed in the methodology chapter by a description of the research methodology and research methods used. Following this methodological overview, the findings of the research are presented in the subsequent chapter. These findings are then discussed including implications for my own leadership practice, and my life in general, as well as
considering some wider implications from this study. My thesis concludes with a brief summary of the research, as well as offering my own subjective interpretations as to the overall significance of this study.

1.10 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

Narrative story telling techniques are applied in autoethnographic writing including scene and plot development, the provision of rich character descriptions, all delivered in the context of an overall storyline (Ellis et al. 2011). The purpose of this chapter was to effectively set the scene for the thesis, laying the foundation for the study that follows. To this end, effort was dedicated at the outset to describing the context and backdrop to this study, including the specific research problem that exists pertaining to a lack of process oriented studies that could inform me in terms of my own efforts to master work related stress.

The chapter went on to discuss the rationale and significance of this study. In terms of the former, I provided an overview of the current and potential threats from work related stress in terms of my own health and wellbeing and leadership performance. This was set within the context of supporting empirical evidence that indeed tends to support the rationale for the completion of this research. I wrote about the significance of this study in terms of potential benefits for my wellbeing and my leadership practice.

This study however seeks to reach beyond personal gain in providing significant contributions to theory, research, practice and policy in several arenas such as the workplace, psychotherapy and government and non-governmental institutions. Although this aspect will be elaborated in detail I posited in this chapter however for example how this research can help invigorate other gestalt researchers to lean on their theoretical basis to contribute more to empirical research. I suggested also how this research can contribute to other disciplines like occupational health psychology by undertaking a labour intensive and complex piece of analysis that can address an empirical shortfall due the challenges in completing such research. Terminology key to this research was explained to assist in achieving a full appreciation of this dissertation. Finally, in attempting to complete the scene setting for this work, the overall structure of the thesis was outlined for the reader.
In conclusion, the detailed explication of the context and backdrop to this study highlighted a dualistic problem that warrants such research. In one respect, the landscape of my leadership practice was shown to be stress inducing. The evidence of this was provided through my own subjective interpretation, but also in extant empirical evidence looking at the impact of recession and also, correlations between leadership and stress in general. Against this backdrop, a lack of empirical research exists making it difficult for the gestaltist to make sense of this issue. Even in terms of contemporary stress theory that positions stress as a process of organism / environment transaction, a lack of empirical investigation has been completed into the actual processes that underpin these transactions. By positioning myself as participant / researcher in this autoethnographic investigation, this research aims to tackle personal and practice based work related stress issues, whilst contributing much needed empirical evidence to the contemporary study of this phenomenon. The linkage between the research problem, purpose and questions is now summarised in Table 1.
Chapter One – Introduction

| Table 1 | Linkage between Research Problem, Purpose and Questions |

**Research Problem** - Research indicates that work related stress remains a significant issue for individuals, organisations, and society. Despite the evolution of stress theory to a process oriented conceptualisation, few process studies relating to work related stress exist. In terms of helping me to improve my own healthy coping mechanisms pertaining to work-related stress, a dearth of empirical research exists.

**Research Purpose** - To employ gestalt theory as a conceptual analytical framework; to investigate the transactional processes of work-related stress, in my practice of leadership. In doing so, the study is concerned with creating a level of awareness that will assist in practice and wellbeing improvements. The study will also add value to knowledge on stress and work-related stress, to inform theory, practice, and policy.

**Research Questions:**

(i) What hazardous work (environmental) factors permeate my practice of leadership?

(ii) What are the dominant primary and secondary appraisal patterns used to assess the significance of an event, an encounter, or a situation?

(iii) What are the habitual coping mechanisms employed in response to the appraisal of an event, an encounter, or a situation?

(iv) What are dominant outcomes in terms of a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale or life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health?

(v) What factors mediate healthy appraisal, coping and outcomes and how does a healthy cycle unfold?
CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Chapter Introduction

The introductory chapter provided a conceptual overview for this study, and the focus now turns to exploring the complexity of discourse surrounding those themes. The aim of this review is to provide a comprehensive critique of literature surrounding seminal concerns of this research. The literature review constitutes a critical step in the research process in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research studies (Onwuegbuzie et al. 2010).

It is a thorough, sophisticated foundation and inspiration for substantial, useful research. The complex nature of research demands such thorough, sophisticated reviews.

(Boote and Beile 2005, p. 3)

Any literature review should firstly set the broad context of the study and clearly demarcate what is, and what is not within the scope of the investigation, and justify those decisions (Boote and Beile 2005). Therefore, this literature review sets the broad context for the study by critiquing literature pertaining to work related stress, leadership, gestalt and literature discussing the interplay of leadership roles and work related stress. It also situates existing literature in a broader scholarly and historical context. It not only reports claims made in the existing literature but also critically examines the research methods used to better understand whether the claims are warranted.

This chapter now proceeds as follows: I begin by providing a high level overview of the literature review, introducing the systematic approach taken, including a brief commentary on the complexity involved in completing the analysis. I then outline the research protocol for this systematic review provided by Simons and Marks (2013). This addresses the specific questions sought to be answered by the literature review and an overview of the literature review search including selection criteria. How data was
extracted through Garrard’s (2013) matrix is described complete with a template example. The quality appraisal methodology created by Caldwell et al. (2011) used in this study is provided also. The presentation of the literature search results completes that section.

The following section begins the synthesis of my review by addressing stress. Historical stress models such as the stimulus response theory are critiqued along with contemporary architectural (interactional) and process models (transactional). Literature pertaining to work related stress triggers, effects and dominant treatments are discussed and critiqued also. The chapter then progresses with a review of literature pertaining to humanistic gestalt psychotherapy. Influences on, and central tenets of the approach, are preceded by a review of definitions of gestalt. The efficacy of gestalt as a psychotherapeutic approach is considered in a comparative analysis with other disciplines namely psychodynamic and cognitive behavioural therapy. Prescribed limitations and empirical criticisms are offered before a review of current discourse and possible future directions for gestalt are explored in the literature.

My review then attends to the comprehensively researched area of leadership. My analysis shows how leadership theory has progressed from trait and behavioural theories (individual), to current frameworks such as the leader member exchange (LMX) and humanistic models (relational). Current leadership trends are then discussed with an eye to the future that identifies an ever increasing recognition of the process orientation, and dynamic nature of leadership. This chapter concludes with a summative synthesis of work related stress, gestalt and leadership that will act as justification for the methodological rationale of this study, and indeed, for the completion of the research itself.
2.1 Systematic Literature Review

In section 1.4 of this thesis, I described various concepts that are central to this study. That imperative highlighted the areas of literature where this review will now focus. The need for a systematic approach was highlighted by an initial attempt at a traditional, narrative approach that failed to achieve a comprehensive review. The initial approach was ineffective leading to a rather superficial outcome. Booth et al. (2016) highlights this issue by claiming that such approaches promote bias, and are largely ineffective when a large amount of data is to be reviewed.

Across all paradigms of research, current practice is tending to favour the completion systematic reviews (Sivera et al. 2014). In 1997, the editorial board of the Cochrane Collaboration Back Review Group (BRG) published guidelines for the completion of systematic reviews in the field of medicine. These guidelines address the main steps in conducting a systematic review – the literature search, inclusion criteria, data extraction, quality appraisal and data synthesis. The purpose of these guidelines was to offer direction to researchers in preparing, conducting, and reporting research in order to ensure rigour and replicability.

According to Hart (1998), the systematic literature review should be an objective and thorough summary and critical analysis of the relevant, available research and non-research literature on the topic being studied. This is necessary to update current personal knowledge and practice on a topic, to evaluate current practices, to develop and update guidelines for practice, and to develop appropriate conclusions about future policy (Polit and Beck 2006). Such reviews are therefore prepared using a systematic approach that attempts to minimise bias and random errors (Martínez-González et al. 2014). Sources of such error and bias may include limited searching, selective inclusion of studies, unclear and unformulated questions, language restriction or unreliable extraction of data from studies (Verbeek et al. 2012).

According to Houdmont (2009), the inclusion of systematic reviews in doctoral theses is a relatively recent innovation but one that is to be encouraged. This development he
argues appears to be sensible when one considers that published reviews are important in the acquisition of knowledge, and in pinpointing possible areas of future scientific study. As Taris and Kompier (2014) have observed

Studies should build on previously gathered evidence when researching a particular topic; there is usually much more such historical evidence available than some of us acknowledge” and in that respect “review studies serve an important function in the advancement of science, showing us where we have already been and where we should go

(Taris and Kompier 2014, p.82)

Simons and Marks (2013) offer summary of the steps for writing a systematic review in Table 2.

Table 2 A Systematic Literature Review Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Decide on Research Question</td>
<td>The first step in performing a systematic review is to formulate a primary research question to be addressed. Only then can the research protocol be agreed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Agree Research Protocol</td>
<td>The goal of developing a research protocol is to develop formulation of the questions and methods of the review before retrieving the literature. The methods for literature searching, screening, data extraction, and analysis should be contained within a written document before starting the literature search.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Complete Literature Search</td>
<td>Identify potential relevant databases from which to search from. The search will also include articles, journals, conference proceedings, media and literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Complete Data Extraction</td>
<td>A Standardised form - paper or electronic assists in the task of data extraction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Complete Quality Appraisal</td>
<td>A checklist to assess for bias is important:and several quality scales and checklists have been developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Complete Data Analysis and Results</td>
<td>After including or excluding studies based on the quality appraisal, data analysis and results of the studies should be undertaken.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Interpretation of Results</td>
<td>Most of this information can be presented in the data analysis and results table in the manuscript. Conclusions should be based on best scientific evidence. Recommendations for future studies can also be made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Simons and Marks (2013)
2.1.1 Literature Review Objectives

According to Amouroux et al. (2008), the literature review questions and objectives should address the main purpose and end use of the study, including paying cognisance to the ultimate audience. My study is aimed at understanding how my training in gestalt psychotherapy can help me to self-regulate through healthy appraisal and coping processes in my practice of leadership. The target audience for this paper includes those involved in leadership positions, policy makers, healthcare professionals and scholars. The purpose of this literature review is to systematically examine and organise the current body of literature that either quantitatively or qualitatively explore stress including work related stress, leadership and gestalt. There were a number of objectives I wanted to achieve in the systematic review that allowed me to generate a number of key questions (Tables 3-5).

Table 3 SLR Objective 1: The review of WRS literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Question</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Question 1</td>
<td>How has work related stress been defined and addressed traditionally in literature?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Question 2</td>
<td>How is work related stress addressed in contemporary discourse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Question 3</td>
<td>What is known about causes of work related stress?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Question 4</td>
<td>What is known about work related stress effects?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Question 4</td>
<td>What are the dominant work related stress treatment methods?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 SLR Objective 2: The Review of Gestalt Literature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Question</th>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Question 1</td>
<td>How is gestalt therapy conceptualised and where has it originated from?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Question 2</td>
<td>What are the main influences on gestalt?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Question 3</td>
<td>What are the central tenets of gestalt psychotherapeutic theory?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Question 4</td>
<td>What are the identified limitations of gestalt?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Question 4</td>
<td>What constitutes current gestalt discourse and future directions?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5  SLR Objective 3: The review of Leadership literature

| Key Question 1 | How is leadership defined? |
| Key Question 2 | What are the historical leadership models? |
| Key Question 3 | What are contemporary leadership models? |
| Key Question 4 | What is current discourse, and likely future directions of leadership theory? |
| Key Question 4 | What is known about linkages between work related stress and leadership? |

2.1.2 Literature Search Methodology and Results

Several databases were identified as being potential sources of data based on a review of their descriptions through the University of Limerick website. These databases included (in alphabetical order): Academic Search Complete, ACLS Humanities E-Book, American Medical Association Journals, Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), BMJ Journals, Cambridge Journals Online, Directory of Open Access Journals, JSTOR, PsycARTICLES, SAGE, SCOPUS, Taylor and Francis Online, The European, Web of Science, Wilson Omnifile, WorldCat Firstsearch. It is important to note that as a constructivist.

It is important to note that autoethnography can be seen as a type of action research approach to achieving practice improvements. Action researchers posit that knowledge is never complete due to the dynamic nature of life and that knowledge will always be obsolete in the context of an ever changing environment (McNiff 2013). Table 6 outlines the results of initial searches but in reality, literature was reviewed and critiqued through the entire research up until submission of the PhD for academic appraisal. Search words included gestalt, psychotherapy, leadership, stress, work related stress, transactional stress models, interactional stress models, engineering stress models.
### Table 6: Database Returns from Initial Keyword Searches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Database</th>
<th>Number of Documents Retrieved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PsychArticles</td>
<td>466</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMBASE</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web of Science</td>
<td>810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Search Complete</td>
<td>610</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Medical Association Journals</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied Social Sciences Index</td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British Medical Journals</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge Journals Online</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directory of Open Access Journals</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSTOR</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sage</td>
<td>450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scopus</td>
<td>317</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor and Frances online</td>
<td>430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web of Science</td>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilson Omnifile</td>
<td>483</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>5,955</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bibliographies and references listed in primary sources were searched also and unpublished and ongoing studies were reviewed in regards to known experts in the three fields of interest. Raw data from published trials and foreign language literature where translations were available were included. I also reviewed “grey literature” i.e. (theses, internal reports, non-peer-reviewed journals, industry files). Leading academic journals in the areas of gestalt, work related stress and leadership were afforded particular attention. These included (in alphabetical order) *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, *Management Learning*, *The Learning Organization*, *Journal of Workplace Learning*, *Journal of European Industrial Training*, and *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. Books and Thesis were retrieved from the library at the University of Limerick or purchased where necessary. I also engaged with previous academic course work material and submitted papers from my studies in predominantly the master’s programmes I had completed at the University of Limerick.
2.1.3 Selection Criteria

Autoethnographic writers tend to be informed from multiple sources and therefore the types of material read is wide and varied (Ellingson and Ellis 2008). The initial search of electronic and library sources generated a large number of publications. A review of abstracts was completed to identify literature that appeared to meet preferential inclusion criteria namely (a) articles published in peer reviewed journals were given a strong preference although grey literature such as unpublished theses etc. also informed the study (b) electronic returns that responded to key search words related to the subject matters of stress, work related stress, gestalt and leadership (c) were published from 2005 to preference contemporary data and (d) adhered to high standards of research methodology through a clear explication research purpose and outcomes.

Next, I examined if there were any external duplicates from current databases being searched against previous databases searched. I recorded the number of duplicates and then deleted the journal articles for the last database search whilst keeping a running total of new articles found. Publications were excluded on the basis of (a) being duplicates or containing duplicate data provided elsewhere (where this was the case the more detailed of the available papers or reports was retained) (b) being irrelevant in terms of failing to address stress, work related stress, psychotherapy, gestalt or leadership (c) full articles that were unavailable despite multiple searches.

2.1.4 Data Extraction

According to Windle et al. (2011) data extraction in qualitative research is typically a fluid process. Key themes will emerge from data and the process of data extraction should be determined by the needs of the specific review. In quantitative research, systematic reviews are relatively linear, where key items for data extraction are specified in advance in a data extraction template, based on the participant, interventions, comparisons and outcomes of interest. In contrast, data extraction in qualitative synthesis shares with primary qualitative research the importance of immersing oneself in the data.
The approach to data extraction employed in this study is twofold in order to facilitate immersion in the data. My study is informed by an array of research that blends the results of empirical studies with literature based on biography, narrative and prose. Garrard (2013) developed a data extraction matrix method to ensure a systematic approach to the completion of data extraction. The extraction protocol is a coherent and easy to follow methodology for medical professionals to assist them to regularly and systematically review current medical scientific literature as part of medical best practice (Angel and Federiksen 2015). It was designed to help researchers, clinicians and health care professionals to identify relevant literature, to organise and critically evaluate it, and to synthesise and incorporate major new research findings and the results of clinical trials as the basis for medical research design, and to help them to make decisions about the most efficacious treatment and care for their patients.

As a data extraction method, it is both a structure and a process and it offers a place to record notes about each article using columns and rows, providing a structure for creating order. The synthesis in the matrix method is a critical analysis and review process of the literature on a specific topic (Cho and Marshall-Egan 2009). Thus, the current systematic review is presented not merely as a vehicle by which to introduce and contextualise subsequent chapters in this thesis, but it acts also as a discrete scientific study of value in its own right. Several other contemporary empirical studies employ Garrard’s method pointing to its establishment and acceptance as a rigorous method for data extraction (Greenwood et al. 2014; Wang and Xiao 2014; Rogers et al. 2015).

By the beginning of the twenty first century, a major growth in the use of narrative and biographical research methods had occurred (Ritchie et al. 2013; Creswell 2012). This resulted from a greater appreciation for understanding phenomena in the context of people’s own accounts, but also due to the limitations of ‘user-led’ investigations. The attractiveness of narrative approaches has seen them permeate almost every discipline (Xu 2014). As a humanistic researcher completing an autoethnographic study, such an approach to data extraction affords the construction of meaning (Zehfuss 2011; Trowler 2012; Lincoln et al. 2011). Paterson and Chapman (2013) argue for the extraction of emotion, experiences, actions, and responses in reviews to achieve enhanced meaning.
and higher levels of self-awareness. In contrast to other methodologies, the autoethnographic approach is informed by an eclectic array of data sources that affords a rich embroidery of meaning. Table 7 on the next page presents an example of a data extract table employed in this study.
## Table 7  Example of Data Extract Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lead Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Study/Paper Type</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Conceptual Framework</th>
<th>Participants/Contributors</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Analytic Methods</th>
<th>Findings/Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evans</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Peer Reviewed Journal Publication</td>
<td>To examine perspectives and insights of four “double-insider” researchers conducting participative research in their communities.</td>
<td>Analytical Autoethnography.</td>
<td>Women with advanced stage breast cancer and practitioner archivists.</td>
<td>Qualitative.</td>
<td>Deductive using directed content analysis.</td>
<td>Friendship and empathy between researcher-practitioner(s) and research participants; shared expertise and sharing expertise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2.1.5 Literature Quality Appraisal

A lack of consensus exists regarding quality assessment in qualitative research (Hughes-Morley et al. 2015, Mays and Pope 2000). Following the review of a range of published critique frameworks, Caldwell et al (2011) created a framework for conducting quality appraisals in research. Their first step was to establish common features across various research approaches. The strengths of the individual critique frameworks were then identified and this enabled the development of a framework that included areas common to both quantitative and qualitative approaches, plus, areas that are specific to each. It begins with questions that address both quantitative and qualitative studies. By placing the questions that are appropriate for the respective research approaches in one single framework it was possible to facilitate the clarification of some of the theoretical positions that inform the respective research approaches and thus, in turn, aid understanding of the need to pose different questions.

The autoethnographic nature of my study requires an engagement with broad array of material to achieve the type of perspective that Silverman (2013) posits through the use of the kaleidoscope analogy, including much grey literature. However, in addressing the areas of stress, work related stress, gestalt and leadership, specific concerns around empirical evidence pertaining to efficacy etc. required a rigorous engagement with studies both quantitative and qualitative in tenure. Whilst there are many criteria that will be common to both research approaches such as the identification of an appropriate question, the choice of an appropriate research design and the completion of a thorough and relevant literature review, there are also discrete areas of difference. For example, variables are not always given operational definitions in qualitative research as sometimes, the aim of the research is to seek definitions of the concepts from the viewpoint of the informants. With this in mind, Caldwell et al. (2011) designed a research critique framework that could be used by students for both qualitative and quantitative studies that I employed in this study (Figure 1). Regarding the efficacy of the framework itself, it has been adopted now in several contemporary studies (Vasey 2015; McMullen et al. 2015; Lipscomb 2012; Homeyard et al. 2016; Credon et al. 2015).
Figure 1  Data Quality Analysis

- Does the title reflect the content?
- Are the authors credible?
- Does the abstract summarise the key components?
- Is the rationale for undertaking the research clearly outlined?
- Is the literature review comprehensive and up to date?
- Are research aims clearly stated?
- Are all ethical issues addressed adequately?

Methodology

**Quantitative**

- Is study design clearly identified and rationale explained?
- Is there an experimental hypothesis clearly stated and are the key variables clearly defined?
- Is the population identified?
- Is the sample adequately described and reflective of the population?
- Are methods of data collection and analysis valid and reliable?

**Qualitative**

- Are the philosophical background and study design identified and the rationale for choice of design evident?
- Are the major concepts developed?
- Is the context of the study outlined?
- Is the selection of participants described and sampling method identified? Is the method of data collection auditable?
- Are the results presented in a way that is appropriate and clear?
- Is the discussion comprehensive?
- Is the conclusion comprehensive?

Are the results generalisable?

Are the results transferable?
2.1.6 Data Analysis

Based on Caldwell’s et al. (2011) data inclusion filtration mechanism for the systematic analysis of literature, Figure 2 depicts the methodology I used to identify suitable material for analysis.

Figure 2 Data Inclusion Flow Chart

Source: Caldwell et al. (2011, p. 58)
Once the literature search was filtered for suitability for this study, the next task was to synthesise the data, and several options exist to complete this function. Aggregative methods, such as meta-analysis for example, quantitatively combine the findings from multiple homogeneous single studies using statistical techniques. Meta-analysis, allows for an increase in power, and thus, based on a summary estimate of the effect size and its confidence interval, a certain intervention may be proved to be effective, even if the individual studies lacked power to show effectiveness (Denyer and Tranfield 2006).

According to Rummill et al. (2010), the methods that researchers use to synthesise, organise, understand, and interpret existing literature vary widely depending on the discipline; the research questions being considered; the researcher’s methodological orientation; the topic being examined, and the nature of existing research methods and findings in the given knowledge domain. Although there are multiple novel and powerful approaches to synthesis, examples of their use in the autoethnographic studies are limited. Narrative synthesis attempts to take a collection of studies that address different aspects of the same phenomenon and build them into a bigger picture, map or mosaic (Hammersley 2001) or to tell the story of studies included in the review (Popay et al. 2006, p. 5) through, for example, describing how they fit within a theoretical framework and the size or direction of any effects found. Narrative synthesis is a flexible method that allows the reviewer to be reflexive and critical through their choice of organising narrative (Hart 1998).

The aim of a narrative literature review is to reshape previously existing information in a way that contributes new perspectives. These new perspectives can then be used to enhance professional practice and inform future research. To accomplish this, narrative literature reviews propose or advance theories and models, explore controversial and/or important topics in the field, present “how to” strategies that aim to improve field practices, and inform readers of important policy changes. In those four ways narrative literature reviews also investigate the issues that need to be addressed in future empirical research. Narrative literature reviews contribute to the research and practice of their specific fields by creating greater depth and insight than can be gleaned from an individual study. As a key goal of this research was to achieve such depth, a narrative
synthesis in the areas of stress / work related stress, gestalt and leadership is now presented.

2.1.7 Results

2.1.7.1 Description of Reviewed Material

Later in this chapter, a full synthesis of findings is presented in terms of key themes that emerged from the literature reviewed. Within the overall framework of a systematic literature review, my dominant approach to analysis was conducted in an autoethnographic manner i.e. embedding oneself amidst theory and practice (Tomaselli 2013). Autoethnographers research under a flexible imperative, constantly seeking out new material, in order to continuously evolve their investigations (Hooper 2013).

This dynamic approach to conducting research required an exhaustive commitment to sourcing pertinent literature. This was required in order to achieve a holistic understanding of work related stress, gestalt psychotherapy and leadership. In Table 3, I provided a sample data extraction page summarising three autoethnographic studies that informed this study. To illustrate the labour intensive nature of this investigation however, over 40 autoethnographic studies were infact reviewed. In terms of the three key areas of investigation in this study, I commenced with an initial engagement with the areas of stress and work related stress.

A logical starting point appeared to be to search through government and expert group reports in terms of work related stress. Those sources of literature included publications from bodies such as the United Kingdom Office for National Statistics (ONS), The World Health Organisation (WHO), the Irish Health and Safety Authority (HSA), the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), and Public Health England (PHE). Those sources of data provided useful insights into key areas such as the prevalence of work related stress, occupations with the highest self-reports of work related stress, and trends in terms of the impact of the recent global recession on psychosocial work hazards. These data sources provided a level of
understanding of the phenomena of work related stress at a rather macro level. A more intimate engagement with the work of seminal authors such as Richard Lazarus, Cary Cooper, Amanda Griffiths and Tom Cox was undertaken to gain an understanding of the more discreet nature of stress and work related stress. The work of these authors (amongst a plethora of others examined) identified issues such as how stress theory has evolved from early stimulus/response theory (Selye 1936), through various stages to a contemporary paradigm grounded in the dynamic relationship between organism and environment (Lazarus 1991).

A logical starting point in terms of an analysis into gestalt psychotherapy was to target articles from gestalt journals such as the British Gestalt Journal, the International Gestalt Journal, and the Gestalt Therapy Forum. The British Gestalt Journal for instance provides access to their defined top 20 gestalt based articles based on the most requested publications, comprising of a cross-section of some of the most seminal writing in gestalt therapy over the past two decades. Those articles and associated authors such as Petruska Clarkson, Erving Polster, Eleanor O’Leary, Gordon Wheeler and Lynne Jacobs provided much contribution in terms of understanding key developments in gestalt psychotherapy. This included commentary upon ongoing debates within that paradigm in terms of future direction for gestalt. Search engine returns from Google Scholar revealed other publications highlighting various facets of gestalt psychotherapy theory and practice such as the application of gestalt psychotherapy theory and practice in non-therapeutic environments (Blom 2013; Tolin 2010). Attempts to locate empirically validated quantitative and qualitative research grounded in gestalt however provided disappointing results. This is an issue addressed by other researchers who have been frustrated in their attempts to find same (Hager 2010; Denton 2014).

Similar to the situation pertaining to stress and work related stress, leadership literature was available to me in abundance. Numerous leadership journals were availed of to inform this study, including Leadership Quarterly, Leadership and the Organisation Development Journal, and the Journal of Applied Leadership and Management. Preliminary investigations identified a number of influential leadership scholars whose work features heavily in the outcomes of this literature review. These writers include
Peter Drucker, Kurt Lewin; Bernard Bass and James McGregor Burns. My analysis tracked the evolution of leadership theory over the past 70 years from trait theories, behavioural theories, situational leadership theory, contingency theory, transactional and transformational leadership, up to postmodern models such as humanistic models (Mengel 2012; Biehl-Missal and Fitzek 2014) and Leader Member Exchange (Graen and Uhl-Bien 2001). The evolution of leadership theory from early theory to postmodern theory, has witnessed a gradual shift in focus from generic characteristics and behaviours of leaders, to a concentration on values such as authenticity, ethics, relational commitment and participative decision making.

2.1.7.2 Work Related Stress

Initial engagements with work related stress literature generated large returns in terms of database searches. According to Houdmont (2009), the scientific study of work-related stress has generated a vast body of literature in a relatively short space of time. A Google Scholar search conducted by this researcher for example, under the heading of work related stress, filtered to between 2008 and 2010, returned over two million hits. Numerous academic papers according to Houdmont (2009) have dedicated their opening lines to the suggestion that work-related stress is a ‘hot topic’, ripe for studying. Other authors advise of caution in this domain, arguing that if the motive for doing a study is based on work related stress being a hot topic in literature, then one should avoid covering it (Campbell 2004). Applied to the study of work-related stress, Campbell’s remark implies that even if it is accepted that work related stress is indeed a hot topic, there has to be additional justification for conducting research in the field. A suitable justification might be found where further research can reveal something new, and in particular, where it has practical applications. My motivation to proceed was not based on work related stress being a hot topic, but indeed, on a desire to reveal something both new and practical.

Using the research critique framework designed by Caldwell et al. (2011) (Figure 1), which is suitable for both qualitative and quantitative studies, I felt a practical place to commence investigations would be government and expert group publications from
different countries, using stress and work related stress as the main search terms. Through various databases searched, a number of suitable reports were selected (n=34). The rationale for choosing such publications was in the knowledge that such documents would be informed by seminal writers who would either have been commissioned as part of the study, or whose work would be referenced therein. Therefore, in addition to engaging with content provided in those documents, an investigative trail was emblazoned, leading me to other sources of expert data based on those referenced in such reports.

Initial investigations were completed in an effort to get a sense of the scale of the problem, and also to identify particular trends. This focus was very much in terms of the “what” of work related stress i.e. empirically generated data in terms of for instance, the prevalence of the problem in general, and indeed, it’s proliferation by employment type and role. Particular publications such as the US Office for National Statistics generated useful facts in terms of costs associated with lost working days per annum. Other publications generated a wealth of useful data in terms wider society costs in terms increased public healthcare expenditure for example resultant from work related stress (Matrix 2013). Trends also emerged in terms of occupations with the highest levels of self-reported stress (e.g. ICTU 2012).

Having captured a large amount of data in terms of work related stress outcomes and prevalence etc., my next step was to investigate theory around stress and work related stress. Database searches completed on PsychArticles, Web of Science, Google Scholar etc., using terms pertaining to work related stress and stress, generated a large number of responses. From the various commissioned international reports, I had examined, I was able to identify who appeared to be the main authorities in these areas such as Richard Lazarus, Tom Cox, Amanda Griffiths and Cary Cooper. By completing a narrative synthesis of all publications I selected for inclusion, I was able to work backwards to chart the development and evolution of stress and work related stress theory. Today, stress and work related stress are thought of in terms of process and continuous transaction between organism and environment (Lazarus 1991; Cox and Griffiths 2010). This conceptualisation has largely replaced a more structural /
interactional depiction of stress, that tended to focus on objective work characteristics in explaining work related stress (Karasek 1979). The structural / interactional model had itself replaced earlier stress models based on a stimulus / response orientation that posited universal responses to external stimuli (Selye 1936).

2.1.7.3  *Gestalt Psychotherapy*

Investigations into gestalt literature commenced with a review of leading gestalt journals including the British Gestalt Journal, the International Gestalt Journal, and the Gestalt Therapy Forum. A useful discovery from the British Gestalt Journal was the publication of a valuable archive of seminal articles on Gestalt theory and practice. This list constitutes the most requested articles from students and training institutes (n=20) over the past two decades and those articles substantially inform this research. Several other articles from those authors such as Petruska Clarkson, Erving Polster, Eleanor O’Leary, Gordon Wheeler, Lynne Jacobs, Elinor Greenburg and Gary Yontef also extensively inform this study. Of course, each of those authors provided numerous references to seminal gestalt authorities such as Fritz and Laura Perls, Ralph Hefferline and Paul Goodman whose work is heavily referenced in this thesis also.

In relative terms, whilst a large number of publications exist based on gestalt theory, locating gestalt empirical studies is challenging. This is a situation alluded to by researchers such as Hager (2010) and Tolin (2010) whose own attempts at locating same proved frustrating. Until the 1980’s, humanistic therapy researchers did not have a set of research methods appropriate to their worldview and practices. This issue raised the question of whether humanistic therapy research was even possible, and consequently, a dearth of empirically based literature existed until that time (Angus et al. 2015). Humanistic assumptions and practices clash with what Wampold (2008, p.8) has termed as ‘an excruciatingly narrow’ consensus on what is scientific, and what should contribute to 20th and 21st-century social science research.
In constructing a defence of the efficacy for gestalt, I had to lean firstly on defending the efficacy of psychotherapy itself, based on successes captured in a large number of empirical studies (Lambert 2013; Barlow 2004; Grawe et al. 1994; Gustavsson et al. 2011; Wittchen et al. 2011). I was then able to defend the efficacy of the humanistic school with relative ease, finding an array of studies that have emerged over the past two decades (e.g. Elliot et al. 2013; Ellison et al. 2009; Greenberg and Watson 1998). Some recent empirical contributions from gestalt do suggest that in itself, it is starting to appear in terms of validated published research. In the narrative synthesis on gestalt psychotherapy literature that follows in this chapter, I quote results from studies such as Freeburg and Van Winkle (2011); Kasper et al. (2008); Holzinger (2015); and Blom (2013) who like me, employed the cycle of experience as a conceptual framework in her research.

2.1.7.4 Leadership

Based on an abundance of leadership literature available, the initial process of researching that subject matter was both time consuming and labour intensive. In terms of employing my selection criteria agreed for this research, I decided that based on the obvious wealth of leadership literature available, articles would only be selected from recent editions of peer reviewed journals, and other sources identified in those articles by seminal leadership authors such as Drucker, Lewin and Uhl-Bien. A large number of abstract reviews were completed through accessing online journals via the University of Limerick (UL) web portal, and publications housed in the UL library. Using the research critique framework designed by Caldwell et al. (2011), a review of both quantitative and qualitative sources of data resulted in an initial cohort of papers being selected to inform my literature review (n=56).

My investigation commenced with a broad mandate i.e. searching databases under the term leadership theory, to create a sense of context and background in terms the evolution of leadership theory. A specific aim was also to identify areas of consensus and debate around the provision of leadership definitions. The results of the narrative synthesis of those publications is summed up by Grint (2014) who posits that
contemporary studies of leadership give meaning to the old adage ‘that everything old is new again’ (2014, p.11). My synthesis of leadership literature will show a development of theory that has followed a distinct line from an early period, consisting of such well known theories as trait theory, behaviour theory, and contingency / situational theory (Collinson and Hearn 2014; Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien 2007; Grint 2014). A second period consists of multilevel approaches; followed by a modern leadership period, which emerged in the 1980s, and included both transformational and charismatic theories. Finally, a post-modern period emerged in the reviewed data, that is distinctly humanistic in ontology (Seow 2012).

Definitions of leadership align to the various iterances of leadership models such as trait including such characteristics as the ability to influence others Van Wart (2013), common sense (Cain and Cocco 2013), the use of emotional intelligence (Goleman et al. 2013). Other definitions are based on behavioural models and include references to attributes of e.g. marines, warriors, chief executive officers, and other executives (Fischer and 2009; Roberts 1985). Transactional conceptualisations of leadership focus on the quid-pro-quo nature of leadership i.e. the realisation of benefits or sanctions as a result of co-operation or non-cooperation with the leader (Antonokis and House 2014; Zhu et al. 2012). Contemporary theories of leadership including authentic, relational and humanistic theories, contain within their definitions references to terms such as transparency, co-creation, engagement and shared vision (Mengel 2012; Uhl-Bien 2014; Biehl-Missal and Fitzek 2014). Transformational definitions of leadership focus on the inspirational capacity of a leader, and their ability to enthuse others to follow them (Trottier et al. 2008).

Critiques of each of the models of leadership are expanded upon in the narrative synthesis that follows in this chapter. In terms of older models, data reviewed demonstrated criticisms centering around issues such as the failure of trait and behavioural theory to develop a universally agreed list of leadership qualities, and in the fact that successful leaders seemingly tend to defy classification imposed by trait and behavioural perspectives (Matthews and Yukl 2011; Van Knippenberg and Sitkin 2013). Criticisms of modern models appear to converge around issues such as the capacity for
exploitation and fanaticism in terms of transactional and transformational theory (Van Knippenberg and Sitkin 2013; Yukl 2013).

A particular aspect of my literature search centred on what I believe would return a large number of publications in terms of providing linkages between leadership and work related stress. Based on my review of extant literature however, it appears that this is a relationship that has received surprisingly little attention in literature. In addition, results reported in this study will highlight that there is a divergence of thought regarding same. Studies such as Wheatley et al. (2011) and Roberts et al. (2014) conclude that leadership roles are more stressful than non-leadership roles. Sherman et al. (2012) however argue that various factors expanded upon in my narrative synthesis on leadership, result in leadership roles being no more stressful than non-leadership ones. In the following section, my narrative synthesis of work related stress, gestalt psychotherapy and leadership is now described in detail.

2.2 Data Synthesis: Stress / Work Related Stress

2.2.1 Origins of our Understanding of Stress

According to Dewe et al. (2012), definitions of stress are products of their time that produce a state of knowledge built around a research agenda that expressed the issues of the day. Thus, all definitions of stress give us a sense of time and place, and it is through this sense that we get an understanding of why different theories of work related stress have emerged. In fact, according to Fotinatos-Ventouratos and Cooper (2015), economic change happens so quickly that conceptualisations of work related stress tend to become obsolete quite quickly.

The term 'stress', probably derived from the term 'stringer' to draw tight, was first used around the fourteenth century (Chrousos et al. 2013). In those times, the term was applied in an engineering sense and was defined as a physical strain or pressure exerted on a material object. The earliest documented recognition of the term as a possible dysfunctional human consequence of stress is linked to the nineteenth century and to
Claude Bernard who suggested that external environmental changes can disrupt the organism (Arminjon 2016; Davies 2016). To deal with these changes, it was essential that the organism achieve stability of the internal environment (Arminjon 2016).

Subsequent researchers were motivated by Bernard's work to investigate further the particular adaptive changes people make to maintain their steady internal states. American physiologist Walter Cannon (1922) introduced the term 'homeostasis' to designate the maintenance of the internal milieu (Pear 2012; De Luca et al. 2014). His research established the existence of many highly specific mechanisms for protection against external demands that threaten to disturb the homeostatic balance of the organism (Selye 1982). To survive environmental threats, the organism must adopt the appropriate reaction - either to fight or to take flight (Cannon 1922). This fight-or-flight reaction is associated with a stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system causing hormonal discharge which prepares the body to cope with prevailing emergencies (Bluen 2015). Cannon's work was an important precursor to the conceptualisation of stress as we know it today (Ivancevich and Matteson 1980).

Hans Selye (1936), an endocrinologist, observed that organisms exhibit the same response to any stressful stimulus. He termed this response reaction the general adaptation syndrome (GAS) (Szabo et al. 2012). Selye's work provided the first breakthrough in stress research and formed the foundation for later research in the field (Szabo et al. 2012). Selye’s original conceptualisation of stress response covered the stereotypical response of an organism to a wide range of chemical, biological, or physical stimuli. In later seeking a term to cover this typical response, Selye used the word “stress”, referring back to the engineering terminology (Chrousos et al. 2013). The term “strain”, which in engineering terms refers to the manifestation of stress in an actual body, or the deformation of a material under a stress, should have been used for the resulting responses. Since this early use of the term stress, there has been continuing confusion and disagreement on the taxonomy in the field (Hickle and Anthony 2013).
Chapter Two – Literature Review

2.2.1.1 Stimulus Based Theories

According to GAS, the body initially defends itself against adverse circumstances by the activation of the sympathetic nervous system. This has been called the alarm reaction. It mobilises the body for the “fight-or-flight” response, which can be seen phylogenetically as an adaptive short-term reaction to emergency situations. In many cases, the stress episode is mastered during the alarm reaction stage (Gladwell 2008). Often however, stress is a longer encounter, and the organism moves on to the resistance stage, in which it adapts more or less successfully to the stressor (Schwarzer 2000). Although the person does not make the impression of being under stress, the organism does not function well and becomes ill. The immune system is compromised, and some typical “diseases of adaptation” develop under persistent stress, such as ulcers and cardiovascular diseases. Finally, in the exhaustion stage, the organism’s adaptation resources are depleted, and a breakdown occurs. This is chronic stress i.e. where the stressor is present continuously or repeatedly over a prolonged period of time and therefore causes a more long-term stress reaction. This is associated with parasympathetic activation that leads to illness, burnout, depression, or even death (Seyle 2013).

The GAS theory has had a major influence on subsequent stress theories, and elements of Selye’s theory can be found in many of its subsequent successors (Arnold 2005). In particular, the exhaustion phase of GAS has close links with the concept of allostatic loading. The concept of allostasis is an extension of homeostasis, representing the way in which human physiological systems such as the immune and cardiovascular systems respond to physical, psychosocial and environmental changes (Juster and McKewn 2014).

Allostasis emphasises the different ways in which organismic systems can adapt to stressful challenges (Logan and Barksdale 2008). However, should the stress response not become inert following response, or are over-used by chronic challenges / stressors, the long-term effects may be damaging and lead to cumulative ‘wear and tear’ on the aforementioned physiological systems (Langelaan et al. 2007). This condition has
become known as allostatic loading, with over-exposure to repeated and cumulative load over a period of time resulting in various organ diseases (Tonello et al. 2014; Booth et al. 2013). Allostatic loading (AL), is labelled as the price of adaptation or the “wear and tear” from experiencing chronic stress (Juster and McKewn 2014, p.12; Koob and Le Moal 2001).

The GAS model retains certain support in contemporary discourse. Additionally, a relatively recent meta-analysis of the impact of different types of stressors on the immune system has found strong empirical support for the general principles of the GAS model, and in particular, when related to chronic stress (Segerstrom and Miller 2004). Similarly, a literature review by Cohen et al. (2001) found that evidence suggests an association between psychological stress and reduced antibody response to immunisation. An individual is continuously flooded with potential stressors which are adequately coped with, but perhaps one more (possibly minor) event can move the individual from being able to cope into the realm of strain. Stimulus based stress concepts provide useful knowledge as to the nature and characteristics of different components and possess the qualities of time and context of stress (Dewe et al. 2010; Cooper 2010). Such definitions also possess an evolutionary quality, allowing researchers to continue to explore their nature and evaluate their characteristics in terms of their relevance to contemporary work experiences, as well as continuing to explore whether the interaction between the two is best expressed as some sort of imbalance between the person and the environment (Cooper et al. 2001).

2.2.1.2 Critique of Stimulus Based Definitions

Despite the originality of the GAS model, over the decades it has been the subject of much negative reaction, and whilst it retains some recognised merits, and still resonates in biomedical sciences, it does not so in psychology (Schwarzer 2000). The main reason attributed to this is that Selye neglected the role of emotions and cognitions by focusing solely on physiological reactions in animals, including humans (Xie et al. 2013; Dewe et al 2010). The absence of these factors may therefore ignore what actually occurs in psychological stress (Dewe et al. 2010; Arnold 2005). In contrast, modern psychological
theories highlight an individual’s interpretation of the situation as a major determinant of a stressful encounter (Hill-Rice 2012).

Seyle claimed that organisms show a non-specific response to adverse stimulations, no matter what the situation looks like and ignored the fact that a response to a potential threat may in turn become the stimulus for another response. It has therefore been assessed as being too simplistic, with Ravalier et al. (2013) suggesting that although it is still valid for some typical stressors (e.g. physical factors such as heat and cold), it is not adequate for the representation of psychosocial factors. An example of this relates to variability in tolerance levels and expectations, which can justify the fact that two individuals can react completely differently to the same condition. Many understand that utilising a solely objective measure of external forces impinging on the individual, thus causing stress, is unsuitable.

A problem has existed in distinguishing between independent, intervening, and dependent variables where stress research is concerned (Cooper 1998). It is now widely recognised that, in a similar manner to response-based definitions, individual differences are wrongly ignored. Indeed, a number of individual differences, such as levels of resilience, can account for the fact that two individuals can react in completely different ways to the same situation or their perception of specific stressors change with time. For example, in nursing, the identification of major sources of workplace stress accounted for just 26% of the variance in the data (McVicar 2003), suggesting that almost three quarters of variance is unaccounted for. Ravalier and Biggs (2009) found that when confronted with very similar situations, members of the police reacted in very different ways. Other research has shown that responses to stimuli can depend on hormonal secretion of the organism (Cooper et al. 2001).

Additionally, the traditional use of a stimulus-based definition means only one component of the stress process is reflected, indicating little about the process itself. With the definitions only focussing on one aspect of a process, this draws attention away from the nature of the actual process, thus ignoring the possible relational nature of stress that may be the focus of definitions (Hickle and Anthony 2013). For instance, the GAS
model posits that reaction is adaptive instead of general, and as such response-based
theories have been criticised for this (Dewe et al. 2010; Ravalier et al. 2013). In addition,
the response-based approach views stress as a generic term which takes into
consideration a wide range of manifestations. However, disagreements exist about these
actual manifestations, as well as about where within the organism / system stress is
manifested; with clarification of this second issue problematic because individuals may
adapt to any potential source of stress, meaning the responses will vary over time
(Houdmont 2009).

Finally, and maybe most importantly, Selye’s approach (and the majority of other
response based definitions of stress) has also been criticised because they appear not to
consider environmental factors in the stress process. Therefore, it can be assumed that
there is a tendency to ignore the stimulus dimensions of stress experiences (Creel et al.
2013). Selye himself acknowledged that his decision to borrow the term ‘stress’ had
been ill-founded attributing this to a language issue during the early stages of his career.
He suggested that with the benefit of hindsight, that he should have used the word
‘strain’. Furthermore, it has been suggested that the focus on individual responses within
the physiological approach has led to a narrowing of focus within stress management
activities; a perspective which may encourage interventions which concentrate on
individuals and their responses to stress independent of the organisational context
(Houdmont 2009).

2.2.2 Current Stress Discourse

The importance of traditional definitions of stress lies less now in the knowledge they
provide, and continue to provide, and more in whether they have the capacity to offer an
understanding of the complexity and richness of the stress process itself (Dewe et al.
2010). A new genre of theory came to the fore during the 1970’s, characterised by two
things: first, they more obviously allowed for an interaction between the individual and
their environment and, second, they ascribed a more active role for the person in that
interaction (Cox and Griffiths 2010). Stress is now therefore thought of in terms of a
dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment and is often inferred by
the existence of a problematic person-environment fit, and the emotional reactions that underpin those interactions (Kortum and Leka 2014).

According to Houdmont (2009), contemporary psychological theories of work-related stress have five main features that set them apart from their predecessors. Namely, psychological theories (i) recognise and accommodate worker cognitions (i.e., what the worker perceives in the work environment is important rather than its objective state), (ii) conceptualise the individual as being active in the stress process (e.g., they may mobilise coping resources in response to problems), (iii) recognise that individual differences have a role to play in the stress process, (iv) may include feedback and feed-forward loops, and (v) conceptualise stress as a negative emotional state with associated (and potentially multiple) causes and consequences (i.e., cognitive, behavioural and physiological) that are dependent on the person’s perceptions and cognitions (Houdmont 2009). Contemporary psychological theories fall into two categories: architectural (interactional) models, and process (transactional) models. Both have their focus on the relationship between the individual and the environment but whereas interactional models focus on the structure of that interaction, transactional models focus on how the interaction unfolds (Babatunde 2011).

2.2.2.1 Interactional Stress Theory

Interactional theories focus on the architecture of the situations that give rise to the experience of stress and place less emphasis on the processes involved, and the individual’s attempts to cope following that experience (Cox and Griffiths 2010). Three leading interactional models have helped shape contemporary stress theory: Karasek’s (1979) Job Demand-Control (JD-C) model also known as the Job-Strain model, Siegrist’s (1996) Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model, and the Job Demands Resource (JD-R) model (McGonigle et al. 2015).

The JD-C model focuses on the interaction between objective pressures in the work environment and the worker’s decision latitude (Karasek 1979; Karasek and Theorell 1990). The model allows for four job types: ‘high strain’ jobs (the riskiest to health)
involve a combination of high demands and low levels of control / resources to deal with those demands. ‘Active jobs’ are characterised by high levels of demands alongside high levels of control (less risky to health, involving average levels of job strain). ‘Low strain jobs’ - low levels of demands allied with high levels of control (below average levels of job strain), and ‘passive jobs’ - low levels of both demands and control (the demotivating nature of this job type might induce average levels of job strain). The model emphasises the status of the psychosocial work environment rather than the individual (Hill-Rice 2012).

The Job Demands-Resources Control (JD-R) model was introduced as an alternative to the JD-C model and has achieved much acceptance amongst work related stress researchers. This model proposes that high job demands lead to strain and health impairment, and that high resources lead to increased motivation and higher productivity (Schaufeli and Taris 2014). The JD-R model assumes that when job demands are high, additional effort must be exerted to achieve the work goals and to prevent decreasing performance. Such discretionary effort is attributed to physical and psychological costs, such as fatigue and irritability. Withdrawal, reduced motivation and disengagement act as self-protective strategies that prevent further energy depletion (Xanthopoulou et al. 2009). Job resources are defined as “physical, social, or organisational aspects of the job that may do any of the following: (a) be functional in achieving work goals; (b) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (c) stimulate personal growth and development”. Job resources can include feedback, job control, and social support (Demerouti et al. 2015, p. 501).

Siegrist’s (1996) ERI model posits that an imbalance between effort and reward at work, adversely affects health and well-being (Bohle et al. 2015). Both effort and reward are broadly conceptual, and imbalance is moderated by personal factors (Figure 3). Rooted in the notion of distributive justice, the theory suggests that effort at work is spent as part of a social contract based on the norm of social reciprocity, whereby effort is reciprocated through rewards provided in the form of money, esteem, and career opportunities (including job security). Lack of reciprocity between costs and gains defines a state of emotional distress with a propensity to stress responses.
Recurrent violation of the norm of reciprocity may elicit a sense of being treated unfairly, and suffering injustice which affects a worker’s self-esteem. Imbalance between efforts and rewards can arise under three conditions: where an employee (i) has a poorly defined work contract or where that employee has little choice concerning alternative employment opportunities owing to, among other things, difficult labour market conditions or lack of mobility, (ii) accepts the imbalance for strategic reasons such as the prospect of improved future working conditions, and (iii) exhibits over-commitment as a means of coping with occupational demands, whereby over-commitment is defined as a set of attitudes, behaviours and emotions that reflect excessive striving in combination with a strong desire of being approved and esteemed” (Siegrist 1996, p. 55). Over-committed employees tend to inappropriately perceive their work-related demands and personal coping resources due to a perceptual distortion that prevents them from making accurate assessments of efforts and rewards (Siegrist et al. 2004).

**Figure 3  Effort Reward Imbalance Theory**

All three models retain much favour in contemporary research. Evidence for the demand-control model is convincing when cardiovascular disease and sickness absence behaviour outcome measures are considered (Belkic et al. 2004; Kivimaki et al. 2016; Peter and Siegrist 1997). The longitudinal British Whitehall study involving 10,000 civil servants demonstrated the model’s efficacy in predicting coronary heart disease (Virtanen et al. 2015; Kivimaki et al. 2016). Virtanen et al. (2015) completed a follow
up study in a sample drawn from of the original Whitehall study population and that study again found support the JD-C model, in predicting several socio-economic and psychosocial risk factors for symptoms of depression post-retirement can be detected already in midlife. A number of reviews on health outcome research associated with effort-reward imbalance are available (e.g., Perrewe 2002; Schnall et al. 2000; Stansfeld et al. 2002; Tsutsumi and Kawakami 2004; van Vegchel et al. 2005). A meta-analysis of longitudinal studies found consistent and robust evidence for the combination of high effort and low reward as a prospective risk factor for common mental health problems (Stansfeld and Candy 2006).

A review of contemporary work related stress literature demonstrates the continued popularity of the JD-R model as a theoretical underpin to current research (Ellis et al. 2015; Karatepe and Okumus 2015; Lee 2015). Together, these three interactional theories offer a straightforward and robust theoretical anchor point from which to develop refinements to the models, in order to better account for the experience of work-related stress (Cox et al. 2010; van Veldhoven et al. 2005).

2.2.2.2 Criticisms of Interactional Stress Theory

Despite its widespread application, the JD-C(S) model has been criticised on various grounds. Concern has been expressed in respect of (i) ambiguity surrounding the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the decision latitude construct (Beehr et al. 2001; Glaser et al. 2001; Peter and Siegrist 1997), (ii) the nature of the interaction between demand and control (De Lange et al. 2004; Taris 2006; Van Der Doef and Maes 1999), (iii) the applicability of the theory in terms of different health and health-related outcomes (Cox 1993), (iv) the narrow focus on just two, albeit key, psychosocial hazards (Huang et al. 2002; Sparks and Cooper, 1999), (v) the direction of causation between demands and health (De Lange et al. 2004; Tucker et al. 2008), and (vi) its failure to consider external factors that may impact upon worker well-being including globalisation, free market forces, technological and environmental demands (Wallis and Dollard 2008). Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that the model may not apply in its traditional form in non-Western cultures (Nomura et al. 2005). Presented some
seventeen years after the D-C model, the ERI model has, thus far, received less research
attention than the former (Huang et al., 2002). Some studies have found no effect at all
(Van Vegchel et al. 2001).

Notwithstanding the prevalence of studies using the JD-R model in understanding work
related stress, much criticism has been levelled at it. These criticisms focus on concerns
regarding its restrictive nature and sole concentration on the impact of work
characteristics on wellbeing (Brouze 2014; Herbert 2011; Karatepe and Olugbade 2009).
According to Schaufeli and Taris (2014), several important unresolved issues exist
regarding its epistemological status, the definition of, and distinction between demands
and resources. A fundamental issue with the model is a lack of appreciation for personal
resources and individual differences (Brouze 2013; Feltz et al. 2008).

2.2.2.3 Transactional Stress Theory

Whilst interactional stress theory considers the structure of the relationship between
organism and environment, the power of the transactional approach to defining stress
lies in the fact that transaction implies process. In order to understand the nature of that
transaction, researchers now explore the cognitive processes that link the individual to
the environment (Dewe et al. 2010). This process comprises of three interrelated
aspects: (i) antecedent factors, (ii) cognitive perceptual processes that give rise to the
emotional experience of stress, and (iii) correlates of that experience (i.e., health
outcomes) (Cox and Griffiths 2010; Lazarus 1991).

It is, as Lazarus (1999) suggests, the process of appraisal that provides that link and, in
so doing, provides the “conduit” between the stressful encounter and the emotions that
follow. The authority of appraisals lies in the fact that they act as a bridge to what one
experiences and how one feels in a particular encounter (Lazarus 2001). This also
provides a conceptual pathway for more closely examining the role of discrete emotions.
If appraisals trigger the emotion response then, as Lazarus and Cohen-Charash (2001)
suggest, stress always implies emotion so “stress and emotion should be treated as a
single topic” as “emotion encompasses all the phenomena of stress” (p. 2001, p. 53).
Lazarus (2001) suggests that we can now turn our attention away from the troublesome concept of stress, and embrace discrete emotions as better expressing the nature of what it is individuals are experiencing. Thus, as definitions of stress have evolved, it is possible to think in terms of the different components of the stress transaction operating within a relational process (Dewe et al. 2010; Lazarus 2001).

Transactional stress theory points to the mechanisms that underlie and best express the nature of the stress process, and the manner in which those mechanisms provide a causal pathway that expresses the nature of the experience making the word “stress,” no longer thought of in terms of “detachable entities” (Coyne and Gottlieb 1996, p. 966) like simply a stimulus and response, but more in terms of a process where the emphasis is on “tracing out the transactional nature of that process” (Aldwin 2007, p. 42). Such causal pathways allow for a more focused direction to the specific nature of what is being experienced, abandoning solely using the term “stress,” and focus more on the emotional quality of the experience.

A key strength of transactional theory lies in its account of the experience of stress within the relationship between worker and work environment, as a mediator between psychosocial hazard exposure and health. Importantly, transactional theory accommodates subjective experience in a way that models which regard stress simply as an environmental threat do not (Dewe et al. 2010). Within transactional theory, the emphasis is upon the individual’s subjective appraisal of the environment, taking into consideration available coping resources. Indeed, the word ‘transaction’ implies that

Stress is neither in the environmental input nor in the person, but reflects the conjunction of a person with certain motives and beliefs with an environment whose characteristics pose harm, threats or challenges depending on these personal characteristics (Lazarus 1990, p. 3).

Transactional theory recognises that stress can be made manifest in physiological, psychological, behavioural, and social terms. It also recognises that a degree of individual variation will exist due to stress being a process of transaction between the
person and the environment. In doing so, it explains why conditions that one person experiences as stressful may not be regarded as stressful by another (Houdmont 2009). Furthermore, the approach takes account of multiple variables in the stress process. As such, studies that adhere to the transactional perspective necessarily collect data on a host of factors that feed into the stress process: hazardous exposures, the meaning of those exposures to the individual, and that person’s coping resources, as well as outcome variables (Dewe et al. 2010; Mark and Smith 2015).

### 2.2.2.4 Criticisms of Transactional Stress Theory

This process-based approach is more labour intensive for both researcher and study participant than interactional stress theory (Mark and Smith 2015; Lyon 2012). In consequence, studies informed by transactional stress theory are fewer in the scientific literature than those guided by interactional models. This serves to highlight one of the major challenges associated with transactional stress theory: the complexity of its application (Houdmont 2009). The very complexity of the transactional stress model means that it is hard to empirically capture, unlike the simpler models of Karasek (1979) and Siegrist (1996). Also, Cooper et al. (2001) and Cox and Ferguson (1991) state that despite the widespread use of the term “coping”, there are difficulties surrounding its definition, as it can be seen as a process, a behaviour, as a stable trait, or as situation specific. Daniels et al. (2004) have suggested that the conception of appraisal is too simplistic and doesn’t include individuals’ histories, and anticipated futures. Cox (1987) also states that the processes discussed may not be as rational as presented in transactional theories.

In addition, the definition of coping in transactional stress does not explain the possible negative effects for those who cannot cope, simply that demands may exceed resources available to cope with them (Quine and Pahl 1991). Also, it is apparent that over time, the same person (or group of people) can often re-define the stressfulness of a particular environmental stimulus indicating the dynamic nature of the method in which individuals (and groups of individuals) appraise stressful situations (Haslam 2004). According to Mark and Smith (2012), while there is plenty of supporting research on the
main effects of individual difference factors such as hardiness, locus of control, self-efficacy, and their relationship to health outcomes, results into the mediating and moderating roles of these factors are far less conclusive (Cooper et al. 2001; Spector 2006; Parkes 1994).

2.2.3 Stress Processes

Focusing on stress as a transactional entity acknowledges the emotional response that follows a stressful encounter (Dewe et al. 2010; Lazarus 2001). Thus, as definitions of stress have evolved, it is logical for this literature review to consider the different components of the stress transaction operating within a relational process i.e. (i) antecedent factors, (ii) cognitive perceptual processes that give rise to the emotional experience of stress, and (iii) correlates of that experience (e.g. health outcomes) (Cox and Griffiths 2010; Lazarus 1991)

2.2.3.1 Antecedent Factors (Environmental Hazards)

Historical stress models such as GAS address antecedent work related stress factors as wholly environmental i.e. a stressful stimulus eliciting a generalised stress response. Contemporary theory however accommodates subjective experience in a way that models which regard stress simply as an environmental threat do not (Dewe et al. 2010). The emphasis now is upon the individual’s subjective appraisal of the environment, taking into consideration available coping resources. The implication is that stress resides neither solely in the environment or the person, but in the meeting of both. Each individual meets their environment with certain motives and beliefs but that very environment poses harm, threats or challenges depending on personal characteristics (Lazarus 1990). Therefore, it is important to understand antecedent factors terms of available evidence relating to individual differences and empirical evidence of most commonly reported stress inducing factors.
The Irish Congress of Trade Unions- ICTU (2012) completed a large scale quantitative study of its members to understand the distribution across industry sectors of work related stress. Their study found that 90% of voluntary sector workers considered their job to be stressful, teachers reported at (88%), service workers reported at (82%), and construction workers reported levels of stress at 63%. The ICTU report was significant in demonstrating the prevalence of work related stress across job types during the recent recession. Colley (2012) suggests that austerity has shifted the “stakes” from employee support to the meeting of economically driven targets during this time (2012, p.15).

Further evidence emerged from literature isolating the interpersonal nature of the work environment as a major contributor to work related stress (Zhou et al. 2015; Jaramillio et al. 2011; Young and Schieman 2012). Zhou et al. (2015) for example, completed an observational analysis looking at the impact of workplace toxicity on work related stress amongst individuals employed in second level education in the UK. Data collected from 76 full-time employees across 10 consecutive working days revealed that daily workplace incivility positively predicted end-of-work negative effects that reduced recovery before returning to work the next day. Further, the impact of work related stress was stronger for people who demonstrated low emotional stability, high hostile attribution bias, and an external locus of control. This is significant because it links the interplay of interpersonal conflict with diminished stress thresholds as being a catalyst for increased effects of work related stress.

Johnson et al. (2005) compared experiences of work related stress across a large and diverse set of occupations. Three stress related variables (psychological well-being, physical health and job satisfaction) were reviewed and comparisons made between 26 different occupations on each of these measures. Twenty-six occupations were selected for inclusion and the researchers found that six occupations reported worse than average scores on each of the factors of physical health, psychological well-being, and job satisfaction. These occupations were found to be infused with interpersonal interaction and habitual conflict.

- Ambulance workers
- Teachers
The issue of workplace toxicity and hostility is reflected in a growing contemporary discourse around bullying in the workplace (Rajalakshmi and Gomathi 2015; Gomes and Coehlo 2014). This refers to harassment, threatening or negative behaviour towards peer employees (or) to the subordinates in the organisation, causing the victim to suffer physically, psychologically and professionally. Different forms of bullying activities can be carried out in the workplace - verbal bullying, nonverbal bullying, psychological bullying and the physical bullying. Gomes and Coehlo (2014) suggest that due to the economic downturn, employees are becoming more stressed at work, partly from the fear of losing their jobs, and this is itself an antecedent of negative work place behaviours and bullying.

In addition to interpersonal elements of work related stress, between 2005 and 2010 evidence suggests that there has been a significant increase the speed of work (Steiber and Pichler 2014). Studies examining European labour markets suggest that many jobs have intensified in the wake of the economic recession (Gallie and Zhou 2013; Russell and McGinnity 2011b). Theoretical predictions about trends in work pressure tend to be unanimously pessimistic. Scholars anticipate an intensification of work pressure in more highly skilled jobs that carry greater responsibility, involve more complex tasks and require the constant updating of skills (Steiber and Pichler 2014). In addition to the extant literature on work related stress hazards, much literature exists demonstrating the significant array of work related stress outcomes. Clark (2013) completed a mixed method analysis of medical professionals in the UK to elicit findings regarding proliferation and triggers of work stress. The array of work related stress antecedents emergent from the data included negative workload, isolation, types of hours worked,
role conflict, role ambiguity, lack of autonomy, career development barriers, difficult work relationships, bullying, harassment, and organisational climate.

2.2.3.2 Cognitive Perceptual Processes

An emphasis on appraisal (how we personally assess the significance of an event, an encounter or a situation) distinguishes the transactional approach to stress from other approaches by focusing our attention on capturing the personal meaning of the stress experience (Dewe et al. 2010; Dewe and Trenberth 2004; Cooper et al. 2001). The stress process involves: our assessment of the personal significance of a situation, encounter, or event (primary appraisal); our assessment of our available resources to cope with the situation (secondary appraisal) and our deployment of cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage and reduce the stress reaction to situations we appraise as significant (coping) (Dewe et al. 2010; Dewe and Trenberth 2004; Mazetti 2011; Lazarus 2003).

Appraisal is the critical dimension in this process and failure to explore its significance, impacts our understanding of the subjective nature of stress (Dewe et al. 2010; Cooper et al. 2001; Lazarus 2000; Dewe 1992). What some may perceive as stressful, others may not and therefore situations cannot be categorised as ‘stressors’ independent of a person’s reaction to them (Lazarus 1990). Primary appraisal is a judgement about what the person perceives the situation holds in store for him or her. Specifically, a person assesses the possible effects of demands and resources on well-being. If the demands of the situation outweigh available resources, then the individual may determine that the situation represents (a) potential for harm or loss (threat), or that (b) actual harm has already occurred (harm), or (c) the situation has potential for some type of gain or benefit (challenge) (Lyon 2012). The perception of threat triggers secondary appraisal, which is the process of determining what coping options or behaviours are available to deal with a threat and how effective they might be. Often, primary and secondary appraisal occur simultaneously and interact with one another, which makes measurement very difficult (Lazarus and Folkman 1984).
In 1966, Lazarus identified two forms of coping: direct action and palliative. In 1984, Lazarus and Folkman changed the names of these two forms to problem-focused and emotion-focused, respectively (Mark and Smith 2012). Problem-focused coping strategies are similar to problem-solving tactics. These strategies encompass efforts to define the problem, generate alternative solutions, weigh up the costs and benefits of various actions, take actions to change what is changeable, and, if necessary, learn new skills. Problem-focused efforts can be directed outward to alter some aspect of the environment or inward to alter some aspect of self. Emotion-focused coping strategies are directed toward decreasing emotional distress. These tactics include such efforts as distancing, avoiding, selective attention, blaming, minimising, wishful thinking, venting emotions, seeking social support, exercising, and meditating. Similar to the cognitive strategies identified in problem-focused coping efforts, changing how an encounter is construed without changing the objective situation is equivalent to reappraisal (Lyon 2012; Hager and Runtz 2012).

### 2.2.3.3 Outcomes of Work Related Stress

Extant literature highlights the significance of the problem of work related stress in terms of outcomes for individuals, organisations and wider society (Korosi and Baram 2010; UK Labour Force Survey 2014; Bagnall et al. 2016; Matrix 2013). The stark reality of negative health outcomes of stress for individuals is identified by the World Health Organisation (2016) in that mental illness is now officially the leading cause of disability worldwide. In terms of work related stress, empirical evidence identifies outcomes in terms of physical disorders such as heart disease, hypoadrenia, immunosuppression, and chronic pain (Juster and McKewn 2014; Koob and Le Moal 2001). Over-activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis leading to chronic elevation of glucocorticoids (e.g. cortisol and pro-inflammatory cytokines); processes linked to accelerated biological ageing and brain ageing is also associated with work related stress (Andel et al. 2012). Other adverse health outcomes related to work related stress include depression, musculoskeletal pain, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and premature mortality (Bagnall et al. 2016).
From an organisational perspective, work related stress constitutes a substantial barrier in terms of employee performance and engagement. Estimates from the UK Health and Safety Executive, the total number of cases of work-related stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 38% of all cases of work related illnesses in 2014/15 and 43% of all working days lost during the same period. In terms of engagement and job performance, work related stress is linked with avoidant and ameliorative behaviours, extreme feelings of panic or anger, disengagement, fatigue, depression and psychosomatic complaints (Levi 2016; McVicar et al. 2014; Nakao 2010. Cognitive deficits arising from chronic stress may be enduring and are linked with inadequate acute stress responses when novel hazards are encountered in the future. Thus, negative outcomes may become exacerbated in terms of work place performance and engagement (Korosi and Baram 2010).

According to the UK Labour Force Survey (2014), occupations with the highest reported rates of work-related stress are health professionals (in particular nurses), teaching and education professionals, and caring personal services (in particular welfare and housing associate professionals). That same survey reported that work-related stress, depression or anxiety accounts for an estimated 12.8 million reported lost working days per year. After musculoskeletal disorders the report indicates that stress is by far the largest contributor to the overall number of days lost as a result of work-related ill-health and in the UK. In terms of how work related stress results in negative outcomes, Palmer and Cooper (2004) developed a model that provides a useful schematic representation (Figure 4).
In a wider societal context, work related stress has become a major priority for organisations such as Public Health England (PHE), because employment is considered a wider determinant of health. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2012), mental illness affects more human lives and gives rise to a greater waste of human resources than all other forms of disability. Dame Sally Davies – Chief Medical Officer of the UK National Health Service NHS – revealed that the cost of these lost working days in now averaging £20 billion per annum in the United Kingdom (Cooper 2014). In a recent EU-funded project carried out by Matrix (2013), the cost to Europe of work-related stress was estimated to be €617 billion annually. This total was made up of costs to employers resulting from absenteeism and presenteeism (£272 billion), loss of productivity (£242 billion), health care costs of £63 billion, and social welfare costs in the form of disability benefit payments (£39 billion).
Psychotherapeutic literature relating to work related stress treatment indicates that a directed form of intervention - cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) holds precedence over other forms of talk therapy (McLeod 2011; Joyce and Sills 2014). The medical profession appears to favour CBT due to it being an evidence-based treatment where specific interventions for symptom-based diagnoses are used (Hoifodt et al. 2011). CBT begins with the premise that abnormal behaviour is caused by abnormal thought processes. It holds that we interact with the world through our mental representation of it, and therefore, if our mental representations are inaccurate, or our ways of reasoning are inadequate, then our emotions and behaviours may become distorted (Cuijpers et al. 2010).

CBT works to identify distorted cognitions through a process of evaluation. The client learns to discriminate between their own thoughts and reality. They learn of the influence that cognition has on their feelings, and they are taught to recognise, observe and monitor their own thoughts. The behavioural part of the therapy involves setting homework for the client to do (e.g. keeping a diary of thoughts). The therapist gives the client tasks that will help them challenge their own irrational beliefs. The idea is that the client identifies their own unhelpful beliefs and then proves them wrong. As a result, their beliefs begin to change. For example, someone who is anxious in social situations may be set a homework assignment to meet a friend at the pub for a drink (James et al. 2013).

The other dominant method of work related stress referred to in reviewed literature relates to pharmaceutical interventions. Symptoms are typically treated with antidepressants, benzodiazepines, tricyclics, and beta-blockers. Anti-depressants—especially those in the class of serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRI) are also commonly used to treat anxiety even though they were designed to treat depression. Seniors who take benzodiazepine have a significantly higher risk of developing dementia during the next 15 years (De Gage et al. 2014). SSRIs have fewer side effects than older anti-depressants, but they are still likely to cause jitters, nausea, and sexual dysfunction when
treatment begins. Some anti-depressants include tricyclics, a class of drugs that are older than SSRIs and have been shown to work well for most anxiety disorders other than obsessive-compulsive disorder. These drugs are known to cause side-effects such as dizziness, drowsiness, dry mouth, and weight gain (De Gage et al. 2014; Goelman et al. 2014). Additional drugs used to treat anxiety include monoamine oxidase inhibitors (MAOIs), beta-blockers, and buspirone. MAOIs are an older type of anti-depressant used to treat some anxiety disorders (Ooi et al. 2015). These drugs carry with them several restrictions on diet and prevent one from taking other medications such as pain relievers. Beta-blockers are usually used to treat heart conditions, but they can also treat physical symptoms that accompany some anxiety disorders.

2.2.5 Criticisms of Dominant Treatments

Many questions remain regarding the overall effectiveness of CBT, its differential effectiveness by disorder, the nature of the control groups by which its effectiveness has been established, and the extent to which its effects persist following the cessation of treatment (Butler et al. 2006). A review of meta-analyses on CBT outcomes is particularly relevant to the on-going debate about the comparative efficacy of different treatments (Carroll and Rounsaville 2007). For instance, a review of meta-analyses of primary studies on CBT for depression concludes that the effectiveness of CBT has been overstated in the literature (Parker 2014).

How outcome is defined also appears to impact findings of treatment specificity. In the meta-analysis completed by Parker (2014) for instance, CBT was demonstrably superior to other therapies when outcome was defined as a reduction in symptoms of the primary illness or global symptoms, or as improvements in general functioning. When outcome is defined in terms of improvements in self-concept, or social adjustment however, CBT no longer appeared superior. Most of the studies that assess self-concept in the meta-analysis study compared CBT against psychodynamic therapy and it is possible that the relative emphasis on self-concept in that therapy (compared to the more symptom-focused emphasis) in CBT leads to greater improvements in self-concept (Cuijpers et al. 2010).
McLeod (2011) also suggests limitations of CBT including a lack of a precise role of cognitive processes that is yet to be determined. The maladaptive cognitions seen in psychologically disturbed people could be a consequence rather than a cause. The cognitive model is narrow in scope i.e. thinking is just one part of human functioning. Broader issues according to McLeod (2011) need to be addressed. As a directive therapy, CBT aims to change cognitions, and sometimes, quite forcefully. For some, this may be considered an unethical approach (McLeod 2011).

Lynch (2001) suggests that a serious consequence of the medical preoccupation with biology and illness is that mental health problems tend to be treated in a vacuum, as if they have little or no relevance or input into the person's everyday life. He suggests that this is an unrealistic approach to mental health and mental health problems. According to Lynch, if we are to stem the tide of suicide, depression and mental health problems that engulf Ireland and other countries, a major overhaul of the intervention and support services for depression and mental health services is urgently required, as is a major review of the nature of mental health problems. Lynch argues for a migration from medication to dialogue based interventions, helping people to share their experiences and realise they are not alone in their experience.
2.2.6 Contemporary Work Related Stress Discourse

My research has uncovered an increasing prevalence of academic literature pertaining to the role of self-regulation in the management of work related stress. Bradberry (2014) completed a qualitative investigation into the coping mechanisms of top leaders across a variety of UK industries. His study reveals that top performers have well-honed coping strategies that they employ under stressful circumstances. These practices are reported to lower stress levels regardless of what is occurring in their environment. These practices also according to Bradberry, ensure that the stress experienced by self-regulating leaders is intermittent and not prolonged. Ten coping mechanisms were isolated in the study to be effective mediators of work related stress for leaders.

The full list of coping mechanisms is listed in Appendix (4). In summary however, these appear to be grounded in a blend of self-directed CBT and humanistic approaches. For instance, successful leaders appear to be able to catch negative thoughts and perceptions and to reframe them into more positive outlook. They also involve body work including deep breathing and the use of reflective space. They also proactively use their relational networks to garner support and awareness. Bradberry argues that although some of these strategies may seem obvious, the real challenge lies in recognising when you need to use them and having the wherewithal to actually do so in spite of your stress.

Reinforcing the self-regulation argument, Hahn et al. (2011) conducted a quasi-experimental study involving a number of participants. They evaluated the effects of a recovery training program on recovery experiences (psychological detachment from work, relaxation, mastery experiences, and control during off-job time). They also evaluated recovery related self-efficacy, and well-being outcomes. Analysis of covariance revealed an increase in recovery experiences and WRS mastery recovery-related self-efficacy amongst participants. Sleep quality also increased whilst perceived stress and stated negative effects from WRS decreased.
Stoeber and Damian (2015) identified a cost from continuously exercising self-regulation however. They completed an analysis focusing on perfectionism in employees. Perfectionism is a personality disposition characterised by “striving for flawlessness and the setting of exceedingly high standards of performance, accompanied by tendencies for overly critical self-evaluation” (Stoeber and Damian 2015, p.2). Their study identified a link between a tendency toward self-regulation and increased perfectionism. Because identified regulation is a form of autonomous motivation whereas introjected regulation is a form of controlled motivation, the findings suggest that high levels of combined autonomous–controlled motivation may be responsible for the perfectionism–workaholism relationship regarding perfectionistic strivings.

Another term emerging in contemporary literature regarding self-regulation is resilience. This relates to how we, as individuals and organisations, cope with adversity and failure. According to Cooper et al. (2014), resilience is as an idea whose time has come. Both individuals and organisations might face stressful situations, setbacks or failure during their respective life cycles. Yet, people’s responses to failure vary widely they argue. Some recover after a brief period, while others descend into depression. Learning from setbacks or failure requires positive attitudes, emotions, and the ability that may ultimately lead to organisational well-being (Cartwright and Cooper 2012).

Cooper et al. (2013) suggest that resilience involves bouncing back from setbacks combined with remaining effective in the face of tough demands and difficult circumstances, whilst growing stronger in the process. Studies show that resilient individuals with high positive emotions and the ability to manage negative emotions can find meaning and overcome stressful situations (Tugade et al. 2004; Cooper et al. 2013). Other research indicates that resilient individuals are better equipped to deal with stressful events or conditions at work (Luthans et al. 2007). Positive psychological capital has been identified as antecedents of well-being (Higgs and Dulewicz 2014), and a mediator of the relationship between leadership and employee creative performance behaviours (Gupta and Singh 2014).
A limitation of the extant research on resilience I believe is that it largely focuses on individual or personal resilience and therefore an opportunity exists to systematically investigate the consequences of resilience on organisational performance. At the organisational level, resilience refers to the organisational ability to dynamically reinvent business models and strategies as circumstances change, and to change before the need becomes desperately obvious (Hamel and Valikangas 2003). This may necessitate strategic flexibility (Hitt et al. 1998), individual and organisational ambidexterity (Juni et al. 2013; Stavel and Zardet 2014), and high-performance work systems (Patel and Conklin 2012). These are required to navigate through fast changing work situations amid continuous change through technology advancements for example.

Leadership practices can play a crucial role in cultivating an organisational environment that facilitates resilience-building for individuals. For instance, a high engagement culture may create a supportive environment for employees to build resilience and develop coping strategies (Bowles and Cooper 2012; Truss et al. 2013). Human resource systems that cultivate relational climates may promote helping behaviours within organisations (Mossholder et al. 2011). Resilience is believed to capable of being developed over time. For instance, a pioneering army program for fostering posttraumatic growth demonstrates that resilience can be trained and taught (Seligman 2011). Therefore, the approaches to design, delivery and evaluation of workplace resilience building interventions await further scholarly investigation that could provide practical recommendations for HR professionals, leaders and individuals within organisations of all types.
2.3 Data Synthesis: Gestalt Psychotherapy

In this section, literature pertaining to the process oriented approach to psychotherapy that is gestalt is reviewed. The section begins with a consideration of how gestalt came into being, as an alternative psychotherapeutic approach to the dominant psychodynamic approaches at a point in time. Key influences on gestalt will be considered leading on to an examination of literature that attempts to define a term that does not easily translate into the English language. An engagement with a suite of contemporary and historical works allowed me to then chart the early days of the movement, up to its current manifestation as a bone fide therapeutic discipline. The efficacy of gestalt is then considered in terms of a number of empirical studies that compare it with other approaches e.g. psychodynamic and CBT. Criticisms, of which there a number, are then explored before literature examining current discourse in gestalt is considered.

2.3.1 Conceptual Overview of Gestalt Psychotherapy

2.3.1.1 Definition and Origins of Gestalt Psychotherapy

The term gestalt does not translate easily into English, coming from the German term “gestalten” meaning whole, or a completion that is greater than the sum of its parts (Irish Gestalt Association 2015). Gestalt posits that an integrated person is aware of all the elements that unite to make them whole i.e. their body, feelings, intellect, and senses. Gestalt therapy aims to find wholeness and integration through awareness in the here and now. It focuses in the present on how the individual blocks expression and spontaneity and explores ways of releasing trapped energy (Starr 2014).

Gestalt therapy continues to develop as part of the humanistic and integrative movement in psychotherapy. The origins of gestalt psychotherapy are linked back to the revisions of the classical psychoanalytical approach promulgated by Freud (Moll et al. 2010). Psychoanalysis is a set of psychological and psychotherapeutic theories and associated techniques where the analyst interprets the utterances of their patient and diagnoses both the malaise itself, and the cure. In classical psychoanalysis, if the patient had a viewpoint
different from that of the analyst, he or she was usually seen as ‘resistant’. This meant that the patient opposed the correct point of view i.e. that of the analyst (Yontef 2012).

Another formulating basis of psychotherapy is behaviourism which only considered stimulus and response. In the same manner that transactional stress theory differs to interactionist stress theory, contrary to the behaviourist approach to understanding the elements of cognitive processes for example, gestalt psychologists sought to understand their organisation and inherent processes (Carlson and Heth 2010). Whether operant or classical conditioning was the paradigm for a particular treatment, the patient’s thoughts, experiences, and feelings were not considered relevant or even regarded as data in behaviourism. Only interventions of classical or operant conditioning were included in the methodology. Early behavioural therapy manipulated stimuli to control responses, but growth in patient awareness was not an intended part of this system (Corey 2012).

The limitations of the accepted parameters of both the classical psychoanalytic system and classic behavioural system created a sharp dichotomy between psychoanalysis which centred on “mind”, and behaviourism which focused on “material substance”. Both manifested a Cartesian system of the isolated mind, separate from the body and others. The choice was between understanding of the transference-neurosis through interpretation and changing behaviour directly by controlling stimuli. Rigidly defining methodology and excluding all but orthodoxy not only made an integrated methodology impossible, but also limited growth and expansion in both (Yontef 2012, p.15).

Alternatives to this dualistic dichotomy appeared in the 1960s and became quite popular. They featured growth through active contact between therapist and patient and active techniques. At the time, the alternative approach was called the “third force”, and included gestalt therapy (Angus et al. 2014). The theories and practices of the third force varied, but all were alternatives to the psychoanalytic disembodied methodology and behaviourism’s emphasis on control and exclusion of relational, affective, and cognitive factors. The theories and the practices of the third force therapies were eclectic in their views on the therapeutic relationship and the range of techniques. Their wide variety of
explicit and implicit behavioural and insight goals lacked a clearly stated theoretical integration with their broad range of techniques (Corey 2015).

Although gestalt therapy began as a revision of psychoanalysis, it quickly developed as a wholly independent, integrated system in its own right (Zinker 2013). It favoured active techniques, often modelled and advocated on confrontational modes of relating, and frequently used cathartic and theatrical techniques. These techniques promoted excitement; emotions were expressed, often exaggerated, at times enshrined, and overly socialised people exploded in confrontation. Patients shouted, pounded pillows, talked to empty chairs, and vigorously encountered each other. The organising rationale here seemed to be to bring the energy into the environment. For example, “Lose your mind and come to your senses” became a well-known gestalt therapy slogan at the time (Yontef 2012, p.5).

2.3.1.2 **Influences on Gestalt**

Historical context dictated a nomadic life for Perls, with moves from Berlin (where he was heavily influenced by psychoanalysis) to Johannesburg in 1933, to New York in 1946, and later to California (Wagner-Moore 2004). Geographic location seemed, in part, to influence Perls’s concepts and practice of psychotherapy, on the basis of his teacher “Dujour.” As a result, Perls’s approach to gestalt theory and therapy was, at best, eclectic. He borrowed some ideas from his analysts, like Reich and Horney (Miller 1974). As Miller (1974) noted, Perls integrated Horney’s notion that “neurotic behaviour is based on manipulation, designed to win love” (1974, p. 5-24) and was attracted to “Sartrean” existentialism’s idea of individual responsibility and choice

In the wake of the zeitgeist of World War II, which was so heavily permeated by phenomenological and existential thought, Perls rejected much of his analytic training in favour of the new zeitgeist (Yontef and Simkin 1989). From Jan Smuts, the prime minister of South Africa, Perls borrowed the idea of holism. Ironically, he initially had minimal exposure to, or understanding of Gestalt psychology itself, and he has been criticised for this on several accounts (Wheeler 1991). Wheeler (1991) noted that Perls’s
early work, titled “Ego, Hunger and Aggression”, was simply revised and renamed “The Beginnings of Gestalt Therapy” (renamed at his wife’s suggestion) with little description of what Perls meant by gestalt psychology or therapy. Perls himself called the book “sketchy,” and Wheeler convincingly argued that Perls’s original text is full of “vague philosophical musings and self-aggrandisement in the Freudian manner” (Wheeler 1991, p. 43).

Significant evidence exists suggesting that the gestalt movement is grounded extensively in spiritual doctrines including Taoism. Williams (2006) provides clear evidence of the influence of Taoism on Laura Perls and Paul Goodman, co-founders of the gestalt approach along with Fritz Perls. The connection between the gestalt approach and spirituality has been shown in many diverse ways. For example, some researchers have viewed the gestalt approach as a type of technique applied to areas that incorporate religious perspectives, such as pastoral counselling (Filippi 1990), and Christian ministry (Richardson 1976). It has also been shown to be effective in helping people deal with issues related to religious values (Zamborsky 1982).

When gestalt-oriented writers typically define or describe “spiritual,” they most often are referring to aspects of spirituality inherent in religious traditions, particularly Buddhism and Taoism. For example, Naranjo (1978) describes “awareness cultivation” and the “prescription of virtuous relationship” in gestalt as similar to concepts within Buddhism (p. 80). Doelger (1978) shows that the Taoist doctrine of inaction, or Wu Wei, is similar to gestalt theory’s concept of organismic self-regulation, or the centring process; and the principles of unification and integration in the human system are similar to the Taoist concept of yin/yang.

It has been speculated that the goals of gestalt (growth, awareness, creativity, integration), Zen Buddhism (Buddha-mind, perfect inner freedom), and Transcendental Meditation (Unity consciousness, God-consciousness) are essentially the same, despite having different names (Stallone 1976). Kennedy (2012) describes the gestalt approach as a “way of being in the world” and not just a type of therapy (2012, p. 88). He outlines
three principles that facilitate spirituality in gestalt: co-creative dialogue, temporality (being in the present, in my body), and horizontalism (we are all equal as humans).

Other authors connect a gestalt approach with spirituality in a much broader way. For example, Crocker and Park (2004) define spiritual and spirituality by making distinctions among human spirituality, spiritual reality, and spiritual experience. Crocker (2013) defines spiritual reality as a “significant mystery” that is not fully knowable, controllable, or predictable; spiritual experience as a meeting with this significant mystery; and human spirituality as “the ability to be present with and receptive to a significant mystery, and then to interact appropriately with it” (Crocker 2013, p. 335). She describes gestalt therapy as honouring spirituality by placing human spirituality at the core of its work.

2.3.1.3 Central Tenets of Gestalt

In gestalt therapy, the meta-theory is existentialism; the psychological theory is gestalt psychology; and the method is phenomenological (Ellegard and Pederson 2012). In contrast to therapist led approaches, gestalt has developed as a relational approach since one part of the whole cannot be perceived without the presence of the other. In gestalt therapy, discourse surrounds needs and interests being foreground or background, of something being figural for the client or therapist. The approach is concerned with emergent gestalts or needs, of sequences of contacting that include sensing, being aware, choosing, taking action, and assimilating or dissolving the figure. This language is intended to be descriptive and never evaluative (Gregory 2014).

Humanistic psychological therapies are based on the premise that people are self-actualising, that is, they have an inherent tendency to develop their potential (Greenberg et al. 2013; Rogers 1951; Maslow et al. 1970). Other defining characteristics of humanistic therapies include the belief that people are self-aware, are free to choose how they will live, are responsible for the choices they make, and are unique entities that need to be understood in the context of their individual experiences and characteristics (Lambert et al. 2016; Cain 1997). From a meta-theory perspective, existentialism is
more a reaction against traditional philosophies, such as rationalism, empiricism and positivism that seek to discover an ultimate order and universal meaning in metaphysical principles or in the structure of the observed world. It asserts that people actually make decisions based on what has meaning to them, rather than what is rational (Mann 2010).

Existentialism focuses on the question of human existence, and the feeling that there is no purpose or explanation at the core of existence (Philosophy Basics 2015). It holds that, as there is no God or any other transcendent force, the only way to counter this nothingness (and hence to find meaning in life) is by embracing existence. Thus, existentialism believes that individuals are entirely free and must take personal responsibility for themselves (although with this responsibility comes angst, a profound anguish or dread). It therefore emphasises action, freedom, and decision as fundamental, and holds that the only way to rise above the essentially absurd condition of humanity (which is characterised by suffering and inevitable death) is by exercising our personal freedom and choice (a complete rejection of determinism) (Webber 2009).

The psychological theory of gestalt therapy was founded by Max Wertheimer in the early parts of the 20th century. Gestalt psychology was to some extent a rebellion against the molecularism of Wundt’s program for psychology, in sympathy with many others at the time, including William James (Boeree 1998). From the very beginning, the following idea was central to gestalt thinking i.e. phenomenal experience consists of part-whole structures, configurations, or “gestalten” (Wagemans et al. 2012; Kohler 1959).

A gestalt is an integrated, coherent structure or form, a whole that is different from the sum of the parts. Gestalts emerge spontaneously from self-organisational processes in the brain. Gestalts result from global field forces that lead to the simplest possible organisation, or minimum solution, given the available stimulation. With this simplicity or minimum principle also known as the law of Prägnanz, the gestaltists found themselves in opposition to the likelihood principle advanced by von Helmholtz: the idea that the visual system interprets, through some unconscious inference mechanism,
incoming proximal stimuli in terms of the most likely distal source that might have given rise to these proximal stimuli (Nevis 2013).

Derived from the Greek word “phainomenon” meaning appearance, the gestalt method is phenomenological - defined as “the science of phenomena as distinct from being (ontology), and division of any science which describes and classifies its phenomena” (Oxford Online English Dictionary 2015). It is the study of human experience and the way things present themselves in, and through, such experience.

Phenomenology is a set of reflective descriptions on our lived experiences, a kind of disengaged, detached, even serene review of our worldly engagements, a philosophy which leaves everything as it is, and thus restores the possibilities of ancient philosophy.

(Sokolowski 2014, p.87)

To create the conditions under which a dialogic moment might occur, the therapist attends to his or her own presence, creates the space for the client to enter in and become present as well. The therapist commits themselves to the dialogic process, surrendering to what takes place, as opposed to attempting to control it. With presence, the therapist judiciously operates as a whole and authentic person, instead of assuming a role, false-self or persona (Husserl 2013).

2.3.2 The Arguments for and against Gestalt

2.3.2.1 The Efficacy of Gestalt Psychotherapy

In addressing the efficacy of gestalt psychotherapy, it is important to firstly examine empirical evidence as to the efficacy of psychotherapy in general. This has been evaluated in a vast number of studies comparing treated groups with control groups receiving no treatment (Lambert 2013; Barlow 2016; Orlinsky et al. 1994). Meta analytic studies are particularly important in this case because they synthesise the results of a set of individual studies in a quantitative way, and allow for a clear picture to
emerge. The pervasive theme derived from hundreds of these meta-analytic studies is that psychotherapy has proven to be very beneficial for a wide range of disorders, including depression and anxiety disorders (Gustavsson et al. 2011; Wittchen et al. 2011; Orlinsky et al. 1994; Lambert 2013b).

From these many studies, the size of the treatment effect that can be expected from psychotherapy is estimated as follows: On average 65% of treated persons will have a positive outcome, compared to 35% of the non-treated control group. This compares favourably to the magnitude of the effects achieved with common medical interventions. Psychotherapeutic effects are larger than those achieved with a wide range of standard medical interventions, including those of almost all interventions in cardiology (e.g. beta-blockers and angioplasty) and geriatric medicine (e.g. osteoporosis treatment (Wampold 2007).

Although humanistic therapy has contributed greatly to making psychotherapy a subject of empirical research, controlled effectiveness studies have played a minor role. Moreover, the appropriateness of applying the concept of evidence-based practice to psychotherapy has been questioned by practitioners. Nevertheless, several randomised controlled trials have now investigated some psychotherapeutic interventions that belong to this school. Overall, the results suggest that these are effective for a range of conditions (Elliott et al. 2013).

These studies have included randomised comparisons among combinations of emotion focused therapy (EFT), client-centered and CBT to address specific clinical disorders such as depression (Ellison et al. 2009; Goldman et al. 2006; Greenberg and Watson, 1998; Watson et al. 2003) and complex trauma (Paivio et al. 2004). Importantly, to answer the key empirical question of does humanistic psychotherapy (HP) work, recent meta-analyses, based on findings from 191 HP outcome studies (Elliott et al. 2013) have established that HPs are associated with large pre-post client change at treatment termination, up to 18-month follow-up and, in general, are clinically and statistically equivalent to other therapies, including CBT.
The defence of the efficacy hitherto could appear to be rather generalised under the banner of being caught within efficacy studies regarding psychotherapy itself and humanistic psychotherapy. If humanistic contributions to empirical research are lacking, then studies specifically testing the efficacy of gestalt are sparse within literature. Recent contributions however suggest that, at least, attempts are being made to report the efficacy of gestalt in more scientific terms. Freeburg and VanWinkle (2011) for example reported the case of a 23-year-old female patient with sexual addiction treated with gestalt psychotherapy, reported a significant reduction in shame based personal reports and sexual behaviour frequency.

Kasper et al. (2008) captured the relationship between inviting the client to work in the here and now and increased reports of immediacy events in therapy over an extended period of review in a qualitative analysis. There was a significant relationship between inviting the client to work in the here-and-now and the client being immediate, defined as her expressing her immediate thoughts or feelings to the researchers about either the therapist or the client / therapist relationship (Kivlighan et al. 2014). Holzinger et al. (2015) completed an exploratory clinical study evaluating gestalt as part of a study investigating the treatment of nightmares. Thirty-two subjects having nightmares at least twice a week participated. Subjects were randomly assigned to group a) gestalt therapy group or b) gestalt and lucid dreaming group therapy. Each group lasted ten weeks. Participants kept a sleep/dream diary over the treatment. Examinations with respect to nightmare frequency and sleep quality (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index) were carried out at the beginning, after five and ten weeks and at a follow-up three months later. Results concerning nightmare frequency showed a significant reduction was found in both groups after the ten-week-study and at the follow-up (Wilcoxon test: P ≤ 0.05). Significant reduction in dream recall frequency could only be observed in the gestalt therapy group (Wilcoxon test: P ≤ 0.05). For subjects having succeeded in learning lucid dreaming, reduction was sooner and higher. Sleep quality improved for both groups at the follow-up (P ≤ 0.05, Wilcoxon test). Only the gestalt lucid dreaming group showed significant improvement at the end of therapy (P ≤ 0.05). The researchers concluded that lucid dreaming, in combination with gestalt therapy, is a potent technique to reduce nightmare frequency and improve the subjective quality of sleep.
Two-chair dialogues have been shown to be effective in resolving negative treatment of self, for example, self-criticism, self-silencing, self-neglect (Shahar et al. 2011), and depression (Watson et al. 2003). In turn, empty-chair dialogues have been used to effectively address complex trauma (Paivio et al. 2004; Pascual-Leone and Paivio, 2010) and unresolved relationship issues (Greenberg and Malcolm 2002; Greenberg et al. 2008). Paivio et al. (2004) found that complex trauma clients who engaged in empty-chair dialogues evidenced more pre-post change than those who did not, independent of the therapeutic alliance.

2.3.2.2 Criticisms of Gestalt Psychotherapy

Gestalt faces criticism from a broad array of detractors from alternative paradigms. Stewart-Sicking (2015) contrasts gestalt’s challenging style to more spiritual or person-centred approaches. He questions any approach that places responsibility for one’s own self-regulation predominantly on the organism themselves because if the organism fails to achieve their goals, the natural assumption is that guilt and shame are consequential. Given that the removal of guilt and shame are primary goals of gestalt, Stewart-Sicking deems this to be an illogical incongruence.

The experiential and open nature of gestalt therapy in particular provokes substantial critique. Wedding and Corsini (2013) argue that it is a bohemian approach to therapy that “uses any technique that works” (2013, p.24). The open nature of gestalt involves a lack of focus on outcomes and measurement that provokes negative benchmarks against other treatments such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Miller, a practicing gestalt therapist and student of Perls, argued that gestalt has “slipped into a middle-aged decline” and is plagued by “a persistent intellectual thinness” (Miller, 1974, p. 21). Perls’s striking “anti-intellectual bias” (Miller 1974) has been transmitted over time. His famous “Lose your mind and come to your senses” best embodies his preference for acquiring knowledge through experiencing and feeling rather than through empirically validated or rational, logical thought processes. Empirical evidence provided in the previous section however demonstrates no greater efficacy of CBT when compared to humanistic treatments across a range of issues (Tolin 2010; Hager 2010).
Without defined parameters however, Levine (2012) refers to concerns pertaining to gestalt in terms of the relationship between practice and theory. Key questions are asked of gestalt including how does theory support good practice and can current theory be holding back the development of gestalt therapy. Lichtenberg (2009) asks “Is current theory helping practitioners patch a leaking boat or build a new one”? (2009, p.13) Kenofer (2013) focuses on risks to clients within gestalt, where the therapist is required to meet the client “where the client is.” He argues that without some notion of “where the client is” developmentally, there is a risk that misunderstandings may inadvertently lead the process astray. If a therapist is to understand the phenomenological perspective of the client, then failure to take account of differences in the level at which client and therapist may construct their experience of the world leaves the therapist open to a fundamental kind of ego-centrism.

In gestalt therapy, people are viewed as being inextricably interconnected as part of a process of continual mutual influence. According to Castellano (2011), in practice, a therapist cannot avoid surreptitiously projecting a set of moral principles (his own or those of society) onto his patient, whether he means to or not. Gestalt, he argues, promotes that man is essentially forward-moving, seeking self-improvement and that we adopt this notion of progress uncritically, neglecting to note that it has not been assumed by all cultures. Some religious or philosophical traditions have held that man should return to his primordial state, or that life moves in cycles, or that stasis and stability are best. Castellano also argues that this principle is not derived from science, but from a western liberal “achiever” mentality, that is naturally pronounced in career professionals like psychotherapists, who expect others to be similarly motivated (2011 p.14).

According to Wagner Moore (2004), orthodox gestalt therapy has suffered a rather unfortunate fate in that it has been poorly articulated, and gestalt techniques have received minimal empirical validation. These weaknesses are, in part, a consequence of Perls’s biographical history, which led to an integration of disparate theoretical models that were exacerbated by his haphazard, idiosyncratic personal style. Gestalt has been criticized for not providing a sufficient developmental theory. Critics include some prominent spokes-people of the gestalt community such as Rich Hycner, Gordon
Wheeler, Violet Oaklander, and Stephan Tobin. At the same time, there are others who strongly support the absence of a developmental theory in Gestalt (Clarkson 2004; Buck-Morss 2002). Either way, it is a fact that there is not a complete developmental theory or model within the gestalt framework that would explain human evolution and behaviour from birth to old age. There are only few, early and incomplete attempts concerning “oral aggression” in Fritz Perls’s *Ego, Hunger and Aggression* (1942/1992) and some scattered, albeit noteworthy, ideas in different works.

Clearly, this lack of sufficient interest in childhood and developmental issues in gestalt therapy is so prevalent that it would be naïve to attribute it to a simple failure of the founders of gestalt therapy to define such concepts. The explanation must, therefore, lie elsewhere. When setting the ground for gestalt therapy, Fritz and Laura Perls relied upon concepts of gestalt psychology, especially those relating to the construction and deconstruction of meaning in perception, intelligence, and action. Perls in particular, as Wheeler (2002a) mentions, emphasised the deconstruction of this process and the need to think and feel “autonomously” for oneself, by “destroying and de-mobilizing whatever cultural beliefs and values one might have been ‘fed’ in infancy and childhood in favour of independence and self-definition” (2002a, p. 18).

### 2.3.3 Current Practice and Future Developments

Modern day gestalt therapy has retained Perls’s applied phenomenological approach and creative techniques (Woelbert 2015; Starr 2014; Mann 2010). Contrary to Perls’s style however, modern gestalt practice considers the relationship between the therapist and client one of the most important aspects of psychotherapy and is less stereotypical in the use of therapeutical techniques (Yontef and Simkin 1989). Yontef (2012) argues that traditional gestalt techniques stressing skilful frustration, client manipulation, and self-sufficiency served to provoke shameful reactions in patients. Current therapeutic discourse accentuates the creation of a trusting relationship where clients are encouraged to explore facets of personality in a much safer environment with encouraging results (McKenzie 2014).
2.3.3.1 Gestalt Theory Applied in Non-Therapeutic Contexts

Evidence is emerging in current discourse regarding the application of gestalt psychotherapy theory beyond the client / therapist setting. A substantial amount of literature is emerging linking gestalt to for example: working experientially with couples and families (Wheeler and Backman 2013; Zinker 2013), societal work (Burrows and Keenan 2004; Lichtenberg 1992; Melnick and Nevis 1992), as a personal and professional development framework taught globally (Woldt and Toman 2005), research (Barber 2013; Brownell 2008), organisational change contexts (Nevis 2013; Blom 2013) and in the pedagogy of entrepreneurship (Slattery and Danaher 2015).

Blom (2013) presents an argument for the use of gestalt as a reflexive analytical framework in a study investigating identity within the context of organisational change. Her grounded theory study looked at the dynamics of organisational identity, prior to, and following significant change. Her study offered a unique opportunity to follow an existentially challenged organisation as its members reacted to, and attempted to make sense of, significant change in terms of redundancies, consolidation and various branch closures. Blom used the gestalt cycle of experience (COE) to trace the processes of adaption to change within individuals and departments of the organisation in question. Her research found gestalt to be effective in analysing and dealing with complex and dynamic organisational phenomena at individual, dyadic and small group levels through its focus on phenomenology and heightening awareness. The result of Blom’s research is a hypothesis about identity work in organisations, firmly anchored in, and commensurate with a present day revised gestalt paradigm, which she presents as a contribution to a formal development of a gestalt organisational theory. Her hypothesis stated that:

Identity work in organisations is a dialectical positioning, both individual and collective, between the existential polar opposites of inclusion and exclusion. The processes through which identity work is enacted are cognitive, affective, and conative, instrumentally served by the contact boundary dynamics of egotism, confluence, projection, retroflection, introjection, and deflection.
My own research continues this trend in applying gestalt theory to non-therapeutic environments. My colleague Gerard M. Slattery and I have used gestalt theory to create a new model of entrepreneurship education at the University of Limerick. This two tier model of entrepreneurship education takes a holistic approach to creating an integrative and experiential programme of entrepreneurship pedagogy. Our model is designed to foster increased awareness in the student of the life wide potential they can achieve from being entrepreneurial teachers, versus being teachers of entrepreneurship (Slattery and Danaher 2015). In contrast to other third level entrepreneurial programmes, we focus very significantly on risk and the consequences of failure; subject matters that are often ignored or hidden in programmes that overtly romanticise entrepreneurship. This is in keeping with the gestalt approach to considering the dark and bright sides of the moon, to create holistic awareness.

2.3.3.2 Toward a Gestalt Development Model

Consistent with the concepts of field theory and self in gestalt therapy, Wheeler (1998, 2005) objects to mainstream developmental models in that they chart the development of the “self-in-isolation,” apart from relationships with others in the field. He further argues that traditional mainstream developmental theories – for example, Freud, Erikson, Kohlberg, and Mahler, as well as the more cognitive models like Piaget’s – conceive development in sequential, linear stages that fail to capture the recursive process of real development. Conversely however, Wheeler posits that the failure to incorporate a developmental theory, especially concerning infancy and childhood, is detrimental to gestalt therapy (Spagnuolo-Lobb 2013).

Wheeler contends that this disjuncture of therapy practice and developmental theory reflects gestalt therapy’s long-standing failure to recognise the importance of development. He suggests that the opinions we hold regarding human nature and the norms of development affect our practice (Spagnuolo-Lobb 2013). By incorporating
such opinions into gestalt theory, he posits that we will leave them open to dialogue and constant reshaping.

If we insist that we don’t have and don’t need notions of development or theories of human nature to be ‘in contact’ with self and others, we are just misunderstanding the constructive dynamic of contact and experience themselves, and of our own nature – which is after all what the Gestalt model is all about.

(Wheeler 2005, p. 22)

Wheeler also notes that there is a tendency within gestalt therapy towards a more individualistic way of working, despite its more “intersubjective, relational, and social-constructionist” theory (2005 p. 23). As a corrective of these limitations in traditional gestalt therapy practice, Wheeler (2005) suggests a model that can assist us in thinking in a developmental way without losing the interactive social frame of this process. That is, he proposes, a model in which individual experience is affirmed, but within the dynamic field of constant and mutual interactions with other subjective selves. Wheeler defines development as the elaboration of successively more complex, more highly organised wholes of meaning (Lee and Wheeler 2013). These wholes evolve potentially throughout life, from the first dawning organisation of the experiential field into “me / you,” through the integration and evaluation of wider and wider fields of perception and activity, and on to include, ultimately, the meaning of the imaginable cosmos (Wheeller 2005, p. 49). This “whole field developmental model,” as Wheeler calls it, proposes an understanding of field that is much broader than its standard definition in Gestalt therapy. Moreover, he puts strong emphasis on inter-subjectivity. Whenever he refers to the environment, he makes it clear that it is always and foremost “social,” since even the most organic of our functions or reactions (thoughts, emotions, memories) are mediated and co-constructed by our social experience.
2.3.3.3 Gestalt as part of Integrative Psychotherapy Approaches

According to Woelbert (2015), new forms of psychological treatments are constantly being developed, and also the evidence base supporting different interventions is constantly increasing. This is acknowledged in the recommendations on treatments issued by the American Psychological Association. After publishing a report with a list of empirically supported therapies in 1995, and several updates of this report, a website was created that allows for more frequent updates (APA Presidential Task Force on Evidence-Based Practice 2006).

A number of trends are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, interventions delivered by psychologists and psychotherapists in practice rarely adhere strictly to one of the above described schools. Many practitioners draw techniques from several traditional schools of therapies (Lambert and Ogles 2014). This calls into question the historically strict divide between the schools, which is also reflected in training programs and existing regulations (e.g. Germany), and also calls for an evaluation of these eclectic approaches (O’Leary 2013).

Secondly, newly developed interventions tend to be tailored very specifically to a particular pathological condition. Thus, rather than the ‘catch-all’-approach of the early school-based psychotherapies, there is now a development towards more disorder-and process-specific interventions (Barlow 2016; Emmelkamp et al. 2014). These developments might make adjustments to training and licensing procedures and regulations necessary (Woelbert 2015). Sanders and Hill (2014) have integrated person-centered and emotion focused therapy (EFT) approaches to create a growing training, accreditation, and research initiative. Humanistic psychotherapy researchers and practitioners increasingly have shared interests with colleagues from psychodynamic and systemic traditions, as well as mental health service user groups.
Thus, it is important for HPs to overcome their traditionally individualistic and apolitical stance in order to build bridges with a range of potential allies (Woelbert 2015; Sanders and Hill 2014). It may be the case that each of the major therapeutic orientations—cognitive-behavioural, psychoanalytic, existential-humanistic, and multicultural—can be optimised when they draw on humanistic practice principles and interventions. Humanistic psychotherapy could also benefit from the selective implementation of effective intervention practices representative of other bona fide therapy orientations (Biehl Mizzal and Fitzek 2014).

Third, because of their shared commitment to empirical research, humanistic researchers are in a particularly good position to connect with sympathetic CBT researchers, particularly those from the acceptance based third wave approaches that have incorporated humanistic ideas into their treatments (Sanders and Hill 2014). Various authors are calling for the continuing place for all the main approaches in the further development of theory and research on psychotherapy. For example, it is proposed that over the past 25 years, research has suffered from an under-representation of research generated from within the humanistic tradition, and even more importantly, from research generated by differing theoretical traditions coming together to collaborate and dialogue (Woelbert 2015).

Angus et al. (2014) argue that there are strong scientific reasons (for example, on the basis of the Bayesian model of inference) for humanistic psychotherapeutic researchers to lobby for meaningful representation on the scientific grant review panels and groups who are developing mental health treatment guidelines in various countries, pushing for full consideration of a wide range of evidence and a fair and balanced reading of that evidence. Thus, they invite a more strategic, activist and constructive stance with regard to mental health treatment guideline development on the part of organizations like the Society for Psychotherapy Research, the new German Association for Humanistic Psychotherapies, and the Society for Humanistic Psychology (in the USA and Canada). Supporting and engaging with each other in these ways will lead to greater understanding of psychotherapy, a highly focused relational form of healing that is essential to the well-being of individuals and societies.
To date, certain Gestalt theorists have drawn attention to the compatibility between self-psychology, inter-subjectivity theory, and gestalt therapy theory, and have emphasized that self-psychology and particularly inter-subjectivity theory brings psychoanalysis closer to gestalt theory and practice. In this way, a kind of bridge has been created between contemporary psychoanalysis and humanistic approaches, including gestalt therapy (Tobin 1991; Breshgold and Zahm 1992; Jacobs 1989; Hycner and Jacobs 1995; Wheway 1997; Sapriel 1998); and from the person-centered approach (Kahn 1985). Noteworthy in creating this bridge has been the work of Rich Hycner and Lynne Jacobs (1995), whose work has integrated Buber’s dialogic approach and gestalt therapy with self-psychology and inter-subjectivity theory.

2.3.3.4 Gestalt as Applied Phenomenology

Giorgi (2011) posits an interesting mode of assisting gestalt to claim greater status within empirical research. He argues that scientific methodologies of natural science “are very useful criteria where they are applicable, but they are not applicable to the full range of phenomena that psychologists would be interested in studying” (2011, p. 3). Instead of natural science, he offers phenomenological psychology, derived from phenomenological philosophy, as a more comprehensive and appropriate platform for a truly human science of psychology.

His position is in contradistinction to naturalism, in that human subjectivity cannot be fully understood as an object of natural science. It is not enough to propose a science of the human, i.e., a naturalist explanation of subjectivity, but to understand how science itself presupposes subjectivity. Human subjectivity cannot be reduced to nature because it is for the human subject that nature, and by extension science, exist at all. In experimental psychology, as Giorgi (2011) states, quantitative measurement is “the desideratum along with quantified expression of results” (2011 p. 6). It is true, as Brownell (2012) points out, that qualitative methods have found their way into psychological research, but their status remains subordinate in the day-to-day world of mainstream psychology. Qualitative methods have made progress in challenging their long standing status as “soft science,” but their role remains largely propaedeutic, and
quantitative measurement remains the gold standard in research, serving effectively as its “highest court of appeals” (Brownell 2011, p.24).

Giorgi’s argument for phenomenology is that it offers a broader platform for psychology than does natural science, proposing critical analysis, according to the nature of the phenomenon, as its defining constituent. This does not diminish the importance of mathematical analysis but situates it within a broader mandate. Quantitative questions, Giorgi notes, deserve quantitative methods; but methods of analysis, ultimately, need to follow organically from the nature of the phenomena being studied and the question being asked. A phenomenological philosophy of science would accommodate both quantitative and qualitative methods on equal footing, but would predicate both on a foundational description of the phenomena to be studied. The danger with adopting a scientific paradigm whose definitive bias is measurement, is that phenomena under study are likely to be framed in a fashion conducive to their measurement. Quantitative bias in contemporary psychological research has exerted considerable influence on the project of validating certain mainstream psychotherapies. Thus, for example, it is often presumed that the singular goal of psychotherapy is the reduction of symptoms and, to this end; highly specific and repeatable “techniques” have been scripted with this singular—and measurable—goal in mind.

The purpose of psychotherapy is treatment and growth. The purpose of research, in the present context, is to accumulate evidence concerning psychotherapy’s effectiveness. Each project has its own integrity. To illustrate Giorgi (2011) considers Victor Frankl’s (1963) treatment of a severely depressed elderly man who had recently lost his wife of many years. Imagine he argues, if Frankl attempted to teach this poor man that his depression was the result of cognitive distortions or some other measurement-friendly variable if the therapy goal was the immediate amelioration of symptoms. Gestalt therapy’s design was to help this man find meaning in his suffering. After so many years of married life together, Frankl pointed out, one of them was doomed to suffer the excruciating loss of the other, and his suffering as the price of his wife’s being spared (1963, p. 178). His objective was not per se to reduce the intensity of his patient’s symptoms, but to render them meaningful. We can describe such an elegant and
compassionate process, but Giorgi (2011) suggests that we would be at a loss to convert it to a repeatable treatment protocol with quantifiable results.

2.4 Data Synthesis: Leadership

Despite significant contributions to our understanding of leadership, researchers still struggle to arrive at a clear operational definition (Beck and Cowan 2014; Spillane 2012). Nonetheless, the great majority of researchers agree that leadership is a socially influenced process (Furnham et al. 2012; Sparrowe 2014). Yukl (1994) offers a lengthy list of leadership functions including influencing processes affecting the interpretation of events for followers; the choice of objectives for the group or organisation; the organisation of work activities to accomplish the objectives; the motivation of followers to achieve the objectives; the maintenance of cooperative relationships and teamwork; and the enlistment of support and cooperation from people outside the group or organisation (Yukl 2012, p. 5).

In this section, I examine various definitions of leadership and consider historical leadership models such as trait, behaviour and transactional. Newer leadership models are then reviewed that focus more on individual differences (Spillane 2012; Sparrowe 2014); leader / follower relationship (LMX; Relational). New humanistic models that mirror many elements of older models such as the transformational model are critiqued. These models differ significantly however in the conceptualisation of the leader as being one who has to be followed, toward a notion of where one must retain moral authority to lead, in the context of a more relational and mutually empowering relationship (Mengel 2014; Biehl Mizzal and Fitzek 2012).
2.4.1 Leadership Defined

According to Grint (2014), contemporary studies of leadership give meaning to the old adage ‘that everything old is new again’ (2011, p.11). Leadership has become a ‘hot topic’ since the early 20th century when the dominant lens of psychology took hold and remains strong until this day, especially in North America. The origins of leadership as a discreet topic by psychology placed strong emphasis on the inner motor of leader traits, cognitions, and styles (Collinson and Hearn 2014; Fairhurst and Uhl-Bien 2007; Grint 2014).

Van Wart (2013) suggest a common perspective to define leadership by one important aspect, such as the ability to influence others, the ability to change organisations, the ability to provide a vision, the ability to create consensus to move forward, the use of emotional intelligence (Goleman et al. 2013), or even the use of common sense (Cain and Cocco 2013). One strength of this approach is the focus that it brings to a complex concept, and, when done well, the valid insights that the reader may be able to apply to his or her understanding and context. A weakness of this approach is that it inevitably omits many leadership concerns, and may even belittle other perspectives (Kotter 2013; Gregorie and Arendt 2014).

A second approach is to provide a list of important factors, frequently embedded in a philosophy that is associated with a specific individual or context. Examples of such broad based list approaches include leadership of marines, of warriors (Fischer and 2009; Roberts 1985), of the approach of individual corporate chief executive officers and other executives, and so on. A strength of this approach is the adoption of a more holistic perspective and, when well done, provides a solid platform based on widely accepted principles of leadership based on historical models. A weakness of the laundry-list approach is that it is difficult to tell how much the specialised context is really typical or generalisable, and thus the reader must make a large leap to his or her situation (Collinson and Hearn 2014; Grint 2014).
Indeed, both the focused and list approaches tend to be highly universalistic across sectors, industries, levels of leadership, and situations (Northouse 2015). While this type of analysis can be highly enlightening, it can easily overwhelm the practitioner and even other academics. Much leadership research works in very specific leadership situations that are carefully controlled so that the problem of excessive universalism is avoided and the innumerable situations studied provide a highly nuanced picture for a specific area such as administrative leadership. The answer for practitioners is often to decide what perspective they want to adopt for their concrete purpose and to be explicit about the assumptions adopted (Northouse 2015).

The development of leadership theory has followed a distinct line from an early period, consisting of such well known theories as trait theory, behaviour theory, and contingency / situational theory; a second period, consisting of multilevel approaches; the new leadership period, which emerged in the 1980s and included both transformational and charismatic theories; and finally, post-charismatic and post-transformational leadership (Seow 2012). Although these approaches are presented chronologically, some approaches (for example, leader-member exchange, one of the multilevel approaches) are still relevant to current empirical and theoretical work (France 2008; Fairhurst and Connaughton 2014). This phenomenon lends itself to Grint’s (2014) use of the everything old is new again in terms of leadership theory. Contemporary leadership theory however distributes itself across time and task, site and situation, and people, along with their bodies, and other leadership making materials such as technology (Connaughton and Daly 2005; Gronn 2000; Sinclair 2005).
2.4.2 Historical Leadership Models

2.4.2.1 Trait and Behavioural Models

Trait theory postulates that personal characteristics (e.g. personality traits, cognitive skills, interpersonal skills) determine an individual’s potential for leadership roles (Hogan and Blickle 2013). Thus, according to trait theory, leadership is something intrinsic to the individual. Parry and Bryman (2006) argue that “nature is more important than nurture” (p. 448); that is to say, that an individual’s predisposition to leadership (his or her “nature”) has a greater influence than the context (Avolio 2010). Thinking of leadership in terms of a trait submits to the notion that leaders are born as opposed to being made (Northouse 2014; Bryman 2013). While leadership is learned, skills and knowledge processed by the leader can be influenced by their attributes or traits; such as beliefs, values, ethics, and character. Knowledge and skills contribute directly to the process of leadership, while the other attributes give the leader certain characteristics that make him or her unique (Robbins 2013).

Trait theory has failed to develop a universally agreed list of leadership qualities and successful leaders seem to defy classification from the traits perspective (Matthews et al. 2015; Buchanan and Huczynski 2010). Moreover, because trait theory gave rise to the idea that leaders are born not made, Scouller (2011) argued that its approach is better suited to selecting leaders than developing them. Trait theory / great man / woman theory assumes the leader is different from the average person in terms of personality traits such as intelligence, perseverance, and ambition. This model of leadership assumes that people are born with inherited traits and that some traits are particularly suited to leadership. It also assumes that people who make good leaders have the right (or sufficient) combination of traits (IAAP 2009).
In response to the early criticisms of the trait approach, theorists began to research leadership as a set of behaviours. They evaluated what successful leaders did and developed a taxonomy of actions and broad patterns that indicated different leadership styles (Northouse 2015). Behavioural theory also incorporates B.F. Skinner's theory of behavioural modification, which takes into account the effect of reward and punishment on changing behaviour. An example of this theory in action is a manager or leader who motivates desired behaviour by scolding employees who arrive late to meetings and showing appreciation when they are early or on time (Day and Antonakis 2012; Scouller 2011; Matthews et. al 2015)

As the questions about how to measure traits continued to challenge trait theory, researchers began thinking about measuring behaviour. While you can’t easily measure confidence or loyalty in a person, they noted, you can define a behaviour or a set of behaviours that seem to embody the trait (Northouse 2015; Day and Antonakis 2012) Researchers define behaviours as observable actions, which makes measuring them more scientifically valid than trying to measure a human personality traits (Trivellas and Drimoussis 2013). Trait theory assumes that a leader is born with specific traits that make him or her a good leader. Behavioural theory, on the other hand, assumes that you can learn to become a good leader because you are not drawing on personality traits. Your actions i.e. what you do, defines your leadership ability (Gavetti 2012).

With the evolution of leadership theory from a trait model to a behavioural model, discourse became dominated by what leaders did – how they behaved (especially towards followers) as opposed to what traits they were born with. Leadership theory moved from leaders to leadership, and this became the dominant way of approaching leadership within organisations in the 1950s and early 1960s (Miner 2013; Robins et al. 2013). Different patterns of behaviour were grouped together and labelled as styles. This became a very popular activity within management training – perhaps the best known being Blake and Mouton’s Managerial Grid (1964). Various schemes appeared, designed to diagnose and develop people’s style of working. Despite different names, the basic ideas were very similar. The four main styles that appear are concern for task,
concern for people, directive leadership and participative leadership (Galanou and Katsioloudes 2014).

Behaviour theory advances the idea that an effective leader is discernible by his or her actions (Miner 2013). Two important studies in behavioural theory at the University of Michigan and the Ohio State University became famous in the next generation of leadership research. These studies identified two key behavioural categories i.e. orientation toward task and orientation toward people. The Michigan studies, which began in the late 1950s, found three critical characteristics of effective leaders - planning, coordinating, and overseeing their subordinates’ execution of tasks. A second type of leader exhibited relationship oriented behaviour. These managers concentrated on task results, but also developed relationships with their subordinates. The third style of leadership was participative leadership. Here, the manager facilitated rather than directed, working to build a cohesive team to achieve team results rather than focusing on individuals (Robbins et al. 2013; Weiss 2012).

2.4.2.2 **Contingency / Situational Model**

Contingency / situational leadership theory is more concerned with the context of applied leadership, which is left unaccounted for in both the trait and behavioural theories (Skog et al. 2013). Here, the focus is on situational variables, where the leader modifies his or her leadership style according to his or her own personal characteristics and the context i.e. the current situation (Oreg and Berson 2015). According to proponents of this theory, an effective leader knows how to adapt their personal characteristics to the context (Van-de-Ven and Ganco 2013). Many different models draw from this trend (Table 8), such as the Path-Goal theory (1971), Fiedler’s Contingency theory (1967), Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership theory (1984), and Vroom and Yetton’s Decision-Making model (1973).
The focus is on the decision-making process. As mentioned by Krumm “The Vroom and Yetton Theory usually is classified as a prescriptive theory, meaning that it provides leaders with a way to choose the best decision-making method before going ahead” (2001, p. 250). A series of questions allows the leader to choose from among five methods of decision-making, ranging from entirely authoritative to completely participatory (Krumm 2001):

Most of the models captured in table 8 assume that leaders can change their behaviour at will, to meet differing circumstances. In practice however, many find it hard to do so even after training because of unconscious fixed beliefs, fears, or ingrained habits. For this reason, it is advised that leaders need to work on their underlying psychology if they are to attain the flexibility to apply these theories (Scouller 2011). Situations vary and what works in one situation will not always work in another. Contingency / situational leadership posits that the leader must use judgment to decide on the best course of action and the leadership style needed for each situation. For example, a leader may need to

Source: Scouller (2011 p. 31).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Houses Path-Goal Theory (1971),</th>
<th>An effective leader guides his employees to help them attain shared goals. He or she supports employees in order to ensure that employees’ goals and collective goals coincide (Judge et al. 2007).</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fiedler’s Contingency Theory (1967)</td>
<td>Fiedler’s work (as reported by Judge et al. 2007. Organisational Behaviour: Concepts, Controversies and Applications. p. 394) outlines three “contingency dimensions” that serve to define the situation the leader faces. The leader-member relations, the task structure, and the position of power. Thus, according to Fiedler, elements of context determine the leadership style (Krumm 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership Theory (1984)</td>
<td>An effective leader adapts his or her leadership style to subordinates’ capacity to accomplish tasks (Judge et al. 2007). That degree corresponds to the maturity of the subordinates. Thus, the leader will choose a type of leadership according to the subordinates’ maturity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vroom and Yetton’s Decision-Making Model (1973).</td>
<td>The focus is on the decision-making process. As mentioned by Krumm “The Vroom and Yetton Theory usually is classified as a prescriptive theory, meaning that it provides leaders with a way to choose the best decision-making method before going ahead” (2001, p. 250). A series of questions allows the leader to choose from among five methods of decision-making, ranging from entirely authoritative to completely participatory (Krumm 2001):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
confront an employee for inappropriate behaviour, but if the confrontation is too late or too early, too harsh or too weak, then the results may prove ineffective. Also the situation normally has a greater effect on a leader's action than his or her traits in this model. This is because while traits may have an impressive stability over a period of time, they have little consistency across situations (Mische 1968). Contingency / situational leadership theory marked the beginning of a migration of thought in terms of traits or behaviours, toward a more process oriented leadership construct (Scouller 2011).

2.4.2.3 *Transactional, Transformational and Charismatic Models*

The transactional leadership model suggests that “there is an implied social contract indicating that if the follower goes along with what the leader wants done, the follower will get certain benefits, such as pay, a promotion, or not getting fired (Krumm 2001). It is a leadership model built on the notion of quid-pro-quo transactional leadership i.e. the provision of contingent rewards and sanctions (Antonokis and House 2014). In short, the transactional leader shows the follower how to be rewarded. There are three components of transactional leadership: passive management by exception, active management by exception, and contingent reward (Zhu et al. 2012; Bass et al. 2003).

Managers are responsible for communicating goals and instructions to workers, observing follower behaviour, and responding in kind to the actions of followers. As such, they tap into long-standing concerns about organisational coordination, shirking, and control (Van Wart 2012). Thus, although not identical, transactional leadership shares much in common with other managerial strategies, like “management for results,” that emphasises monitoring and rewards (Moynihan 2009). Bass et al. (2003) see these approaches to management as “lower order” in that they are fundamental to organisational functioning. They enable followers to get recognition for their work and make it possible for managers to detect when a follower is not producing work. Without transactional leadership, Bass et al. (2003) argue that it is not possible to develop “higher order” leadership strategies, which have the potential to unlock employee potential and creativity.
In the 1970s and 1980s, researchers such as J. M. Burns and B. M. Bass developed transformational leadership theory. In contrast to leadership based on individual gain and the exchange of rewards for effort, transformational leaders direct and inspire employee effort by raising their awareness of the importance of organisational values and outcomes (Wright and Moynihan 2012). In doing so, such leaders are said to activate the higher-order needs of their employees and encourage them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organisation and its clientele. Research not only has validated the existence of transformational leadership, but has also consistently linked the practice to improved employee performance and engagement (Bass and Riggio 2006; Givens 2008).

Transformational leadership grows out of the assumption that people will follow a leader who inspires and motivates them. In this theory, the leader motivates and inspires by developing a compelling vision, selling that vision, and focusing on developing relationships with followers as a teacher, mentor, and coach (Givens 2008). The transformational leader engages subordinates by spending a great deal of time building trust and demonstrating a high level of personal integrity. The ultimate goal, as the name implies, is to transform followers’ goals, vision, and sense of purpose, moulding them into a cohesive team (Bass and Riggio 2006).

Charismatic leaders are said to motivate and inspire followers through their strong convictions in their beliefs and ideals; their display of confidence and positive emotions, and the imaginative vision they provide (Oreg and Berson 2015: Shamir et al. 1993). House (1971) defined charismatic leadership as a “phenomenon that occurs when the leader has a major impact on subordinates” (1971, p.34). Given the impact that charismatic and transformational leadership have on employees and organisational outcomes, much effort has been directed toward predicting charismatic leadership measurements and predictive tools. Early on, personality took centre stage (House 1971). Numerous studies were conducted aiming to characterise charismatic leaders in terms of their values (Sosik 2005) and traits (Resick et al. 2009).
In charismatic leadership, the leader has a vision, one that can motivate others (Hayibor et al. 2011). Charismatic leaders can generate confidence in their followers that leads to enhanced productivity levels (Shastri et al. 2010). The qualities of a charismatic leader are expected to improve communication and satisfaction. According to Hayibor et al. (2011), charismatic leaders are known for their behavioural qualities that motivate their followers toward the vision and goals that are presented to them. According to Conger and Kanungo (1994), earlier formulations of charismatic leadership emerging from the fields of sociology and political science were primarily concerned with what leader behaviours and contexts induced follower responses (1994). Through charismatic leadership the relationship between leader and follower is highlighted. According to Levine et al. (2010), the leader and follower relationship is focused on passion and foresight, and emphasises that there are three stages of the leadership process: assessment of environment, sensitivity to the needs of others, and strategic vision and articulation.

2.4.2.5 Critique of Older Leadership Models

Critics of the transactional leadership model argue that this leadership style leads followers into short-term relationships of exchange with the leader (McCleskey 2014; Burns 1978). These relationships tend toward shallow, temporary exchanges of gratification and often create resentments between the participants. Additionally, a number of scholars criticise transactional leadership theory because it utilises a one-size-fits-all universal approach to leadership theory construction that disregards situational and contextual factors related to organisational challenges (Yukl 2011; Yukl and Mahsud 2010).

Although empirical research supports the idea that transformational leadership positively influences follower and organisational performance, a number of scholars criticise transformational leadership (Diaz-Saenz 2011; Yukl 2011; McCleskey 2014). Yukl (2011) suggests that the underlying mechanisms of leader influence at work in this model are unclear and that little empirical work exists examining the effect of transformational leadership on work groups, teams, or organisations. Yukl (2011)
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identifies the overlap between the constructs of idealised influence and inspirational motivation. He also suggests that the theory lacks sufficient identification of the impact of situational and context variables on leadership effectiveness (2011).

The concept of charisma (intrinsic to the transformational and charismatic leadership) has been associated with narcissism (Parry and Bryman 2006) and, sometimes, with destructive leaders Krumm (2001). Parry and Bryman (2006) suggest that a movement away from the behaviours and styles of the transformational or charismatic leader is a positive one removing the iconisation of powerful figureheads and exploitative leader / worker relationships.

Van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) question the validity of transformational theory by identifying four issues in terms of theory and research in this area. First, they suggest that clear conceptual definitions of transformational leadership are lacking. Second, they argue that theories fail to sufficiently specify the causal model capturing how each dimension has a distinct influence on mediating processes and outcomes, and how this is contingent on moderating influences. Third, they argue that conceptualisation and operationalisation confounds transformational leadership with its effects. The final challenge is around the fact that most frequently used measurement tools are invalid in that they fail to reproduce the dimensional structure specified by theory. They also fail to achieve empirical distinctiveness from other aspects of leadership. Jiang (2014) demonstrates another issue with transformational leadership in describing the dual side of where one individual is focused on self-actualisation, that may diminish or demean intra-team connectivity.

Contingency or situational leadership was a popular conception of leadership, however, problems with the construct were identified in terms of three specific flaws around lack of internal consistency, conceptual contradictions, and ambiguities its consistency (Bass 2008; Nichols 1995). Additional weaknesses of this model have been posited such as the premise of a universally effective leadership style (Glynn and DeJordy 2010) and behavioural theories relied on abstract leadership types that were difficult to identify (Glynn and DeJordy 2010).
### 2.4.3 New Leadership Theories

#### 2.4.3.1 Authentic Leadership

Although the authentic leadership concept is relatively new, several empirical studies link it with positive outcomes in various fields such as industry, finance, retail, and prison services. Explicit outcomes include: enhanced work attitudes and outcomes (Hur et al. 2015; Walumbwa et al. 2008; Avolio et al. 2009, Peus et al. 2012); positive relationships between authentic leadership and performance (Walumbwa et al. 2008; Clapp-Smith et al. 2009); organisational citizenship behaviour (Avolio et al. 2009; Walumbwa et al. 2010; Peus et al. 2012), psychological empowerment (Avolio et al. 2009; Walumbwa et al. 2010), trust in management (Clapp-Smith et al. 2009; Walumbwa et al. 2010), organisational commitment (Peus et al. 2012), and work engagement (Avolio et al. 2009; Walumbwa et al. 2010)

Authentic leadership theory suggests that leaders who are more authentic draw on their life experiences, psychological capacities (i.e. hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy), a sound moral perspective, and a supporting organisational climate to produce greater self-awareness and self-regulated positive behaviours. This in turn fosters their own and their followers’ authenticity and development, resulting in wellbeing and sustainable / consistent performance (Avolio and Gardner 2005, Gardner et al. 2005).

In simpler terms, authentic leadership is a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behaviours that encourage openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting input from those who follow

Avolio et al. (2009, p. 424).

The authentic leader builds trust and healthier work environments through four key components: balanced processing, relational transparency, internalised moral perspective, and self-awareness (Laschinger et al. 2013). Leaders who are authentic use ‘balanced processing’ by requesting from followers’ adequate input and
perspectives, both positive and negative, prior to making important decisions. They emphasize a level of openness and truthfulness (‘relational transparency’) that encourages others to be forthcoming with their ideas, challenges, and opinions. The authentic leader sets and role models a high standard of ethical and moral conduct (internalised moral perspective) and finally, conveys self-awareness by understanding not only their own strengths and limitations, but how they affect others. Avolio et al. (2004) suggest that, by enacting these behaviours, authentic leaders facilitate higher quality relationships leading to active engagement of employees in workplace activities, which results in greater job satisfaction and higher productivity and performance. Authentic leadership theory posits that authentic leader’s model and support follower self-determination.

2.4.3.2 Leader Member Exchange (LMX) Theory

According to Dulebohn et al. (2012), the leader-member exchange (LMX) model has developed into a significant area of scientific inquiry and has received considerable empirical research attention in the organisational sciences. The LMX was first developed from the perspective of vertical dyad linkage (VDL) theory, and the work of Dansereau et al. (1975). In the very early period, he focused on the various roles that people assume in organisations and with what he referred to as the “role-making process” (1975, p.2).

As this approach increasingly began to focus on the superior-subordinate dyad, the term vertical dyad linkage (VDL) was adopted and in the early 1980s. Leader-member exchange (LMX) replaced VDL as a more appropriate descriptive of the processes involved, although some publications of this period use the term vertical exchange as well, and some refer to dyadic career reality theory (Wakabayashi et al. 2005, p. 257).

When it was first introduced, this theory was path breaking for two main reasons. First, LMX focused on the separate dyadic relationships between leaders and each of their followers. Second, LMX stipulated that leaders do not develop the same type of relationship with each follower. Specifically, LMX theory states that leaders vary their
interactions across followers and, in doing so, determine their relationships with followers (Wakabayashi et al. 2005). Moreover, that quality of the relationship predicts different outcomes (Gerstner and Day 1997), such as satisfaction or turnover intentions (Van Dyne 2007; Liao et al. 2010).

Low LMX relationships are characterised by economic exchange based on formally agreed on, immediate, and balanced reciprocation of tangible assets, such as employment contracts focusing on pay for performance (Blau 1964). On the other hand, high-LMX relationships increasingly engender feelings of mutual obligation and reciprocity (Gouldner 1960; Liden et al. 1997), which render such relationships more social in nature. Work relationships built on social exchange, rather than economic exchange, are characterised by loyalty, commitment, support, and trust (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Uhl-Bien and Maslyn 2003). The mutual reciprocation that embodies high-LMX relationships results in increased affective attachment between leaders and followers (Ferris et al. 2009; Maslyn and Uhl-Bien 2001).

LMX theory has always been in constant transformation. Since the beginning of the theory, four stages have been identified as being present- (1) discovery of differentiated dyads (i.e., in-groups and out-groups) in a perspective of vertical dyad linkage, (2) investigation of characteristics of LMX relationships and their organisation implications; (3) description of dyadic partnership building; (4) aggregation of differentiated dyadic relationships to group and network levels (Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995, p. 225). LMX is a relational theory because (1) both parties (leader and follower) are implied, (2) the dimensions of LMX participate in the building of relationship, and (3) it takes into account that relationships are different between with each subordinate (Volmer et al. 2012; Erdogan and Bauer 2012). Although the relationship is at the heart of LMX, it does not imply that the relationship between the manager and the subordinate builds leadership (Dulebohn et al. 2012).
2.4.3.3 Shared Leadership

Whereas vertical leadership entails the process of one individual projecting downward influence on individuals, shared leadership entails the process of shared influence between and among individuals (Pearce et al. 2014). More precisely, it is a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organisation goals or both (Pless et al. 2012; Waldman and Siegel 2008).

This influence process often involves peer or lateral influence and at other times involves upward or downward hierarchical influence. The key distinction between shared leadership and traditional models of leadership is that the influence process involves more than just downward influence on subordinates by an elected leader (Pearce et al. 2014: Pearce and Sims 2002). Rather, leadership is broadly distributed amongst a set of individuals instead of being centralised in the hands of a single individual who acts in the role of a superior (Conger and Pearce 2003, p. 1).

Organisational leadership has come under fire across the globe in recent years because of severe ethical lapses in some of our most significant organisations (Manz et al. 2008; Stahl and de-Luque 2014). As a natural response to these ethical lapses, both academics and practitioners have increased their focus on leadership and the inherent obligations in leadership positions (Pless et al. 2012; Waldman and Siegel 2008). In particular, emerging literature on the topic of responsible leadership (Waldman 2014) offers promise to refine and move thinking forward in an integrative way that bridges what we know about corporate social responsibility (CSR) and leadership (McWilliams and Siegel 2001; Siegel 2009; Waldman et al. 2006).

In this model, leadership is not simply relegated to a position, i.e. to a single authority, but is instead associated with the capacity of individuals to influence peers (Pearce and Conger 2003). Shared leadership is defined by its relational aspect and the distribution of the leadership itself, a “phenomenon occurring at different levels and dependent on social interactions and networks of influence” (Fletcher and Käufer 2003, p. 21). Indeed,
according to Fletcher and Käufer (2003), shared leadership implies three shifts in leadership theory: it is distributed and interdependent, embedded in social interaction, and considered leadership as learning, i.e. the learning is collective (Fletcher and Kaufer 2003, p.24).

Pearce and Sims (2002) identified included five factors of shared leadership. Each factor represents a particular form of shared influence strategy: (1) aversive; (2) directive; (3) transactional; (4) transformational; and (5) empowering (Pearce and Sims 2002, p. 124). In shared leadership, there is a shift from an individual perspective to a group perspective (Avolio et al. 2003; Fletcher and Käufer 2003). The nature of modern organizations is such that we no longer work solely with professionals from the same field (e.g. engineers working with engineers), but more within a team of varied professionals (e.g. engineers working with technicians and architects). More and more, we find ourselves in cross-functional context (Pearce and Conger 2003). Therefore, group work is conceived more frequently in terms of multifaceted projects rather than in terms of a single profession, or occupation. Consequently, the way of doing things in the traditional hierarchy is evolving toward teamwork (Day 2004). This new perspective challenges the traditional view of leadership where leadership is associated with the manager, or where leadership is created from the hierarchical relationship.

### 2.4.3.4 Relational Leadership

This new and original approach was first introduced by Uhl-Bien (2006). It seeks to move beyond a focus on the manager–subordinate dyad or a measure of relationship quality to address the question of what are the relational dynamics by which leadership is developed throughout the workplace (Reitz 2015; Fulop and Mark 2013; Carmeli et al. 2012). At first sight, in the perspective of a relational analysis of leadership, the answer seems to be in the question. Essentially, Uhl-Bien defines relational leadership as
A social influence process through which emergent coordination (i.e., evolving social order) and change (e.g., new values, attitudes, approaches, behaviours, and ideologies) are constructed and produced.

(Uhl-Bien 2006, p. 655).

In other words, the social aspect is at the heart of relational leadership. Because changes are “constructed and produced”, everybody participates in the process. Thus, as Uhl-Bien (2006) adds, relational leadership is not dependent on role or hierarchical position. Relational leadership can be considered from two different perspectives: entity and relational. The entity perspective refers to attributes of individuals as they engage in interpersonal relationships whereas the relational perspective refers to a process of social construction through which certain understandings of leadership come about and are given privileged ontology (Cartsen and Uhl-Bien 2015).

Relational theory classifies leader member exchange (LMX), charismatic relationships and social networks in an entity perspective, whereas relational (multiple realities) perspective, relational constructivism and relational leadership in a relational perspective (Dubrin 2015; Fulop and Mark 2013). Essentially, the meaning or conceptualisation of the relationship changes according to the perspective “the former focuses primarily on leadership in conditions of already being organised, while the latter considers leadership as a process of organising” (Uhl-Bien 2006, p. 664).

In sum, in an entity perspective the relationships are within perceptions, behaviours, cognition, etc. of the individual, whereas “relational perspectives view leadership as the processes by which social order is constructed and changed” (Hosking and Morley, 1988 cited in Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 664). According to relational theory the process can be considered from both perspectives in the context of a social dynamic. Members of the organisation participate in “knowledge systems” through the relational dialogue (Carmeli et al. 2015; Fulop and Mark 2013; Uhl-Bien 2006).
Relational leadership allows us to consider processes that are not just about the quality of the relationship or even the type of relationship, but rather about the social dynamics by which leadership relationships form and evolve in the workplace. In this way, it moves leadership beyond a focus on simply getting alignment (and productivity) or a manager's view of what is productive, to a consideration of how leadership arises through the interactions and negotiation of social order among organisational members (Uhl-Bien 2006, p. 672).

Although Uhl-Bien’s work proposes only a theoretical reflection upon the question, this theory presents a promising way of rethinking, reconceptualising, and re-measuring the social influence process in leadership. Beyond being employees, managers, leaders or followers, we are individuals; the organisations to which we happen to belong are merely systems in which individuals participate together in order to construct social order. Thus, an examination of the influence processes of these hierarchical relationships ought to automatically imply a consideration of the concomitant social interaction which unfolds (Fulop and Mark 2013).

2.4.3.5 Humanistic Leadership Models

Relational leadership and shared leadership models demonstrate that current leadership thought exemplifies a movement away from embedded paternalistic governance styles characterised by top-down decision making. Such environments invariably foster superior–subordinate relationships that invoke dependability (Davila and Elvira 2012). Historical leadership practices involve treating workers more like offspring, often resulting from tacit assumptions that employees are unable to make their own decisions, lack appropriate education, or are unwilling to take risks (Davila and Elvira 2012; Rodriguez-Lluesma et al. 2014). Theoretical developments are resulting in leadership thinking in terms of a global context, more humanistic and transformational in nature. (Youssef and Luthans 2012; Davila and Elvira 2014; Takahashi 2014, Ishikawa 2012).
A new constructivist approach to leadership embraces creativity, innovation, sustainability and a focus on creating symbiotic interpersonal relations (Gagliardi and Czarniawska 2006; Adler 2006). Mengel (2012) for example has created a leadership model grounded in existentialism and motivational analysis (EMotiAn). This model integrates the work of Viktor Frankl (1985) and Steven Reiss (2008). It is designed to be useful in changing leader mind-sets from the pursuit of wealth and power, to more meaningful aspirations. Frankl's motivational theory provides an anthropological basis for the importance of values in leadership processes, and the need to create meaningful work environments (Mengel 2012).

Reiss (2008) argued that the pleasure principle does not suffice to adequately describe human behaviour, and suggests that pleasure and happiness are rather by-products of experiencing life in general where “desire, purpose, and goals, are the main differences between life as a biological mass, and life as a human being” (Reiss 2008, p. 132). By embracing 16 basic desires, Reiss argues that we experience a general feeling that life has purpose (Table 9). By understanding these basic human desires, leaders can create an environment that embraces working in a healthy pole, versus an unhealthy one. It is about the empowerment of individuals, teams, and consequently the organisation itself, in contrast to traditional autocratic leadership styles that promote dependence.

Table 9 Reiss’s Personality Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological / Basic Needs</th>
<th>Polarities</th>
<th>Example: Strong Desire Trait</th>
<th>Example: Weak Desire Trait</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td>Self-doubting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Practical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>Overeater</td>
<td>Fussy eater</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Devoted parent</td>
<td>Absent parent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honour</td>
<td>Principled</td>
<td>Opportunistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idealism</td>
<td>Humanitarian</td>
<td>Looks the other way</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Stubborn</td>
<td>Interdependent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Mengel’s model therefore is about fostering leadership through emotional intelligence, a term considered in detail in the next section. Biehl-Missal and Fitzek (2014) also favour a humanistic leadership model and advocate gestalt as being efficacious in improving leadership development. Regarding the lack of contributions from gestalt to leadership discourse, they suggest that “both sides miss opportunities to bring together their potential in research and practice” (Biehl-Missal and Fitzek 2014, p. 145). The artistic thrust of gestalt can lead to more creative and expansive organisational decision making by “challenging the mundane world of organisations and to apply practical arts-based research approaches to support change and development processes” (Biehl-Missal and Fitzek 2014, p. 13).

Naicker and Vethaviasa-Naidoo (2014) also propose a gestalt leadership model. Their work focuses heavily on the relational thrust of gestalt. In a qualitative study with six purposively selected school principals, their research found a range of leadership learning opportunities that presented themselves within leadership practice communities through collaboration, discussion and relationship development. This is not a new concept because in the 1950’s, the gestaltist Kurt Lewin analysed the psychological field structures and tensions within organisations. He was able to link gestalt theoretical thinking to the psychology of individuals, groups, organisations and the cultural and social climate as a whole.
He viewed social and economic structures as more or less holistic organisations; systemic wholes with a dynamic and unique identity (Lück 2011). Lewin’s paradigm was a challenge to the prevailing concept of the rational “economic man” in Taylor’s scientific management. The latter model assumed a more passive and financially motivated worker, disregarding dynamic processes of sense-making and complex psychological influences related to work. Gestalt theory preceded management concepts that later acknowledged that people attempt to make sense of organisations, valuing the multifaceted and subjective motivations of the “social man”, the “self-actualising man” and the “complex man” (Lück 2011, p. 9).

Gestalt is also now being viewed as applicable in the area of coaching. Cox et al. (2014) explain how in gestalt, the emphasis is on the biological law of balance and the organism’s attempts to regain balance through “creative adjustment.” In gestalt coaching, the coach uses the cycle of experience as an orienting framework and works with what is happening in the present moment to free up energy to help release clients from the traps of unfinished business or redundant ways of thinking. The learning inherent in this approach is quite powerful and can result in significant development for the client according to Bluckert (2005). Even as a passionate gestaltist, I argue that perhaps we should welcome gestalt models of leadership with a degree of caution. As a discipline open to experimentation and experiential learning, individuals, organisations and indeed society itself need to be safeguarded from the consequences of something going wrong because the end does not always justify the means. The gestalt approach can be confrontational for example and this has obvious implications particularly in the workplace (Janov 2005).
2.4.3.6 Current Leadership Trends

Leadership research has grown extensively over the last decade resulting in a transformation in the understanding of the leadership phenomena (Gardner 2010). Historically, the study of leadership typical involved a static approach, predominantly relying on cross-sectional retrospective survey methodologies (Gardner 2010; Hunter et al. 2007; Lowe and Gardner 2001). This approach tended to ignore the cumulated effects of transitory processes such as emotions, thoughts, reactions, and embodied cognitions, which can fundamentally alter leader development and behavioural outcomes (Day and Sin 2011; Lord and Shondrick 2011). Theory has now progressed to focusing on understanding general leadership processes as they occur over indeterminate amounts of time (Van Vugt et al. 2008).

The permeation of emotional intelligence (EI) in leadership discourse has helped to evolve understanding based on how micro-processes such as perceptions, discreet emotions, and cognitions (Dinh and Lord 2012; Trichas and Schyns 2012), and macro processes, such as the social–relational context (Chang et al. 2011; DeRue and Ashford 2010) dynamically affect follower and leader outcomes. Over the last three decades, leadership scholars have also developed theories to explain a leader's role within complex systems for instigating organisational change and managing dynamic social networks (Balkundi et al. 2011; Hannah et al. 2011). Bartenuk et al. (1996) for example demonstrated in their study of change management in a public sector UK institution that change management is more successful when those to be impacted by change are directly involved in the change management process itself.

The evolution from autocratic to more constructivist leadership styles is evidenced in increased references to the blending of action and reflexivity in extant literature (McNamara et al. 2014; Lawrence and Pirson 2014; Lawrence 2010). McNamara et al. (2014) for instance propose action research (AR) models of leadership because they argue that leadership is an ongoing process that takes place over time, and in various dynamic contexts. They suggest that leader competencies are best developed through interventions that address individual needs as they relate to role performance and
practice improvement. Interventions that are experiential, action-oriented and focused on achieving improvement, such as mentoring, coaching and action learning should be incorporated into leadership development programmes they argue.

By assisting practitioners to develop and demonstrate leadership competencies in context, experiential and action oriented interventions may be preferable to once-off short term courses, but they require long-term commitment from individuals and their organisations. If commitment can be gained, the humanistic narrative exemplifies a more comprehensive and better suited explanation of human behaviour than the traditional scientific narratives that historically dominated leadership literature. Lawrence (2010) provides a fitting analogy by saying that trying to run a corporation in the traditional way is like running a four-cylinder car with only two cylinders firing. Commensurate with the humanistic paradigm, AR principles now provide a more reflective, subjective and sustainable leadership opportunity. A number of recent studies demonstrate the efficacy of the AR leadership approach.

Demonstrating the efficacy of AR in terms of developing organisational leadership, Lines et al. (2015) successfully deployed AR to empirically measure the impact of individual change management factors on minimising resistance from organisational members during an implementation project. Carver and Klein (2013) used AR to upgrade a university-based leadership preparation program. Using examples drawn from an AR research project with candidates on a master’s level principal preparation programme, they demonstrated how the collection and analysis of candidate’s written reflections, completed as part of required coursework, informed their work as university faculty, and supported cycles of continuous programme improvement.
2.4.4 Leadership and Work Related Stress

Literature reviewed for this research indicates that the relationship between leadership roles and stress is not devoid of debate. Literature exists promoting a direct link between leadership and work related stress (Campbell et al. 2001; Wheatley 2011). Sherman et al. (2010) however contributed a recent report suggesting that leadership positions themselves afford a level of work related stress protection that non leaders do not enjoy. Natural characteristics of leaders are also mediators of work related stress they argue. Searches were also completed for this study seeking to elicit secondary data considering the role of self-regulation in leadership. In an effort to deduce key triggers of work related stress, the P.E.S.T.E.L model of macro environment factors was considered for this study.

2.4.4.1 Literature Linking Leadership to Increased WRS

Substantial evidence exists linking leadership roles with heightened work related stress. Campbell et al. (2007) completed a study of 160 organisational leaders pertaining to the issue of their subjective experience of work related stress. 88% reported that work is a primary source of stress in their lives and that having a leadership role increases their experiences of stress. 60% of surveyed leaders cited their organisation as failing to provide them with the tools they need to manage stress. 66% of surveyed leaders believed their stress level is higher today than it was five years ago and 80% stated they would benefit from a coach or mentor to help them manage their stress.

Roberts (2014) completed a study investigating occupational stressors, their effects, and the coping mechanisms of women in leadership positions. Selected women in various managerial positions were interviewed using the Occupational Stress Inventory–Revised Interview guide. The results showed that stressors experienced by the women included role over-load, role insufficiency, role ambiguity, role conflict, role responsibility and physical environmental stressors. The effects of these occupational stressors included vocational, psychological, interpersonal and behavioural and physical strains.
O'Neil and Davis (2015) recently examined if there existed differences in the types and frequency of work stressors between those in leadership and non-leaders in the hotel sector. The two most common stressors were interpersonal tensions at work and work overload for both groups. Hotel leaders however reported significantly more stressors than employees, suggesting that leadership roles in the hospitality sector are more stressful. Campbell et al. (2010) suggest that certain organisational leadership factors ensure that leadership roles are intrinsically stressful. The burden of decision making for leaders emerged as a significant finding. If a leader makes a good decision, there can be positive outcomes, but if a poor decision is made, widespread negative consequences can ensue. Campbell et al. (2010) also suggest that when economic downturns and unstable financial markets are added to the leadership equation, the conditions for work related stress are rife. Lovelace et al. (2007) argue that although leaders work in highly stressful environments, few leadership development efforts have focused on managing work related stress.

Literature also linking leadership with work related stress is laden in the issue of toxicity resultant from distributive bargaining (DB). This is an approach to negotiation prevalent in situations of limited resources involving habitual conflict. The outcome must represent a gain for one party and a loss for the other (Fischer 2013). It usually occurs over areas such as compensation and benefits, and the allocation of scarce fulfilment or specialist resources. The goal in DB is not to assure that both sides win, but rather that one side wins as much as it can, generally meaning that the other side will lose, or at least, will get less than it had originally wanted. DB tactics rarely assume that the fixed pie will divide equally, and it can also be referred to as "claiming value," "zero-sum," or "win-lose" bargaining (Ten-Brinke et al. 2015).

Toxicity refers to individual or organisational behaviours that are propelled by personal gain, power struggles, financial disputes, status claims, unethical behaviour, vindictiveness, and sometimes illegal means, manipulation and annoyance (Durré 2010). Toxic situations often involve behaviours that are ultimately defeating to organisational objectives, to other employees, and to ethical and professional standards. According to Kusy and Holloway (2009), the number of toxic employees in the workplace appears to
be growing in response to increased work related stress. The authors attribute toxicity increase to consequences of DB environments characterised by lean staffing, stress from the threat of redundancies and the removal or depletion of current benefits etc.

Thompson (2010) suggests that stress degrades the decision making capabilities of leaders. Work related stress is also shown in literature to deplete attentional resources where resources are committed to the processing of task-relevant dimensions leading to negative stress levels among the decision makers (Selart and Johan 2010). Several studies also suggest that stress impairs memory-retrieval, including social memory, due to stress induced increased cortisol production. The dominant stress response then comes in the form of aggression and is likely to reduce pro-social orientation and proclivity to engage in ethical behaviour (Buchanan and Tranel 2008; Merz et al. 2010).

2.4.4.2 Literature Proposing Leadership and WRS Mitigation

Sherman et al. (2012) suggest that leadership is associated with lower levels of stress. They recently completed a study examining the relationship between leadership and stress across two distinct manifestations of stress—one physiological (salivary cortisol) and one psychological (anxiety reports). By focusing on the mediating role of a psychological sense of control, they linked increased leadership levels with stress-buffering benefits. In particular, occupying a position marked by a large number of subordinates and possessing substantial authority over one’s subordinates are two aspects of leadership that confer such benefits.

Sherman et al. (2012) argue that the fact that these positions elevate one’s psychological experience of control is not surprising because they are likely to be marked by prestige as well as objective power and influence. In contrast, personally managing a large number of people was not associated with a greater sense of control or less stress. This is perhaps because ascension to high-ranking positions encourages one to delegate the day-to-day management of subordinates to lower-ranking officials. Altogether, their results highlight the importance of distinguishing between total number of subordinates and number of direct reports in terms of WRS.
A limitation of their study I believe is that their central concern is related to external sources of work related stress. They do acknowledge this limitation in their recommendations for future research. They posit that individuals with higher stress thresholds may be particularly well-suited to leadership and therefore will gravitate organically towards same. As a result, it may be the individual’s intrinsic characteristics versus the leadership position itself that negates the effects of work related stress. Although their study provides some interesting perspectives on work related stress, the limitations of their study coupled with the weight of evidence linking leadership with increased work related stress suggests that leadership roles are indeed inherently more stressful than non-leadership ones.

2.5 Limitations of this Literature Review

It is acknowledged that in using a narrative synthesis approach, a limitation of this literature review may rest in the fact this method is often criticised because researchers can privilege certain findings or studies over others, and it is feasible that two reviewers who synthesise the same set of studies using this method of synthesis could reach different conclusions (Rumrill and Fitzgerald 2001). In addition, autoethnographers are typically informed by an array of literature including ones that are not moulded in an academic manner. Several sources of “grey” or unpublished material are reviewed in this thesis also, in line with popular practice within autoethnography. This approach however will be defended in chapter 4 of this research in dealing with the issue of validation.

There are limitations in this review also resulting from the subject areas being researched. In terms of transactional stress theory for example, it is recognised that empirical evidence is underrepresented in contemporary discourse due to the complexity and labour intensive nature of the subject matter (Mark and Smith 2012; Dewe et al. 2010). A similar issue was resultant from the lack of availability of current or historical gestalt led research. This problem was identified also by Hager (2010) who reported frustrating attempts to complete a meta-synthesis involving gestalt, cognitive behavioural therapy and psychodynamic therapy. Whilst Hager was able to locate an
abundance of CBT publications, she encountered a significant dearth in terms of both gestalt and psychodynamic. My literature review however looked beyond seeking empirical support based on outcome studies, to consider wider issues such as a growing trend for gestalt theory to inform other disciplines outside of the therapy room (Nevis 2013; Slattery and Danaher 2015).

2.6 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

The systematic review presented here has facilitated the consideration of work related stress, gestalt psychotherapy and leadership. It commenced with an overview of the steps taken to ensure a robust and systematic literature review in accordance with contemporary practice in doctoral research. It then described in detail the evolution of stress theory from Seyle’s (1936) general adaption syndrome (GAS) model through to contemporary thought that positions stress in terms of a dynamic transactional process between organism and environment.

Gestalt literature was reviewed in the context of the overall development of psychotherapy theory and practice. That review demonstrated the emergence of gestalt as a protestation against dominant modes of psychotherapy. Gestalt is seen in this review as a relational approach to psychotherapy that focuses on the process of organism and environmental contact, and how authentic contact can be interrupted by neurosis. Finally, literature on leadership was reviewed illustrating how leadership theory has evolved from an initial dominance by trait and behavioural theory, to more relational and process models. Like stress, my review has shown that leadership itself is complex phenomenon operating across multiple levels of analysis (Cho and Dansereau 2010; Wang and Howell 2010), involving multiple mediating and moderating factors (e.g., DeRue et al. 2011), and takes place over substantial periods of time (Day and Sin 2011; Lord and Hall 2005).

Although the concepts of stress, gestalt and leadership were reviewed independently in this review, a convergence around a process orientation in all three effectively means in terms of my research that all three can be understood in terms of the external
environment, internal processes and outcomes (Figure 5). In the next chapter, this study now examines choices made in this study including all methodological and related methods decisions.

Figure 5  Theoretical Convergence on Process
CHAPTER THREE - RATIONALE

3.0 Chapter Introduction

In terms of psychotherapeutic treatment and analysis in work related stress, extant literature indicates that humanistic approaches appear to be consigned to the academic wilderness, whilst cognitive behavioural treatment and outcome studies continue to enjoy supremacy in their respective domains (McLeod 2011; Hager 2010). The leadership agenda has traditionally been dominated by a positivist, scientific and overtly patriarchal bias towards trait, behavioural and transactional conceptualisations (Uhl-Bien 2006). New leadership models such as relational, authentic and humanistic ones that pervade contemporary literature however, indicate a significant movement away from the past (Mengel 2012; Biehl-Missal and Fitzek 2014). Having now traced the evolution of stress theory from the original GAS model (Seyle 1936), to today’s interactional process models (Lazarus 1961), it appears that the time is right to complete this research.

Constructivist researchers believe that we understand the world within which we live and work “when we develop subjective meanings of our own experiences” (Creswell 2012, p. 8). Building on that sentiment, my review of extant literature identified a number of reasons why this study should take place due to limitations in current knowledge. How my constructivist ontology and epistemology resulted in selected research methodologies and methods to address those gaps is defended in this chapter also. A detailed debate on the utilisation of a qualitative autoethnographic methodology is offered, complete with a comprehensive discussion regarding strengths and limitations arising from those decisions. Justification is also provided for research methods used in data collection and analysis before they are described in detail in the subsequent methodology chapter.
3.1 Current Knowledge Deficits

The aim of my literature review was to create a thorough, sophisticated foundation and inspiration for substantial research, warranted by the complex nature of the subject matter in question. That analysis set the broad context for the study by critiquing literature pertaining to conceptual models of stress and work related stress, gestalt psychotherapy, other psychotherapeutic paradigms, historical and contemporary models of leadership. It situated existing literature in a broader scholarly and historical context, and it critiqued not only claims made in the existing literature, but it also critically examined the research methods used that support those claims. That chapter concluded with a synthesis of reviewed literature depicting the historical and contemporary development of current discourse. In order to derive evidenced based conclusions from the investigation, it was necessary to complete a systematic approach to the examination of available literature (Sivera et al. 2014; Houdmont 2009). That systematic review identified several deficits in current theory and praxis that this study aims to address.

3.1.1 A Process Study Needed to Investigate a Process Phenomenon

Several articles reviewed for this study demonstrate that work related stress research is grounded in architectural models, and treatment is dominated by short term directed methods (Schneider and Längle 2012; Baker et al. 2009). This is problematic however because stress is now thought of in terms of the ongoing process of organism / environmental transaction. Consequently, a need exists for a process based approach to the analysis and treatment of a process based phenomenon. My literature review identified also how gestalt, as a process orientated approach, is under represented in contemporary empirical discourse and therefore opportunities hitherto to apply this appropriate framework to the field of work related stress have not been taken (Elkins 2012; Wampold, 2012).
Gestalt’s resistance to focus on outcomes and measurement drives negative benchmarks against other treatments such as CBT (Wedding and Corsini 2013). This is regrettable however as a limited amount of available comparative data suggests that CBT is no more efficacious than gestalt across a range of issues (Tolin 2010; Hager 2010). O’Leary (2013) articulated how humanistic therapies do not play a major role in mainstream psychotherapy training, and are not delivered as psychotherapy within the public health system in many countries. She explains that a lack of substantial empirical contributions in contrast to cognitive and behavioural therapies could well be at the route of this issue. This study can therefore address a lack of process oriented studies in a transactional stress investigation of work related stress using gestalt psychotherapeutic theory.

3.1.2 Issues Surrounding Coping and Appraisal

The review of available literature indicates that understanding the processes of appraisal and coping in terms of the transactional stress model remains problematic. Cooper et al. (2001) and Cox and Ferguson (1991) state that despite the widespread use of the term “coping,” there are difficulties surrounding its definition, as it can be seen as a process, a behaviour, as a stable trait, or as situation specific. Daniels et al (2004) have suggested that the conception of appraisal is too simplistic in the model, and doesn’t include individuals’ histories, and anticipated futures. Cox (1987) also states that the processes discussed may not be as rational as presented in transactional theories. According to Hickle and Anthony (2013), much empirical research is required to better understand the nature of appraisal and coping in terms of transactional stress theory.

In terms of traditional stress models, these issues were problematic also. For instance, the GAS model describes a non-specific bodily response to stressors allowing no part for individual perception / understanding of a situation, or particular coping strategies utilised by different people. Studies like Ravalier and Biggs’s (2009) demonstrated the different reactions by police members to similar situations thus highlighting deficits in terms of appraisal and coping in that model. When stimulus – response theory was replaced by later architectural models such as the interactional one, addressing the
subject of appraisal and coping has again remained problematic. A fundamental issue has been highlighted with regard to the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model for example regarding a lack of appreciation for personal resources and individual differences in this domain (Brouze 2013; Feltz et al. 2008). The psychoanalytical approach explains coping in terms of defence which play an important role in regulating emotions. A basic limitation of this approach is that it does not examine those coping methods directed at the problem causing the stress (Aldwin and Brustrom 1997). Another limitation of this approach is that the process is confused with the result of the adaptation.

3.1.3 Complexity and Labour Intensity: Process Based Stress Research

According to Houdmont (2009), process-based approaches to researching work related stress are more labour intensive for both researcher and study participant than in interactional studies. In consequence, studies informed by transactional stress theory are fewer in the scientific literature than those guided by architectural models. This serves to highlight one of the major challenges associated with transactional stress theory i.e. the complexity of its application.

Despite the support of many authors for transactional type stress models, studies based on transactional theory (i.e. theories that describe the stress process in terms of antecedent factors, cognitive processes, emotional experiences, and health outcomes, (Cox 1978; Cox and Griffiths 1995; Lazarus, 1991) are also labour intensive and this appears to act as a deterrent to researchers in preference for more straightforward structural approaches that facilitate less labour intensive research effort. Lazarus (1991) commented on the vital need to understand an individual’s patterns in terms of appraisal and and coping with stress. Therefore, the completion of transactional investigation requires a considerable amount of commitment over an extended period of time to capture patterns, thus creating a deficit in transactional empirical contributions in contrast to studies informed by other, non-process oriented models.
3.1.4 New Leadership Models: Further Research Required

My study highlighted an array of approaches to leadership, or leadership models that are the product of reactions to historical models and issues with prevailing leadership practice at various times (Grint 2014). Reactions to leadership approaches based on traits such as charisma have emanated from a turning away from leadership models associated with narcissism (Parry and Bryman 2006) and, sometimes, with destructive leaders Krumm (2001). New leadership models such as relational leadership (Uhl-Bien 2006; Carmeli et al. 2013), authentic leadership (Avolio et al. 2009; Ilies et al. 2005) and humanistic leadership models (Mengel 2012; Biehl Missal and Fitzek 2014) are emerging as approaches to leadership grounded in social constructivism.

This study is interested in the potential of self-regulation in the achievement of mastery and self-determination i.e. one’s autonomy or discretion to perform one’s work in the way that one chooses, including making decisions about work methods, procedures, pace, and effort are synonymous with these new leadership models (Thomas and Velthouse 1990, Ilies et al. 2005). Authentic leaders for example develop follower motivation and self-determination by creating conditions or structures that facilitate two-way communication and follower autonomy, providing coaching and constructive feedback, acknowledging followers ‘perspectives and interests, and involving them in decision making (Gardner et al. 2005, Ilies et al. 2005).

New humanistic leadership models centre on creativity, innovation, sustainability and a focus on creating symbiotic interpersonal relations (Gagliardi and Czarniawska 2006; Adler 2006). Mengel’s EMotiAn (2012) model has a primordial focus on meaningful leadership aspirations that extend beyond the pursuit of wealth and power. In seeking to understand ways to master work related stress, Frankl's motivational theory that provides a meta-theoretical platform for the humanistic leadership model stresses the importance of values in leadership processes, and the need to create meaningful work environments (Mengel 2012). This is conducive to providing an environment where job demands can be linked with goal congruency to assist in forming positive appraisal
behaviour. Given the rate and amount of new leadership theory generation however, much more empirical research is required to create a widened discourse as to the efficacy of these models in practice (Fulop and Mark 2013).

3.1.5 Inconclusively: Work Related Stress in Leadership Roles

The relationship between work related stress and leadership roles appears to be a complex and debated one, based on a review of extant literature. Substantial evidence exists linking leadership roles with heightened work related stress (Campbell et al. 2007; Roberts 2014; O’Neill and Davis 2015). Issues such as lack of resources, onerous travel and role ambiguity were found to infuse leadership roles. A burden of responsibility exists where the outcome of an intervention may have far reaching consequences for the leader, the employees, the organisation and society. Campbell et al. (2010) argue that when economic downturn and unstable financial markets are added to the leadership equation, the conditions for work related stress are rife. Lovelace et al. (2007) suggest that although leaders work in highly stressful environments, few leadership development efforts have focused on managing work related stress.

Sherman et al. (2012) report a different position and suggest that leadership is actually associated with lower levels of stress. In particular, occupying a position marked by a large number of subordinates and possessing substantial authority over one’s subordinates are two aspects of leadership that confer such benefits they argue. The same authors argue that the fact that these positions elevate one’s psychological experience of control is not surprising because they are likely to be marked by prestige as well as objective power and influence.

It therefore appears that a divergence of thought exists regarding the nature of the relationship between stress and leadership. My database searches on this particular topic drew limited results however, indicating that further discussion on this relationship is required. Although this current study is not limited to the analysis of the relationship between leadership and stress, it does somewhat contribute to addressing this void and
aims to add useful insight through the subjective interpretation of my own experiences in a leadership context.

3.2 Research Methodology Rationale: Qualitative

In this section, I justify the key methodological choices made for this research in attempting to address empirical gaps and the specific research questions I pose. I firstly describe the ontological and epistemological rationale for this study. This leads in to a justification for pursuing a qualitative approach to examining my relationship with work related stress. The choice of an autoethnographic methodology is justified as being appropriate to examine the phenomena of hazards, appraisal, coping and outcomes in terms of my subjective experiences of work related stress.

3.2.1 Ontological Rationale for a Qualitative Study

Ontology refers to a theory of existence and is concerned with the nature of reality and that of being human (Lee 2012). Ontological questions are concerned with the very essence of the phenomena under investigation. The central question is whether the reality of social entities is external to the individual, or whether they are the product of individual perceptions and actions (Marshall and Rossman 2012). These two contrasting positions are referred to as objectivism / positivism and constructivism / interpretivism. Objectivism implies that social phenomena confront social actors as external facts beyond their influence. Constructivism, on the other hand, sees social phenomena and their meanings as being continually accomplished by social actors. Thus, constructivism implies that social phenomena are produced through social interaction and thus, are in a constant state of revision (Bryman 2008).

Whilst older models consider stress in terms of traits and structural-based relationships between organism and environment, contemporary theory implies a transactional process. In order to understand the nature of that transaction, researchers now explore the cognitive processes that link the individual to the environment (Dewe et. al 2010).
It is, as Lazarus (1999) suggests, the process of appraisal that provides that link and, in so doing, provides the “conduit” between the stressful encounter and the emotions that follow. The authority of appraisals lies in the fact that they act as a bridge to what one experiences and how one feels in a particular encounter (Lazarus 2001). This also provides a conceptual pathway for more closely examining the role of discrete emotions. Thus, as definitions of stress have evolved, it is possible to think in terms of the different components of the stress transaction operating within a relational process (Dewe et al. 2010; Lazarus 2001). As such, studies that adhere to the perspective necessarily collect data on a host of factors that feed into the stress process: hazardous exposures, the meaning of those exposures to the individual and that person’s coping resources, as well as outcome variables.

Because stress theory has evolved from static conceptualisations from such models as trait theory (stimulus-response); structural theory (interactional), to current process theory (transactional), I therefore deemed a qualitative investigation as an appropriate methodology for this investigation. As there is a relative dearth in the availability of empirically based process studies, the ontological rationale for a qualitative approach to this study is apparent.

3.2.2 Epistemological Rationale for a Qualitative Investigation

Epistemology is a term used to refer to theories of knowledge, or ways of knowing especially in regard to its methods, validation and possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality (Edwards 2012). In short, epistemology relates to claims about how what is assumed to exist can be known (Grix 2013). Derived from the Greek words episteme (knowledge) and logos (reason), it is concerned with the knowledge-gathering process. Like ontology, two contrasting epistemological positions exist - positivism and interpretivism. Broadly speaking, the former is an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond. The latter is an epistemological position that is predicated upon the
view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences.

Constructivist epistemology therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social interaction (Bryman 2012). This affects the relationships between the researcher and the phenomenon being researched. Knowledge is believed to be formed based on the quality of absorbing learning from engagement with self and others (Cohen et al. 2001). According to O’Grady (2013), this view is reinforced by Eisner (1997) who considers some forms of knowledge to be better understood by action. Research questions embody one’s ontological position and thereby, influence the design of the study (Bryman 2012). Because epistemology refers to assumptions about knowledge and how it can be obtained, it is also concerned with how it can be communicated to others. Kolb (1984) illustrates the key differentiators between the subjective and objective approaches that discern the methodological choices for research design (Table 10). It is clear from this taxonomy, that in studying a phenomenon characterised by individual / environment interaction, subjective interpretation of situations, individual differences, that a subjective research approach was appropriate for this study in contrast to an objectivist one.

Table 10   Kolb’s Research Typology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective Approach</th>
<th>Versus</th>
<th>Objective Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nominalism</strong>- the social world is created by the individual concerned.</td>
<td><strong>Ontology</strong> – What can and does exist</td>
<td><strong>Realism</strong>- A single reality exists independent of the individuals view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voluntarism</strong>- Free will plays a role in the relationship.</td>
<td><strong>Human Nature</strong> – Relationships between human beings and their environment</td>
<td><strong>Determinism</strong>- Relationships are determined by external environmental forces.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interpretivism</strong>- Knowledge has to be personally experienced.</td>
<td><strong>Epistemology</strong> - The Nature of Knowledge</td>
<td><strong>Positivism</strong>- Knowledge can be acquired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideographic</strong>- Emphasises the analysis of subjective accounts revealed through qualitative explanation</td>
<td><strong>Methodology</strong> – How research is/will be constructed</td>
<td><strong>Nomothetic</strong>- A deductive approach that seeks explanation through the analysis of</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
gleaned inside a given situation.

| casual relationships to allow the testing of hypothesis and the construction of generalised laws. |

Source: Kolb (1984)

3.3 An Autoethnographic Study

Having a choice of various qualitative investigative methodologies to explore, I explain in this section why an autoethnographic methodology was selected. In doing so, an explication is provided regarding those various qualitative methodologies that were available but discounted, when comparatively assessed for suitability against an autoethnographic approach. The strengths and weaknesses of the autoethnographic methodology are debated in this section also.

3.3.1 The Process of Discounting Alternatives to Autoethnography

Choosing a particular research approach does not end when the methodological dilemma is concluded, because the qualitative paradigm in particular offers an array of reflective possibilities. Silverman (2013) outlines how in qualitative research, a number of approaches are available to the researcher (Table 11).

Table 11 Qualitative Research Methodologies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Narrative research has many forms, uses various analytic practices, and is rooted in different social and humanities disciplines (Charmaz and McMullen 2011). Narrative might be the term assigned to any text or discourse, or it might be text used within the context of a mode of inquiry in qualitative research, with a specific focus on the stories individuals tell (Cohen et al. 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>Ethnographic is where the researcher studies in tact a phenomenon within a natural setting over a prolonged period of time by collecting mainly observational detail (Creswell</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Grounded theory is a qualitative research design in which the inquirer generates a general explanation (a theory) of a process, action, or interaction shaped by the views of a large number of participants (Creswell 2012; Hutchinson et al. 2013). This theory would be “grounded,” or derived from participant data (Strauss and Corbin 1997).

The focus in case study research is not predominantly on the individual (and their stories), as in narrative research, but on the issue with the individual case selected. Also, in case study research, the analytic approach involves a detailed description of the case, the setting of the case within contextual conditions, and a presentation that may or may not be chronological (Silverman 2013).

Researchers first turn to a phenomenon or an abiding concern (Pringle et al. 2011), that seriously interests them (e.g. reading, running, driving, mothering). In the process, they reflect on essential themes i.e. what constitutes the nature of this lived experience. They write a description of the phenomenon, maintaining a strong relationship to the topic of inquiry, and balancing the parts of the writing to the whole. Phenomenology is not only a description, but also an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation i.e. the researcher mediates between different meanings of the lived experiences (Giles 2011).

Source: Silverman (2013)

Grounded theory was ruled out as a methodology because that approach typically depends on the involvement of large number of participants (Creswell 2012). Another key disadvantage I found with grounded theory is that it fails to recognise the embeddedness of the researcher, and thus obscures the researcher's considerable agency in data construction and interpretation (Bryant and Charmaz 2007). Both grounded theory and wholly phenomenological studies allow themes to organically emerge from collected data but I am interested in seeking to understand my subjective interpretations of work related stress through a specific lens, that of gestalt.
Chapter Three - Rationale

Case studies tend to narrow in on a specific time / event / encounter for the individual rather than seeking a wider holistic view of the individual (Bryman and Bell 2015; Silverman 2013). That approach was ruled out because I am interested in understanding my experiences in a dynamic approach over an extended period of time. The focus in case studies is not predominantly on the individual (and their stories) as in narrative research, but on the issue with the individual case selected (Bryman and Bell 2015). Also, in case study research, the analytic approach involves a detailed description of the case, the setting of the case within contextual conditions, and a presentation that may or may not be chronological (Silverman 2013). A limitation with the case study method is a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. In addition to considering the specific research question, researchers must also consider what the case is. Determining what the unit of analysis (case) is can be a challenging. The case is defined by Miles and Huberman (1994) is in effect, your unit of analysis (1994, p. 25). I deemed this approach to be too static and restrictive in which to observe a multidimensionality and process orientation of my relationship with stress. Houdmont (2009) argues that we must take account of multiple variables in the stress process. Therefore, data has to be collected on a host of factors that feed into the stress process - hazardous exposures, the meaning of those exposures to the individual, and that person’s coping resources, as well as outcome variables.

Because the dominant methodology of gestalt itself is phenomenological, this research does share some commonalities with a pure phenomenological research methodology. In phenomenological research, researchers first turn to a phenomenon, or an abiding concern (Pringle et al 2011), that seriously interests them (e.g., reading, running, driving, mothering). In the process, they reflect on essential themes i.e. what constitutes the nature of this lived experience. They write a description of the phenomenon, maintaining a strong relationship to the topic of inquiry and balancing the parts of the writing to the whole. This is usually completed using inductive data analysis methods where themes emerge as subjectively interpreted by the researcher. This is reflected in the specific interpretive process of the lived experience (Giles 2011). Bracketing is a method used by some researchers to mitigate the potential deleterious effects of
unacknowledged preconceptions related to the research and thereby to increase the rigour of the project. In my research however, I am actively seeking out pre-defined gestalt patterns using a conceptual framework to construct codes to place on the data. I equate this to using a metal detector, looking for something specific that cannot be found if it is not there. If that something is present, then, the shape, pattern and movement it makes throughout the tenure of the data capture period will show itself.

3.3.2 Why an Autoethnographic Methodology

In keeping with Lazarus’s (1991) goal of studying the organism’s patterns of experience with stress over time, it is appropriate that an autoethnographic approach was taken. This is an approach that combines the first two methodologies listed in table 11 i.e. narrative and ethnographic. When broken down into the components of the word, autoethnography is based on a systematic analysis (graphy) of personal experience (auto), with the intent of understanding experience cultural (ethno) (Ellis et al. 2011). It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (e.g. the work environment), a self-narrative that critiques the situations of self with others in social contexts (Martinez 2015).

As a narrative form of inquiry, it seeks to tell the personal stories about people’s lives, their ‘lived experience’ within relative contexts, in a meaningful and creative way. It connects the personal to the wider cultural and social, and its meanings and understandings and is a specific form of narrative inquiry however. Pure narrative inquiries involve taking a look at a story of self. Self-studies involve taking a look at self in action – usually confined to an educational setting, but autoethnography involves taking a look at self within a larger context (Lynn-Hamilton et al. 2008). It connects to social context by combining inquiry into a cultural phenomenon with personal experience and reflections on its socio-cultural context (Bartlett 2014).
It makes use of interviews, dialogues, self-conscious writing, and other creative forms to facilitate an expanded awareness for the author/researcher and audience (Bartlett 2014; Ellis 2004). According to Starr (2014), the multiple layers of reflexivity that the autoethnographic approach affords is particularly important for studies concerned with improving professional practice, because it allows us to make sense of the tensions and struggles involved in our relationship with our environment (Martinez 2015; Bartlett 2015). Being positioned in an environment that is in constant flux requires a sense of groundedness, which comes from knowing one’s story and how that story interacts with the stories of others (Starr 2014). Because of such salient autoethnography characteristics, it reflects central tenets of gestalt transactional stress theory, and contemporary leadership theory – namely a seminal focus on relatedness and process orientation.

Another rationale for the use of autoethnography according to Marshall and Rosman (2014) is that it is a particularly pertinent and common approach to conducting investigations into applied field, such as leadership and management, nursing, community development, education and clinical psychology e.g. (Oliver 1990; Greenwald 1992). According to Kempster and Stewart (2010), autoethnography promotes continuous practice improvement by encouraging the adoption of a hyper-reflexive stance where the autoethnographer is encouraged to conduct a study within a study that involves depth of self-disclosure and analysis. In this way two aspects occur; reflection inward, and observation outward (Parry and Boyle 2009). The contribution to management learning is drawn from the observation outward by examining the inward reflections through an exploration of situated curriculum. Ellis (2004) metaphorically describes these two parts as a sandwich—the bread as the interpreted observations, and the tasty filling the reflections on the experience (p.198).

Contemporary stress theory suggests that in order to understand the nature of organism / environment transaction, researchers now explore the cognitive processes that link the individual to the environment (Dewe et al. 2010). Thus, as definitions of stress have evolved, it is possible to think in terms of the different components of the stress
transaction operating within a relational process (Dewe et al. 2010; Lazarus 2001). The multi layered thrust of an autoethnographic approach is therefore commensurate with the complex phenomenon that stress is now viewed as.

From a postmodern perspective, the exploration or understanding of leadership identity is “a process of infinite interpretation, reinterpretation of experiences, circumstances and conditions emphasising the interconnectedness of past and present, lived and living” (Starr 2014, p. 4). This is one of the fundamental reasons for selecting an autoethnographic, qualitative research methodology. Autoethnography is a reflexive means by which the researcher-practitioner consciously embeds himself or herself amidst theory and practice, and by way of intimate autobiographic account, explicates a phenomenon under investigation or intervention (Tomaselli 2013). It is a vehicle that operationalises social constructionist research and practice, and it affords the establishment of authentic research. Furthermore, the method is a means to operationalise the notion of critical consciousness within researchers and practitioners (Anderson and Austin 2012).

Several recent empirical contributions point to further research deficits that warrant the completion of an autoethnographical type approach to the consideration of stress. Although at a conceptual level, there appears to be a consensus that stress is a subjective and dynamic process informed by individual and situational factors, there has been much criticism that the methods used to research appraisal and coping are too simplistic and have failed to capture stress as it is experienced (Dewe et al, 2010; Aldwin, 2007; Daniels et al, 2004; Dewe and Trenberth 2004). Mazzzetti (2014) for example argues that traditional self-report questionnaires have been criticised as they are structured in such a way that deconstruct the stress process into its constituent parts: the individual and the environment, resulting in ‘bits’ of the stress process being taken out of their relational context (Aldwin 2007; Arthur 2004). Using the analogy of the blind men and the elephant, Arthur (2004) suggests that there is a tendency for stress research to compartmentalise, but that only if we examine the whole, ‘will the gestalt of the elephant appear’ (Arthur 2004 p.158). Therefore, as I will later defend the use of gestalt based
on Mazzetti’s analysis, here, I defend the multi-factoral, multi layered approach that an autoethnographic study can lend itself to the consideration of work related stress.

3.3 Empirical Evidence of Autoethnography Efficacy

Autoethnographic studies in the work place environment are featuring more in contemporary literature due to the convenience of researching in one’s own organisation (Doloriert and Sambrook 2011). Bager (2015) for example completed an autoethnographic study looking at the issues of boundaries in organisations, increasingly defined by loose couplings, pluri-vocality and network configurations, and the impact of same for employee’s sense of identity. Patten (2015) completed an autoethnographic study examining the impact of mindfulness meditation on educator growth and professional development, using the conceptual frameworks of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and Mezirow’s transformational learning theory. Houdmont (2009) advises that studies adhering to contemporary stress perspectives collect data on a host of factors that feed into the stress process. Autoethnography is such a multi-factoral approach to conducting research (Martinez 2015; Bartlett 2014; Ellis 2004).

Addressing the need for further contributions in terms of gestalt and transactional stress empirical research, a recent doctoral study completed in South Africa demonstrates the efficacy of using gestalt in the context of an autoethnographic study to gain awareness around stress processes and outcomes (Horn 2009). That investigation examined the impact of the design, development, presentation and evaluation of a gestalt therapeutic process model for teachers suffering from career-related stress, in their quest to regain homeostasis. It resulted in the design of a functional gestalt therapeutic programme implemented within the school environment by a trained member of the school management team. The hypothesis in this mixed method study stated that if teachers, suffering from career-related stress, were exposed to a gestalt therapeutic model, they would regain homeostasis. Both the qualitative and quantitative findings of the study supported that theory.
Demonstrating the efficacy of autoethnography in leadership studies, Garza (2008) completed such a study highlighting the challenges he encountered in his efforts to maintain his commitment to leadership for social justice when he assumed the superintendancy of a small rural school district in southern Texas. He started collecting data in the form of a journal. His story describes the challenges encountered in leading the transformation of a school district. His analysis found that the greatest resistance came from adults, including board members, a few “elitist” parents, and some school employees. The community was set in the belief that certain children simply could not learn. His challenge was to create the belief that all children could succeed regardless of their perceived “deficits.” Standing up to the incessant political and social pressures required a strong sense of ethics, and courage. Through the completion of an autoethnographic study, he refused to lose focus on his efforts to facilitate success for all children.

His study demonstrated to him a significant amount of personal resilience manifesting in an attitude that would not allow him to compromise his philosophy of social justice. His findings also showed that was impossible for him to depoliticise his decisions. He learned that his social justice ideology interfered with his ability to recognise the oppressive political structures of this community. Consequently, he was forced to be reactive rather than proactive. He learned that it is not easy to be a leader for social justice. Leaders for social justice consistently challenge the hegemonic culture, and this often results in an adversarial relationship between the superintendent and those who use their power to demand and create privilege. And finally, he learned that his naivety got him in to trouble. However, he also learned that being naïve was not necessarily negative. Being naïve made him less cautious of the negative consequences and allowed him to look at the possibilities. He learned that his philosophy of social justice was constantly challenged, and it required great ethical stamina to withstand the negative pervasiveness of a deficit-thinking society.
3.4 Strengths and Limitations of Autoethnography

3.4.1 Strengths of Autoethnography

My review of literature has highlighted how psychological, psychotherapeutic, stress and leadership theory have all converged at a point where process is now afforded primordial emphasis (Dewe et al. 2010; Cox and Griffiths 2010; Avolio et al. 2012). Similarly, scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines have migrated from being closer to physics to being closer to literature as they proffer stories, rather than theories, and promulgate self-awareness and value-centering rather than pretending to be value free (Bochner 2012).

The autoethnographic approach provides a positive response to critiques of canonical ideas about what research is and how research should be done (Ellis 2010). In particular, the attention to producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience, research that can sensitise readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathise with people who are different from us (Ellis et al. 2011). Autoethnographers recognise the innumerable ways personal experience influences the research process. Even though some researchers still assume that research can be done from a neutral, impersonal, and objective stance (Atkinson 1997; Buzard 2003; Delamont 2009), most now recognise that such an assumption is not tenable (Bochner 2002; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Rorty 1982). Consequently, autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist.

Autoethnography expands and opens up a wider lens on the world, eschewing rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research. This approach also helps us understand how the kinds of people we claim to be, or are perceived to be influences interpretations of what we study, how we study it, and what we say about our topic.
The use of autoethnography as a methodological approach savours the concept of individual differences in the conceptualisation of stress. This demonstrates its efficacy as a process oriented approach capable of contributing what is recognised as much needed complex and labour intensive layered accounts of organism / environment interaction.

One of the quintessential reasons why early stress models such as GAS became heavily criticised relates to the neglect of the role of emotions and cognitions in favour of a sole emphasis on physiological reactions (Xie et al. 2013, Dewe et al 2010). A belief in the efficacy of early stress models to adequately address the stress phenomenon became depleted due to their disregard for what actually occurs in psychological stress (Dewe et al. 2010; Arnold 2005). Ellis (2010) talks of how this ‘crisis of confidence’ inspired by postmodernism introduced new and abundant opportunities to reform social science and reconceive the objectives and forms of social science inquiry (Ellis 2010, p.4).

In analytic autoethnography the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher’s published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena” (Anderson 2006, p. 375). The key difference between the analytic and more aesthetic forms of autoethnography is the author’s intention to draw conclusions about the context from personal experience, or in other words, an “autoethnographic lens should therefore start with the self in order to critique the social” (Taber 2012, p. 81). The intense reflexivity of the method requires that “we write ourselves inside-out by continually reflecting back on our lived experience, putting us inside our bodies while simultaneously negotiating the interrelations between ourselves and others” (Spry 2010, p. 278).
3.4.2 Limitations of Autoethnography

Guignon (2004) suggests that autoethnographic researchers engaged in committed intensity, can become too committed and overly involved. He suggests that there is a danger as Lippitt (2005) describes, that committed intensity can lead to myopic vision, so that we don’t make the best decisions for ourselves and others who depend on us. Because autoethnographic writings begin with the researcher’s use of the subjective self as, perhaps, the only source of data, or at least the main source of data, autoethnography has been criticised for being self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective, and individualized (Sparkes 2000). Certain authors have gone further in their attacks on autoethnographers labelling them as “navel-gazers, self-absorbed narcissists who don’t fulfil scholarly obligations of hypothesising, analysing, and theorising” (Soyini-Madison 2006, p.57).

Ellingson (2012) argues that the value of an autoethnographic study is limited to the meaning it creates in each individual reader. Those who therefore take an ontologically different stance, particularly partisan positivists will likely discount autoethnographic works. According to Ellis (2010), as part-ethnographers and part-auto biographers, autoethnographers are often criticised as if we were seeking to achieve the same goals as more canonical work in traditional ethnography or in the performance arts. Critics she argues want to hold autoethnography accountable to criteria normally applied to traditional ethnographies or to autobiographical standards of writing. Thus, autoethnography is condemned for either being too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful. Because the audience for this type of research can be limited, negative consequences in terms of the uptake of practice and policy recommendations from autoethnographic studies, in a society consumed by quantification and outcomes studies, are likely.
Autoethnography is often labelled as avant-garde (experimental) method of research and “the emergence of autoethnography and narratives of self has not been trouble-free, and their status as proper research remains problematic” (Sparkes 2000, p. 22). Despite the influence of postmodern thought, academic conventions are powerful, and there is resistance to the intrusion of autobiographical approaches to knowledge production and sharing (Larson 2011). The focus on biography rather than formality is a concern for some, because personal experiences have the platform and are separated from other discourses in their contexts “there is an extraordinary absence of social context, social action, and social interaction” (Atkinson 1997, p. 339).

However, the autoethnographic author is then challenged to provide social context and to describe the value of this type of research for academia and for practitioners. The lack of systematic and methodological rigour is also noted as a barrier to the acceptance of autoethnography. Even for those open to qualitative inquiry, traditional criteria such as credibility, validity, dependability, and trustworthiness can be important, although not always easily applied to autoethnography (Reilly 2013; Ellis 2011; Richardson 2000; Holt 2003). Duncan (2004), herself an autoethnographer, has noted that criticisms have been levelled at the

More experimental forms of autoethnography in which the boundaries of scholarship are merged with artistic expression; as a way of challenging the limitations of what is normally accepted, as knowledge in academic contexts.

(Duncan 2004, p. 11)

She criticises evocative personal writing that relies on a direct emotional response from a reader rather than offering analysis, grounded in theory, and methodological rigour. Those who support autobiographical inquiry however argue that autoethnography is more authentic than traditional research approaches, precisely because of the researcher’s use of self; the voice of the insider being truer than that of the outsider (Reilly 2013; Ellis 2011).
3.4.3 My Position

Taking a retrospective viewpoint having completed an autoethnographic study, I can appreciate arguments from the pro and anti autoethnographic camps. In its defence as a research methodology, I believe that perhaps, it is an approach to research whose time has come. This study I believe exemplifies this point because it investigates a phenomenon where dominant theory has moved from a fixed, deterministic viewpoint of traits, structures and behaviours to new models based on process, flow and dynamic interaction. At a time where for example, stress was believed to invoke generalised and common responses in reaction to purely objective concepts of work hazards, it is easy to understand how the scientific community would dismiss self-reflective narratives as being unimportant in the context of “known truths”.

Indeed, stress theory began to evolve and develop when Lazarus (1936) protested on the basis of limitations in both trait and behavioural stress paradigms. His new theory of stress as being a complex psychological interaction of organism and environment now recognised the role of individual difference, in terms of appraisal, coping and outcomes. Moving from a universal stimulus and response concept, stress now became an individual construct where subjective interpretation thus became figural. Autoethnography therefore provides an appropriate methodology to capture individual narratives and interpretations of lived experience.

From an experiential perspective, I found completing an autoethnographic study to be very challenging. The labour intensive and complex nature of studying stress from an autoethnographical transactional viewpoint, demonstrated to me why transactional based empirical studies such as this are lacking. In relative terms, vast amounts of data were captured, including time consuming journaling and supervision session transcriptions (further explication in chapter 4). The process of directed content analysis required forensic and multiple readings of data captured. I have a certain sympathy now for Soyini-Madison’s (2006) accusation of “navel gazing” because at times, I felt consumed by, and locked into, my own narrative. My research findings actually
demonstrate to me the problematic nature of this because as a defence mechanism, evidence points to patterns of turning inwards versus seeking social support, a sort of distorted interpretation of self-regulation that I believe was compounded by the autoethnographic methodology.

One of the characteristics of the transactional model of stress is that stress is now thought of in terms of discreet emotions (Houdmont 2009; Cox and Griffiths 2010). This creates a level of complexity where more empirical research has been called for, to help us to understand the nature of those emotions at work i.e. what do appraisal and coping processes look like in motion. Issues with interactional stress models had highlighted deficits in the direction of causation between demands and health for example (De Lange, et al. 2004; Tucker et al. 2008). This pointed to the difficulty of studying / researching what happens between the external (environment) and the outcome i.e. the processes of appraisal, re-appraisal and coping that lie between. Having completed an autoethnographic study, I now believe however that the layered approach that it involves is efficacious to study these processes in a manner that other qualitative and quantitative approaches would fail to achieve, based my comparative analysis of options discussed in this chapter.

3.5 Research Method Rationale: Data Capture

Researchers using the autoethnographic approach typically gather data through their own writings (Schwandt 2007; Ellis and Bochner 2000). Data captured in this manner allows for reflection upon experience with the potential to yield important qualitative analytic findings (Atkinson 2006; Delamont 2009). According to Hays and Gay (2011), professionals are expected to display enhanced self-regulatory skills and be able to understand how they perform, using this knowledge to plan their ongoing professional development, building on strengths and addressing weaknesses. Larrivee (2008) argues that reflective practice moves us from a knowledge base of distinct skills, to a stage in our career where we are able to modify our skills to suit specific contexts and situations, and eventually to invent new strategies.
Critical reflection fosters a deep examination of one’s assumptions and beliefs about how the world should work (Brookfield 1995). Davis et al. (2014) for example employed an autoethnographic reflection as a contemplative tool in understanding graduate student learning experiences. Three participants kept weekly journals of their writing progress and they also captured their reflections on course material. These reflections provided valuable insights for the progression of the students themselves, but also for the ongoing improvement of the course they were studying for the course directors. Stevens and Cooper (2009) argue that the development of critical reflection ability and retention of key ideas and concepts fosters clarity of thought, better writing ability, organisation of ideas, and even better health. In this section I discuss the rationale for data collection methods used in this study i.e. reflective journaling and transcribed supervision meetings.

3.5.1 Reflective Journaling

3.5.1.1 Overview of Reflective Journaling as a Data Collection Method

One method of data collection I employed was the use of a reflective journal. Details around frequency, type and content are covered in subsequent chapters of this dissertation. By way of introduction to the notion of reflective journaling in this paper however, it is appropriate to point out that as a method of data collection, it is closely associated with Dewey’s (1933) theory of reflective thinking (Farrell 2012). Dewey proposed that reflective thinking occurs in situations of perplexity where uncertainty within situations triggers the person to inquire and find information to resolve this tension (Epp 2008, p.1380).

Building on Dewey’s theory, Schon (1983) described a theory of knowledge acquisition known as reflective practice: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Jone and Joness 2013). Schon (1991) challenged the notion of science and technical knowledge as the prevailing hegemony, suggesting that such knowledge might be effective where there is ‘high, hard ground’ but pointed out that professionals work in “messy swamps
filled with uncertainty, where artistic and intuitive practices are essential” (1991 p. 34). Schon (1991) suggested that much of what professionals know is learned by doing in practice, through a process of shifting back and forth between reflecting-in-and-on-action.

Academia has embraced the concept of reflection as valuable to critical thinking, insight, and learning; a source of truth, knowledge, and self-regulation (Onah and Sinclair 2015; MacKenzie et al. 2013). Reflective processes have been credited with being a medium to nudge students from engaging in just basic thinking to critical inquiry (Pond et al. 1991; Callister 1993; Cameron and Mitchell 1993). Moreover, engaging in reflection has been credited with providing opportunity for students to explore judgments and clinical decisions that have been acted on in practice (Mantsoukas and Jasper 2004); further providing a chance to change practice as the student ponders the integration of theory and practice (Burton 2000; Duke and Appleton 2000).

Rather than attempting to control researcher values through method or by bracketing assumptions, the aim is to consciously acknowledge those values. Keeping self-reflective journals is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity, whereby researchers use their journal to examine “personal assumptions and goals” and clarify “individual belief systems and subjectivities” (Ahern as cited in Russell and Kelly 2002, p. 2). Whilst keeping a reflective journal is a common practice in qualitative research, particularly reflexive research (Etherington 2004), there is relatively little literature on the use of reflective journals in the research process, and limited guidance for novice researchers as to the purposes of keeping a reflective journal from a methodological perspective and how to use their reflections as an integral part of the research process (Ortlipp 2012).
3.5.1.2 **Rationale for use of Reflective Journaling**

In explaining the concept of reflective journaling as a data capture method, the origins of this method were traced back to Dewey’s (1933) conceptualisation of critical thinking. Dewey’s theory reflects a central tenet of both gestalt and transactional stress theory, that of the uniqueness of the individual. He proposed that reflective thinking occurs in situations of perplexity where uncertainty within situations triggers the person to inquire and find information to resolve this tension (Epp 2008, p. 1380). Dewey’s individual response theory in terms of coping in perplex situations, is in distinct contrast to Seyle’s general adaptive model of stress. The latter model subsumes a generalised response to stress inducing stimuli and therefore, individual insights are not applicable. In contrast, in addressing stress within a contemporary framework, the use of a reflective tool such as the journal is appropriate.

From an epistemological perspective, Schon’s (1983) theory of knowledge acquisition - reflective practice: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action challenges the notion of science and technical knowledge as the prevailing hegemony. This reflects core arguments of the transactional approach to understanding stress and the subjective appraisal mechanisms that underlie current stress thinking. Given that stress is thought of in terms of process, discreet emotions, a relational conduit between organism and environment, the rationale for a qualitative / autoethnographic approach methodology for this study examining self-regulation was deemed appropriate. Schon suggested that a different approach might be effective where there is ‘high, hard ground’ but as my study is concerned with examining my professional practice in the ‘messy swamps’ filled with uncertainty, more artistic and intuitive practices are essential (p. 34). The research journal is effective for capturing such data (Epp 2010).

I broke down the constituents of the word autoethnography when introducing it in this paper as my chosen qualitative research methodology. It was explained in terms of being based on a systematic analysis (*graphy*) of personal experience (*auto*), with the intent of understanding experience cultural (*ethno*) (Ellis et al. 2011). It was explained as being
an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (e.g. the work environment), a self-narrative that critiques the situations of self with others in social contexts (Martinez 2015). Autoethnographic findings are generally presented in terms of vignettes as in the case of this study. Moon (2008) maintains that taking the view of a journal as a series of stories makes it possible to work with the material of a journal in new and vibrant ways, commensurate with the autoethnographical methodology.

3.5.1.3  **Empirical Support for Reflective Journaling**

The value of reflective journaling has found fertile territory in the realms of academia (Dubuc-Charbonneau and Durand Bush 2015; Arcand et al. 2007; Simon and Durand-Bush 2009). In a study reflecting similar research interests to my own, Dubuc-Charbonneau and Durand-Bush (2015) completed a mixed methods study looking at the effects of a self-regulation intervention on the stress, burnout, well-being, and self-regulation capacity levels of university student-athletes. The purpose of this study was to implement and assess the impact of a person-entered, self-regulation intervention on the stress, burnout, well-being, and self-regulation capacity of eight university student-athletes experiencing burnout. Students maintained a reflective journal to document their daily thoughts, behaviours, and how they felt, along with any pertinent information regarding their effective or ineffective regulation of stress, burnout, and well-being. The intervention tested in the study resulted in significant decreases in stress and burnout. Well-being and self-regulation capacity levels significantly increased as the intervention progressed. A principal method of data collection used in that study was reflective journaling that captured the subjective interpretations of movement in the narratives of the students themselves.
Demonstrating the efficacy of autoethnography in leadership studies, Larson (2011) used this approach to understand her lived experiences of change as she transitioned to being a leader within a large educational institution. She alluded to the importance of journaling and reflecting on the events around her to help make sense of the change process during the transition. She speaks of the tough days where her journaling and reflections helped her to derive meaning from difficult situations, and where she was able to use those reflections to grow into the role. Mazzetti (2011) posits that an emphasis on appraisal; how we personally assess the significance of an event, an encounter, or a situation, focuses our attention on capturing the personal meaning of the stress experience. Mazetti’s use of reflective journaling in her autoethnographic study of her own work related stress experiences allowed her to identify specific stress inducers in her own practice through the retrospective analysis of field notes.

Such studies demonstrate that journaling is efficacious in fostering heightened self-awareness toward the achievement of ongoing practice improvement. Duncan (2008) applied reflective journaling in a six year autoethnographic study aimed at improving her practice as a hyper-media designer. Reflective journaling in particular, she reflects; allowed her to capture the interrelationship between perception and reality. Indeed, Duncan was following guidelines from Yin (1989) that specifically promotes the maintenance of a reflective journal as part of all hypermedia design projects. Fundamental to my study is the concept of coping in terms of self-regulation.

Reflective journaling was used effectively as a data collection method by Phillips et al. (2013) in an interpretative phenomenological analysis of men and women’s’ coping strategies relating to transactional stress in an in vitro-fertilisation treatment (IVF) treatment programme. This research shows that for these participants, shorter-term behavioural strategies were informed by longer term goals, which is consistent with a self-regulatory approach to understanding how people cope with the stress of treatment for infertility. Although previous research had identified coping strategies used during fertility treatment and the impact of those strategies on adjustment, the use of reflective journaling helped to identify not only what strategies they adopted, also why they
adopted them and the processes of appraisal they used to discriminate between various options.

3.5.1.4 Advantages and Limitations of Reflective Journaling

The process of reflective journaling can be an agent for realising positive changes in itself through the completion of active reflection (Bolton 2010; Dubuc-Charbonneau and Durand Bush 2015). Dubuc-Charbonneau and Durand Bush (2015) reported in their autoethnographic study of self-regulation in athletics, that whilst early improvements in self-regulation capacity were not statistically significant, sharing experiences with the researcher, and being introduced to preparation and coping strategies such as goal setting, time management, and journaling, may have been sufficient in generating early positive changes in the student-athletes’ emotional and physical exhaustion, stress, and well-being levels.

In terms of reflective journaling in autoethnography specifically, it is an approach that allows for the capture of lived reality encountered in the field (Ellis 2010: Ellingson 2012). Gestalt is concerned with achieving self-regulation through mastery in the here-and-now and the flexibility and accessibility of journaling allows for reflections to be captured in the immediacy of the moment. In contrast to interviews etc. there is no dependency on other individuals for participation, or no set times that must be adhered to. I found the journal to be a blank canvass that allowed me to capture my subjective interpretations of the messy, gritty reality of leadership and living, when and where I chose to, and for how long I chose to complete a reflection.

Bolton (2010) who has contributed much to the field of journaling in reflexive practice contends that reflexivity is about finding ways to question our attitudes, theories in use, values, assumptions, prejudices and actions of habit. In reflecting on my attitudes, theories, values, assumptions and actions, I found the reflective journal to be a safe arena in which to explore those very personal constructs. It allowed me to externalise what would normally be retained in personal recesses e.g. thoughts and feelings in relation to
myself and others that I would find difficult to voice. It was particularly useful in terms of allowing the dark side of the moon to illuminate itself.

Despite its numerous advantages, a limitation of the method is that I believe I developed an over-reliance on the journal. It became a sort of safe haven, a type of uncritical friend. For the neurotic whose processes include habitually turning away from environmental contact, perhaps the journal was complicit in exacerbating this problem. Berry and Patti (2015) speak of the solipsistic potential from reflexive autoethnography where the risk of one becoming “insular” or “singular” for the researcher exists (2015 p. 187). In contrast to the dialogical nature of data captured in supervision meetings, journaling required the creation of space and time, resulting in a one directional out-pouring of discreet emotions based on my own unchallenged interpretations of experience.

A recognised disadvantage of journaling is that it is deeply reflective writing, and this skill does not come generally come readily (Bolton 2010; Newton, 1996). Bellman (1996) lamented her own inadequacy in introducing and supporting this valuable mode of reflection with her co-researchers. She quotes her co-researchers reasons for not maintaining their reflective journal e.g. “embarrassing”, “we 'reflect anyway over a drink with the girls’, “couldn't see the relevanc””, “too depressing”, “you forgot to give me one”, “I find it a threat because someone could read it”, “no-one else was doing it”, “I don't see the point really” (1996 p.56).

I found that to maintain commitment journaling required substantial discipline; not only to sit down to journal in the context of a busy day, but also to give it time, to allow reflections to reach beyond a surface level recant of the day’s events. I believe that in the context of completing an academic piece of work, it can become a task that must be completed, rather than one that should be actively engaged with. When that situation arises, I believe the process becomes counterproductive. To prevent this from occurring, I believe any researcher completing a sizeable piece of research must be aware and honest with themselves to acknowledge when this is happening.
3.5.2 Transcribed Supervisory Meetings

Another rich source of data captured in the dialogous tradition of gestalt was achieved through the transcription of academic supervisory meetings. In chapter 4 of this paper, specifics around the deployment of same such as number of sessions, transcription methodology etc. are described in detail as part of the overall methodological description for this study. In this section, the rationale for, empirical validation of, strengths and limitations of this research data collection method are discussed.

3.5.2.1 An Overview of the Supervisory Process and Research Supervisor

The academic supervision for this thesis was completed in accordance with the University of Limerick Academic Supervision Charter (Appendix 3). It is important to note that this is a structured doctoral programme where the first two years are taught based and the researcher then attends to the completion of their own research. At the point of commencement by the researcher of their own research, an academic supervisor is assigned to the student. The student advances through the research phase of the programme through a series of progression meetings with an academic board accompanied by their supervisor on an annual basis.

The academic supervisor assigned to me was Dr. Patrick Ryan. Dr. Ryan is Director of the Doctoral Programme in Clinical Psychology at the University of Limerick. A graduate of Queens University in Belfast, he has extensive practical experience working as a clinical psychologist and he has been involved in the training of mental health professionals for ten years with a particular interest in the area of life span development and its contribution to understanding family relations.

During discussions around appropriate methods of data capture for this research, it was agreed that the academic supervisory arena offered potential fertile grounds to capture data. The dialogical and interpersonal nature of academic supervisory sessions became apparent to both supervisor and student early in the process. Empirical evidence strongly
supports the efficacy of such a mode of data collection and this evidence is reviewed now.

3.5.2.2 Empirical Support for use of Transcribed Supervisory Meetings

According to Pettifor et al. (2011), supervisory contexts provide researchers with invaluable opportunities to gain insight through a relationship between supervisee and supervisor. Farber (2012) suggests that supervision also cultivates relationship competencies by providing an environment of authenticity, genuineness, and collaboration. This competency is reflected by Kotzê (2014) who writes about the transformative effects of academic supervision. She was reflecting on supervision with a student of hers completing an autoethnographic study investigating her lived experience with anorexia and bulimia. In Kotzê’s reflection, she focuses on challenges for the supervisor and student, the supervisory relationship, and the strategies employed to move beyond impasse.

Kotzê highlighted moments when the supervisor / researcher relationship came to an impasse when analysing data generated in the study. She also writes however about how their relationship helped them to respond to those difficulties, moving them beyond the impasse. The use of specific knowledge, skills and strategies in the supervisory relationship she suggests, opened up space for agency and movement within these moments of impasse. Blacker (2009) also demonstrates the efficacy of using transcribed supervisory meetings in the context of an autoethnographic investigation examining leadership within a psychiatric day hospital. Her research attempted to gain an understanding of the experiences of staff and patients on an acute adult inpatient ward through the use of a psychodynamically-orientated observation methodology. Blacker’s findings uncovered a complex system that impacted upon ward atmosphere, relationships, behaviour and perception of job role and responsibility. The research process also appeared to highlight important considerations relating to the role of affect and the process of learning in qualitative research.
3.5.2.3 **Strengths and Limitations of the Transcribed Method**

According to Struthers (2012), supervision allows for the sharing of perspectives with others to help avoid solipsism, the condition I described previously in this section where the student becomes so engrained in their own perspective that they begin to lack an appreciation for differing views. Progression from the taught element of the doctoral programme to the research segment resulted in a relative degree of isolation where contact with other doctoral students was removed in terms of scheduled university modules where the collective would gather, share experiences and lend moral support to each other. That period also resulted in the turning to the journal, and the development of conditions rife for solipsism.

Supervision meetings however provided an opportunity to externalise, to engage in insightful dialogue and shared reflections. Supervisory meetings were transcribed within a matter of days of each session. Although this is a time-consuming way to complete data capture, it fosters an undeniable entrenchment with the content of the material that using a third party transcription would not afford. As a gestaltist, I recognise the transformative potential from healthy environmental contact including dialogue. As in the case of Pettifor (2011), I found the supervisory relationship useful in helping to gain insights, in an environment described by Farber (2012) as “authentic, genuine, and collaborative” (2012, p.42).

There were limitations with regards to this approach however. In the first instance, much of the time in supervision was taken up with what I would describe as technical or practical issues such as the adherence to deadlines, preparation for progression meetings, content review of writing etc. That is of course the function of academic supervision and therefore, discussion time around process was limited. This in turn limited the amount of useful data that was available to be captured in the transcripts, in contrast to the data captured in reflective journaling. In addition, the process of transcription itself is time consuming and arduous in nature.

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3.6 Data Analysis Method Rationale – Directed Content Analysis

In this section, the rationale for my method of data analysis is described. This is a deductive form of content analysis known as directed content analysis and the terms content, deductive and directed are used synonymously throughout this paper. The justification for the use of content analysis versus other qualitative analytical tools is provided in this section also. Then I describe directed content analysis as a data analysis tool contrasting it with inductive approaches. Empirical evidence demonstrating the efficacy of content analysis and directed content analysis in specific is provided. The strengths and limitations of this approach are discussed in this section also.

3.6.1 Content Analysis Overview

Content analysis is a widely used qualitative research technique (Schreier 2012). Rather than being a single method, current applications of content analysis show three distinct approaches: conventional, directed, and summative (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). All three approaches are used to interpret meaning from the content of text data and, hence, adhere to the naturalistic paradigm (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). The major differences among the approaches are coding schemes, origins of codes, and threats to trustworthiness. In conventional content analysis, coding categories are derived directly from the text data. With a directed approach, analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes. A summative content analysis involves counting and comparisons, usually of keywords or content, followed by the interpretation of the underlying context.

As a research method, it represents a systematic means of describing and qualifying phenomena data that are summarised, described, and interpreted (Schreier 2012; Downe-Wamboldt 1992). This is achieved through the process of systematic classification, coding and identification of themes or patterns (Moretti et al. 2011). Qualitative content analysis defines itself within this framework as an approach of empirical, methodological, controlled analysis of texts without rash quantification
(Mayring 2015). It is used to identify main themes from the data and is appropriate for examining experiences and attitudes toward a particular subject (Polit 2013).

Content analysis has a long history in research, dating back to the 18th century in Scandinavia (Rosengren 1981) and beyond to the 7th Century. In the United States, content analysis was first used as an analytic technique at the beginning of the 20th century (Barcus 1959). Initially, researchers used content analysis as either a qualitative or quantitative method in their studies (Berelson 1952). Later, content analysis was used primarily as a quantitative research method, with text data coded into explicit categories and then described using statistics. This approach is sometimes referred to as quantitative analysis of qualitative data (Morgan 1993). Recognition of the widescale potential of content analysis as a method of qualitative analysis for researchers has led to its increased application and popularity (Mayring 2015; Moretti et al. 2011: Elo and Kyngäs 2008). In summary, the development of content analysis can be broken down into three distinct phases (Table 12).

Table 12      Development Phases in Content Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activities / Significant Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Preliminary Phase</td>
<td>7th Century</td>
<td>Analyses of Old Testament texts were carried out. Lutherans and Pietists in the 18th century their texts were subjected to a comparative content analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Consolidation Phase</td>
<td>1930’s</td>
<td>Analysis of mass media to assess public opinion. Experimental division for the study of wartime communications- second world war.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fine Developments and Interdisciplinary Expansion</td>
<td>1950’s</td>
<td>Conference on content analysis held by the Committee on Linguistics and Psychology of the Social Sciences Research Council in 1955 at Allerton House, University of Illinois, Monticello (Allerton House Conference). Recognition for role of qualitative content analysis i.e. a focus beyond frequency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Krippendorf (2012)
3.6.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative content analysis is a method of analysing data that goes beyond a quantitative search for frequency of occurrence of text (Schreier 2012). As a research method, it represents a systematic and objective means of both describing and quantifying phenomena (Elo et al. 2014; Schreier, 2012). A prerequisite for successful qualitative content analysis is that data can be reduced to concepts that describe the research phenomenon (Elo and Kyngäs 2008; Hsieh and Shannon 2005) by creating categories, concepts, a model, conceptual system, or conceptual map (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). The research question specifies what to analyse and what to create (Schreier 2012).

In qualitative content analysis, the abstraction process is the stage during which concepts are created. Usually, some aspects of the process can be readily described, but it also partially depends on the researcher’s insight or intuitive action, which may be very difficult to describe to others (Elo and Kyngäs 2008; Graneheim and Lundman 2004). From the perspective of validity, it is important to report how the results were created. Readers should be able to clearly follow the analysis and resulting conclusions (Schreier 2012). Qualitative content analysis can be used in either an inductive or a deductive way. Both inductive and deductive content analysis processes involve three main phases (Table 13): preparation, organisation, and reporting of results (Schreier 2012).

Table 13 Phases in Qualitative Content Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Activities / Significant Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Data Collection Phase</td>
<td>Gathering data, and selecting the unit of analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Organisation Phase</td>
<td>In the inductive approach, the organisation phase includes open coding, creating categories, and abstraction (Elo and Kyngäs 2008). In deductive content analysis, the organisation phase involves categorization matrix development, whereby all the data are reviewed for content and coded for correspondence to or exemplification of the identified categories (Polit and Beck 2012).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reporting of Results</td>
<td>In the reporting phase, results are described by the content of the categories describing the phenomenon using a selected approach (either deductive or inductive).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Elo et al. 2014)
3.6.3 Directed Content Analysis Described

Directed content analysis is useful in circumstances where theory or prior research exists about the phenomenon. Potter and Levine-Donnerstien (1999) categorised this approach of content analysis as a deductive method (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). Directed content analysis is an approach to data analysis that involves the application of conceptual categories to a new context. It is appropriate to use when existing theory or prior research about a phenomenon is incomplete, and could benefit from further description. The goal in doing so is to validate or extend conceptually, a theoretical framework or theory (Hsieh and Shannon 2005, p. 1281).

Directed content analysis is guided by a more structured process than used in a conventional approach to content analysis. Conventional content analysis is generally used within a study design whose aim is to describe a phenomenon. This type of design is usually appropriate when existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited. Researchers avoid using preconceived categories, allowing instead the categories and names for categories to flow from the data. Directed content analysis uses existing theory or prior research in contrast and researchers begin by identifying key concepts or variables as initial coding categories of analysis, bringing them in connection with the text (Figure 6). Hsieh and Shannon (2005) advise that the directed approach is useful when the purpose is to validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory.
Chapter Three - Rationale

Figure 6  Directed Content Analytical Approach

Research Question - Object

Theoretical based definition of the aspects of analysis, main categories, and subcategories

Theoretical based formulation of definitions, examples and coding rules for the categories and collecting them in a coding agenda

Revision of categories and coding agenda

Final working through the texts

Interpretation of the results

Formative check of reliability

Summative check of reliability

Source: Mayring (2015, p.1)
3.6.4 Rationale for the use of Directed Content Analysis

This study involves the application of gestalt conceptual categories to a new context i.e. transactional stress model. It is appropriate to use this approach because existing theory and prior research about transactional stress is incomplete, and could benefit from further description. My review of extant literature demonstrates that the process orientation of the transactional stress theoretical approach is more labour intensive for both researcher and study participant than interactional stress theory (Mark and Smith 2012; Lyon 2012). In consequence, studies informed by transactional stress theory are fewer in the scientific literature than those guided by other models such as interactional models. This situation is problematic because it identifies that contemporary empirical practice is dominated by attempts to continue to understand work related stress in structural terms, when it is widely accepted now that stress is a process based phenomenon.

The very complexity of the transactional stress model means that it is hard to empirically capture, unlike the simpler models of Karasek (1979) and Siegrist (1996). Also, Cooper et al. (2001) and Cox and Ferguson (1991) have stated that despite the widespread use of the term “coping”, there are difficulties surrounding its definition, as it can be seen as a process, a behaviour, as a stable trait, or as situation specific. According to Houdmont (2009), this highlights one of the major challenges associated with transactional stress theory i.e. the complexity of its application. Through the deployment of gestalt theory as conceptual categories in this study, an objective of the research was to assess the potential from gestalt to effectively map out various processes involved in my habitual environmental transactions.

Daniels et al. (2004) have suggested that the conception of appraisal in the transactional model is too simplistic and doesn’t include individuals' histories, and anticipated futures. Cox (1987) also states that the processes discussed may not be as rational as presented in transactional theories. In addition, the definition of coping in transactional stress does not explain the possible negative effects for those who cannot cope (Quine
and Pahl 1991), simply that demands may exceed resources available to cope with them. Also it is apparent that, over time, the same person (or group of people) can often redefine the stressfulness of a particular environmental stimulus indicating the dynamic nature of the method in which individuals (and groups of individuals) appraise stressful situations (Haslam 2004).

According to Mark and Smith (2012), while there is plenty of supporting research on the main effects of individual difference factors such as hardiness, locus of control, self-efficacy, and their relationship to health outcomes, results into the mediating and moderating roles of these factors are far less conclusive (Cooper et al. 2001; Spector 2006; Parkes 1994). The directed content approach is intended to impose gestalt codes onto my narrative captured in reflective journaling and in dialogue captured in text from supervision meetings, to create a gestalt picture of those processes including the impact of history and anticipated future, the messy and real life capturing of rational and irrational coping strategies and mediating and moderating healthy personality characteristics.

3.6.5 Empirical Evidence of Applicability of Directed Content Analysis

Ample evidence exists suggesting that directed content analysis is now widely used amongst researchers (Mayring 2015; Grimmer and Stewart 2013; van Soest-Poortvliet and van der Steen 2011; Thyme et al. 2013; Rosvik et al 2011). Thyme et al. (2013) for example completed a study using directed content analysis in an art-psychotherapy study. Psychodynamic themes were used to analyse pictures and words from transcribed psychodynamic psychotherapeutic sessions. Rosvik et al. (2011) also employed a directed content qualitative analytical approach to examine the practice of dementia care in nursing homes. Focus groups were analysed using directed content analysis based on care theory generated by the philosophy of Kitwood (1997), and prior research on knowledge translation.
A pertinent example of directed content analysis in action examining stress and coping comes from a study on psychosocial consequences of unemployment (Mayring et al. 2000). Fifty teachers who became unemployed as a consequence of German unification after 1990 took part in open-ended interviews. The material was transcribed and analysed through directed qualitative content analysis. Three deductive categories were created to appraise the degree of stress of the interviewed persons - no stress, little stress and high stress. 

Kircanski (2015) used directed content analysis in a qualitative investigation to examine the phenomenon of therapist self-disclosure. Her literature review found that a death exists in research relating to areas around therapist self-disclosure. In particular, she found that there is little or no research on how self-disclosure is used by student therapists, in actual psychotherapy sessions, particularly in the context of sessions in which difficult or traumatic subject matter is discussed.

Her study involved a sample of 5 therapist-participants from university-based community counselling centres. Transcribed videotaped sessions in which client- and therapist-participants discussed trauma were analysed. A qualitative directed content analysis was employed, using a coding system that was created based on the extant literature on therapist self-disclosure, to examine verbal expressions of therapist self-disclosure in psychotherapy sessions with trauma survivors.

### 3.6.6 Strengths and Limitations of Directed Content Analysis

Initially, criticism of the content analysis method posited that although it provided a useful and flexible method of analysis for a variety of researchers, a lack of a firm definition and procedures had potentially limited its wider application of content analysis (Tesch 1990). Since the earlier days of its permeation in empirical research however, significant steps have been taken to ensure a more structured and procedural approach, thus increasing its status as an analytical tool (Mayring 2014; Bloomberg and Volpe 2015).
The strength of qualitative content analysis relative to other interpretation methods resides precisely in the fact that the analysis is resolved into individual steps of interpretation which are determined in advance. The whole process is thereby made comprehensible to others and intersubjectively testable. Consequently, it can also be transferred to other subjects, is available for use by others, and can be regarded as a scientific method (Mayring 2014). In this study, I was in a position to employ the assistance of intra-coder testers to ensure the appropriateness of my coding categories (see chapter 4). It took three levels of code testing to ensure consistency in coding application and resulted in significant modification of coding rules. Although this was a time consuming and labour intensive process in itself, the ability to achieve intra-coder validity was possible through the structured approach to data analysis afforded by the directed content method.

The differentiation of content analysis is usually limited to classifying it as primarily a qualitative versus quantitative research method. A more thorough analysis of the ways in which qualitative content analysis can be used would potentially illuminate key issues for researchers to consider in the design of studies purporting to (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). According to Elo et al. (2014), a more focused discussion about the quality of qualitative content analysis findings is also needed, particularly as several articles have been published on the its validity and reliability (Neuendorf 2011; Potter and Levine-Donnerstein 1999; Rourke and Anderson 2004). Also, whereas many standardised procedures are available for performing quantitative content analysis, this is not the case for qualitative content analysis (Krippendorf and Bock 2009).

One of the key decisions for choosing a directed approach to the analysis of captured data was that it brought a degree of efficiency and structure to my research activity. I had a defined set of research codes based on the gestalt cycle of experience. Where captured data met the coding rules it was possible to glean as evidence. In contrast to an interpretative phenomenological approach or inductive content analysis however, data was not allowed to organically organise into novel or unexpected themes. If the component of the gestalt cycle of experience was present it was captured, but my
analytical framework was limited to searching for evidence of a set number of gestalt themes. A possible limitation of this study therefore from the use of directed content analysis is that some important information could perhaps be overlooked in the data as no search was completed for same.

3.7 Rationale for Using Gestalt as Conceptual Framework

In this section, a rationale is offered for the deployment of gestalt theory as a conceptual framework in which to understand my transactional stress experiences. This defence begins with an overview of the gestalt cycle of experience or contact styles. This relates to how gestalt psychotherapy views itself as ‘the science and technique of figure / background forming in the organism / environmental field (Tonnesvang et al. 2010). The rationale for the use of the cycle of experience as an analytical framework is then provided before empirical evidence of the use of the cycle of experience in informing research is described. This section is subsequently completed with a discussion of the strengths and limitations of this approach.

3.7.1 The Gestalt Cycle of Experience Model

What became apparent from a review of extant literature regarding gestalt is that criticism tends to rest on techniques and lack of empirical evidence, versus the content of the theory in itself (Levine 2012, Wedding and Corsini 2013; McLeod 2010). There are concerns expressed about the lack of a developmental model (Wheeler 2012; Spagnuolo-Lobb 2012); regret is expressed by some regarding the failure for gestalt to permeate further into informing other non-therapeutic disciplines such as leadership (Biehl Missal and Fitzek 2012). My literature review however also showed gestalt’s applicability across a range of disciplines including a personal and professional development framework taught globally (Woldt and Toman 2005), research (Barber 2013; Brownell 2008), organisational change contexts (Nevis 2013) and pedagogical praxis (Slattery and Danaher 2015). It is important to recognise that as part of the protestation against deterministic psychotherapy schools, gestalt played a large part in
contributing theory that significantly enhanced the rise in popularity of humanistic psychotherapy over the past number of decades.

As in the case of contemporary stress theory, gestalt theory holds that the self is not seen as a static thing, but rather a continually evolving process defined and illuminated by how a person makes contact with their environment (Day 2015; Pryor 2009). This process, when completed in a healthy and unimpeded way, generally follows a process called the cycle of experience. This cycle is a basic map for how a person becomes aware of a need, mobilises to meet that need, and achieves satisfaction (Burley and Freier 2004). The key phases of the process are sensation, awareness, mobilisation, action, contact, satisfaction, and withdrawal / rest. One of the most commonly cited examples of this process is the act of eating. We begin with the physical feeling of hunger (sensation) which is generally followed by our acknowledgement of the hunger: “I feel hungry” (awareness). We take action to find and acquire food (mobilization), we eat the food (contact), our hunger is sated, we feel full (satisfaction), and we are done with the process; it no longer draws our attention (withdrawal) (Pryor 2009).

Given this map of a fundamental healthy human process, we are then able to examine how the process gets interrupted, providing information for analysis and treatment. Suppose a young girl desires affectionate contact with her father. She initiates contact and tries to be affectionate with her father but, for whatever reason, he rebuffs her (possibly due to physical illness or his own discomfort with physical affection). His reason to rebuff her is not important. What is important is how she perceives it. Since there is no overt or outright explanation to the girl, she perceives that he does not want contact with her, or that she has done something wrong. So the girl, rather than feel the pain and frustration of a continually unsatisfied need, may develop her own reason for the rebuff (“physical contact with men is not okay,” or “there is something undesirable about me”). In this example, the cycle has been interrupted at the point of contact.
Another example, a boy may grow up in a family where emotions are neither valued nor acknowledged. In this situation, the boy may learn that feeling sad or angry is not allowed, or even potentially dangerous, and may develop a habit of ignoring or suppressing his emotions completely. The cycle here is being interrupted at the point of awareness. The ways in which we interrupt the cycle at a young age (or any age) can stay with us throughout our lives. This habitual way of trying to use an old solution to present problems is referred to as unfinished business. One of the goals in gestalt therapy is to help people become aware of the ways they have learned to interrupt themselves and empower them to make new choices (Day 2015; Pryor 2009; Novack et al. 2012). Figure 7 is an integrated representation of healthy and unhealthy cycles of experience.

**Figure 7** The Gestalt Experience Cycle (Healthy and Unhealthy)

Source: Stevenson (2012)
3.7.2 Rationale: The Gestalt Cycle as Conceptual Framework

The gestalt cycle of experience (contact) model provided illustrates how, as with contemporary stress theory, gestalt conceives that experience is not a static thing, but rather a continually evolving process defined and illuminated by how one makes contact with his or her environment (Tonnesvang et al. 2010; Novack et al. 2015). The emergence of a dominant process based stress theory means that stress is no longer thought of in terms of “detachable entities” (Coyne and Gottlieb 1996, p. 966) like simply a stimulus and response, but more in terms of a process where the emphasis is on “tracing out” (Aldwin 2000, p. 42) the transactional nature of that process. The depiction of causal pathways allows for a more directional schema of stress and to what is being experienced, focusing on the emotional quality of the experience itself.

Similarly, the process of experience and awareness in gestalt occurs in sequence, as depicted in the cycle of experience (Roth 2010). This is represented by Perls (1976) as a continuum of phases “where awareness emerges into a foreground, is experienced, changed, assimilated, and then falls into the background as the next awareness emerges” (1976, p.16). Transactional stress theory also moves in phases through the presence of antecedent environmental hazards, individual appraisal and coping, and stress related outcomes (Lyon 2012; Cox and Griffiths 2010). A formidable benefit of the transactional model is that it addresses limitations of interactional models where ambiguity lies in direction of causation, between demands and health outcomes for example (De Lange et al 2004; Tucker et al. 2008). Although it does address such deficits, wide scale recognition exists that empirical research is required to better understand those processes. The structured flow of the gestalt cycle of experience (Neumann and Neumann 2015) imposed into a transactional stress model is designed to capture how those processes work as patterns of appraisal, coping and outcomes in my practice of leadership.

One of the biggest strengths of transactional theory is that it takes into account the dynamic relationship between the individual and his / her environment, and the experience of stress as the result of exposure to psychosocial risk factors, with health
outcomes also associated (Cox et al. 2006). Importantly, the theory accommodates subjective experiences in a way that many models and definitions do not because it looks at individual subjective appraisals of the environment, taking into account available coping resources (Cox et al. 2006). Therefore, in seeking to find a practical analytical framework that also accommodates the individuality of the organism, and the place for the subjective interpretation of lived experienced, the application of gestalt theory in attempting to explain lived experience within a transactional construct is rational.

3.7.3 **Empirical Evidence: Gestalt as an Analytical Framework**

The gestalt cycle of experience permeates contemporary discussion regarding organisational change. Blom (2010) for example completed a grounded theory study investigating the dynamics of organisational identity, prior to, and following significant change. Using a combination of deductive and inductive content analysis, her study offered a unique opportunity to follow an existentially challenged organisation as its members reacted to, and attempted to make sense of, significant change in terms of redundancies, consolidation and various branch closures. Blom found gestalt to be effective

In analysing and dealing with complex and dynamic organisational phenomena at individual, dyadic and small group levels through its focus on phenomenology and heightening awareness.

Blom (2010 p.18)
The result of Blom’s research is a hypothesis about identity work in organisations, firmly anchored in, and commensurate with a present-day revised gestalt paradigm, which she presents as a contribution to a formal development of a gestalt organisational theory. Her hypothesis stated that:

Identity work in organisations is a dialectical positioning, both individual and collective, between the existential polar opposites of inclusion and exclusion. The processes through which identity work is enacted are cognitive, affective, and conative, instrumentally served by the contact boundary dynamics of egotism, confluence, projection, retroflection, introjection, and deflection.

(Blom 2010, p.13)

Roth (2010) used the cycle of experience to examine a wilderness-centered rites of passage intervention that included experiential components of: (1) emersion in nature, (2) nature-based activities and challenges, (3) alone time in wilderness, (4) exposure to nature-based archetypes, elementals, and folklore, and (5) participation in community that supports connection through in ritual, ceremony, dialogue, and reflection. The participants included three early adolescent males and one adult male, a parent participant. Data collection methods included participant observation, journal entries, photo documentation, photo elicited interviews, processing groups, and field notes. A multiple case narrative format, each focusing on a program activity component, was utilized to present data and findings representing the transformative process of the participants.

In completing the outdoor experiences of this research, the participants moved through the cycle of experience as they hiked on rough terrain. By exemplifying the cycle through this experience, the cycle began with a sensation of unsteadiness or imbalance. The awareness may be a need to be more present, to attend to the physical ground, or to have more intentioned movements and a wider stance. Mobilisation of energy may be a deepening of need as one continues to stumble and a focusing attention on their
physical body and creating a mental picture of their intended physical changes. Action may be making the shift in their physical body. Contact may be a fuller shift of their attention to the interaction between their body and the ground and recognizing and deepening of experience of themselves in a fuller embodied presence attaining better balance and stability as they continue to hike. Integration and assimilation may be an enjoyment and reflection on their experience of heightened ability and self-efficacy with a fuller embodied presence and considerations of the potential applications and benefits of embodied presence in other aspects of their lives. Closure and withdrawal may be a shift from embodiment to something in the natural environment that catches their attention.

Barber (2006) completed a case study methodology examining change in a university setting and the fostering of a peer-learning community in an established charismatic organisation. The study involved an analysis of organisational culture through the application of the gestalt cycle of experience. Action research was used to collaboratively inquire into the success the gestalt informed peer-learning community through the voices of its participants, and a case study approach was employed to illuminate the day-to-day drama of facilitating cultural change within a resistive commercial setting. The findings from the study support the efficacy of the cycle of experience in bringing awareness of successful and unsuccessful aspects of the change process. Barbers study found that the department, to which the he was attached in particular, had seemingly become stuck between ‘awareness’ and the ‘mobilisation of energy’ in the change process.

Denton (2014) used the gestalt cycle of experience with sexually abused adolescents to study the impact of using forgiveness to break free from guilt and shame by helping to increase awareness of their emotional experiences. Abused adolescents have boundaries that distinguish them from their environment in order to preserve their identity. To make contact with the field, abused adolescents reach out and discover their own boundary (Brownell 2010). In good boundary functioning, abused adolescents move between final contact and contact breach or withdrawal (Gestalt destruction) of their environment.
Through awareness, abused adolescents develop insight into their contact and contact withdrawal patterns to make choices and to accept responsibility for their choices (Oaklander 2007, p.22). Abused adolescents’ contact with their environment or the lack thereof, determines, to a large extent, their development or growth. When abused adolescents come into contact with unresolved emotional experiences (unfinished business), the process of healing began to slow. Contact implies the dialogical relationship and an encounter between the subject and the object of consciousness (“me” and “not-me”) (O’Connor and Braverman 2009, p. 285). This process occurs due to abused adolescents’ physical and emotional needs and natural desire to regulate these needs through self-regulation.

3.7.4 Strengths and Limitations of Using the Gestalt COE

The gestalt cycle of experience / contact / awareness is one of the core tenets of the gestalt approach. It was first postulated by Perls at a time where psychotherapy was rather stuck in a fixed notion of trait, reductionism and determinism. It represented a substantial departure in explaining organism / environment interaction and created a flow or a map of experience in a manner that other psychotherapeutic schools did not. Similarly, transactional stress theory has shifted the focus from detachable entities to a systemic flow of experience from appraisal to outcome across a continuum of appraisal and coping.

Where the transactional model provides a comprehensive set of phases through which an organism passes in response to environmental hazard, the cycle of experience provides a comprehensive phase model of experiential existence that shares much in terms of direction and process. Both models place primordial emphasis on individual differences, subjective interpretation and the tension between opportunities for healthy and unhealthy ways of being. In the transactional stress model, management of stress is different to mastery of stress, and coping can entail unhealthy coping mechanisms. In gestalt, the urge to complete the cycle is assumed to be present in all individuals and therefore an organism will drive toward completion where drive behaviour maybe
unhealthy e.g. the paradoxical theory of change. The cycle of experience model has
erroneously been criticised for overemphasising the role of the organism, underplaying
the role of environment (Zinker 2013). This is a flawed analysis of the model as it
assumes organism / environmental interplay is seeped into the choices made either
consciously or autonomously by the organism throughout the cycle. Therefore, both the
gestalt cycle of experience and transactional stress models are grounded in the dynamic
relationship between organism and environment.

A limiting factor in this study is the availability of empirical evidence in terms of the
use of the cycle of experience, in addition to relatively limited availability of empirical
evidence produced on process oriented stress studies. If one was completing an
empirical investigation involving the JD-R model as opposed to the transactional stress
model, far more available studies could have informed this researcher. If one was
completing an empirical cognitive behavioural study focused on outcome, far more
empirical evidence would have been available to this researcher also. However, this
research is concerned with addressing gaps in contemporary knowledge in terms of the
processes of stress. In choosing an empirically underrepresented process model
(transactional) of stress, with an underrepresented process model of psychotherapy
(gestalt), I posit that this points to the fact that although this is not an easy or popular
way of investigating stress, it is an empirically valid and necessary way of doing it.
3.8 Chapter Summary and Conclusions

This chapter commenced with outlining the rationale for this research in terms of my primary goal of seeking to understand the role of self-regulation in the mastery of work related stress. The necessity for a study such as this in term of informing discourse in psychotherapy, stress research and leadership was outlined. The ontological and epistemological rationale for methodological and method choices made to best investigate the phenomenon in question was described. The veritable strengths and limitations of choices made in this research were attended to throughout this chapter as a precursor to an outline in the next chapter as to how those choices were applied in this research.

The main conclusions drawn in this chapter were based on available evidence that validates the choices made to inform this study (Figure 8). Alternative choices available were examined and a defence was presented throughout, as to why my research has proceeded on the basis of various decisions made. That allows for progression to the next chapter in which I now focus on providing for the reader, a thorough explication of how those choices translated into the methodological framework for this study. How the chosen research methods, identified as best-fit to fulfil my needs in this study, were deployed is also attended to in the next chapter entitled – Methodology.
Chapter Three - Rationale

Figure 8  Research Rationale

**Research Problem**
Research indicates that work related stress remains a significant issue for individuals, organisations, and society. Despite the evolution of stress theory to a process oriented conceptualisation, few processes studies relating to work related stress exist. In terms of helping me to improve my own coping mechanisms pertaining to work-related stress, a dearth of empirical research exists.

**Research Purpose**
To employ the use of gestalt theory as a conceptual analytical framework, in order to understand the transactional processes of work-related stress, in my practice of leadership. In doing so, the study is concerned with creating a level of awareness that will assist in achieving practice and wellbeing improvements. The study will also add value to the considerable body of knowledge on stress and work-related stress, to inform theory, practice, and policy.

**Research Questions**
(ii) What hazardous work (environmental) factors permeate my practice of leadership?
(iii) What are the dominant primary and secondary appraisal patterns used to assess the significance of an event, an encounter, or a situation?
(iii) What are the habitual coping mechanisms employed in response to the appraisal of an event, an encounter, or a situation?
(iv) What are dominant outcomes in terms of, a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale or life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health?
(v) What factors mediate healthy appraisal, coping and outcomes and how does a healthy cycle unfold?

**Summary of Rationale Provided**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Problem:</th>
<th>Researcher leadership practice; health and wellbeing issues; from WRS, and wider issues from WRS.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Purpose:</td>
<td>Examine mastery potential from self-regulation over WRS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficits Identified:</td>
<td>Extant Data – e.g. Lack of transactional empirical studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology:</td>
<td>Qualitative Autoethnography – To identify patterns, achieve layered accounts, complete labour intensive and complex study required to understand transactional stress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods:</td>
<td>(a) Data Capture (Reflective Journaling and Transcribed Supervisory Meetings)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(b) Data Analysis (Directed Content Analysis)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FOUR - METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter set forth the rationale for the completion of this study. In doing so, it highlighted requirements for further studies in stress, gestalt and leadership. Rationale was provided for the various choices that I have made in this study to best address those lacunas. The study is concerned with achieving the type of active and mindful awareness sought by gestaltists and therefore it depicted the rigorous decision making processes employed in this research around selecting methodologies and associated research methods deemed most appropriate to answer the research question. Arguments were set forth in defence of the execution of a qualitative autoethnographic study, chosen over other available methodologies to achieve a depth of understanding, in terms of the type of patterns of stress appraisal and response sought by Lazarus (1991). A comprehensive defence was presented for the imposition of a directed form of content analysis over inductive and summative methods. The use of a directed method allows for the tracing out (Lazarus 1991) of patterns of stress transaction in my practice of leadership by using the gestalt cycle of experience (healthy and unhealthy) (Perls 1973).

Following on from the explication of that rationale, this chapter now sets forth the actual methodology of this research. It includes (a) a step by step summary to aid replication, (b) overview of research design, (c) methods of data collection, (d) analysis and synthesis of data, (e) specific validation approach: crystallisation, (f) ethical considerations and (g) limitations of this study.
4.2 Research Design Overview

In section 4.3 of this chapter, a detailed step by step outline of the study is provided complete with a listing of the corresponding location within this thesis. The following list summarises the steps used to carry out this research:

1. The prima facie research topic relating to self-regulation was translated into specific research questions forming the basis for this study.

2. The research proposal was presented to the University of Limerick as part of the selection process to take part in the structured doctoral programme in education at the university.

3. Preceding the actual collection of data, a systematic review of the literature was conducted to study the contributions of other researchers and writers in the broad areas of stress, humanistic psychotherapy and leadership.

4. Following the identification of limitations in the available literature to adequately inform my understanding of the processes of my own stress, various research methodologies were analysed towards identifying the most appropriate to answer the research questions.

5. Once a qualitative autoethnographic methodology was chosen as the most appropriate methodology, the various research methods were presented and defended at a progression review board meeting. This progression review allows the PhD student to advance from the taught portion to the research portion of the PhD programme at the University of Limerick.

6. Data was captured over a two-year period in the form of reflective writing in a biographical reflective journal. Data was also captured from the interaction between researcher and academic supervisor by way of recording and transcribing those sessions.

7. Data was analysed by means of a specific form of content analysis known as directed content analysis where existing gestalt theory was organised into analytical categories and codes.
8. In the overall context of the transactional model of stress, findings were elicited from the research data in terms of a) work related hazards b) appraisal mechanisms c) coping processes and d) outcomes.
9. Those findings were later analysed and discussed in detail toward establishing implications for practice, research, theory and policy.
10. A number of specific recommendations are made from this research in terms of fostering greater levels of work related stress mastery in terms of my own practice of leadership. In addition, a number of wider recommendations are made on the basis of claims to knowledge from this study.

4.3. Replicating this Study

According to Newing (2010), in order for social research to be appropriately interpreted by a reader, they must have sufficient understanding of the philosophical principles and theoretical assumptions of the discipline. This argument is based on the observation that each discipline has principles and assumptions that are used to design, conduct, analyse, and interpret research and its outcomes. In the previous chapter that dealt with explaining the rationale behind choices made in this research, I provided a comprehensive overview of how my constructivist ontology creates a specific epistemological stance. This section now provides a blueprint of how the actual methodology is constructed and organised in this study. Mayring (2010) provides a methodological framework for the completion of a research project involving directed qualitative analysis. In order to assist with replicating this study, Table 14 uses Mayring’s framework to act as an aide memoire for fellow researchers.
### Table 14 – Complete Research Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1 – Agree Research Questions</td>
<td>Formulate a clear research question (not only a topic).</td>
<td>Chapter 1 Introduction - Section 1.3 Research Questions pp 22-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe the theoretical background (theoretical position, previous studies).</td>
<td>Chapter 2 – Literature Review pp 40-198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The research question must fit the deductive ongoing, that means that there is an a priori interest in special aspects of the material and a clear theoretical background.</td>
<td>Abstract and Chapter 1 – Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2 – Definition of categories</td>
<td>The research question has to be operationalised into categories that mean research aspects brought to the material.</td>
<td>Chapter 4- Methodology, Section 4.5.2 Data Categories pp 326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analyse the state of the art, preceding studies on the topic, to get a theoretical foundation! Not all categories have to be found in the research literature, but they have to be grounded with theoretical arguments!</td>
<td>Chapter 4- Methodology, Section 4.5.2 Data Categories pp 326 – 329</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Check, if the material contains text passages relevant to the categories!</td>
<td>Chapter 2 – Literature Review and Chapter 3 – Rationale including empirical examples.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If possible, try to group the categories to main categories in a nominal or ordinal way</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3 - Define Coding Guidelines</td>
<td>Formulate a table containing four columns: category label, category definition, anchor example, coding rules. Each category represents one line.</td>
<td>Chapter 4 – Figure 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fill in the category labels and the category definitions, and, if already formulated, anchor examples and coding rules.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 4 – Complete Coding</td>
<td>Start coding the material from the beginning. If you find material fulfilling the category definition, mark the text passage and note the category label (or category number). If you think it is a prototypical text passage for the category, add it to the coding guideline as anchor example.</td>
<td>Section 4.6.4 Step 4: Coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>If you come to a text passage where the assignment to a category remains unclear, try to come to a decision and formulate a coding rule for this and following similar cases. In case of uncertainty use theoretical considerations.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 14 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Action Item</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 5 - Revise Coding</td>
<td>If the coding guideline seems to be completed (at least with anchor examples) and the coding process seems to be smooth (usually after 10 - 50% of the material) or if severe problems arise, a revision of categories and coding scheme is necessary. Check all category definitions and coding rules in respect to the research question (face validity). If changes are necessary, use theoretical considerations.</td>
<td>4.6.5 Step 5: Revision of Categories and Coding Guidelines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6- Final Through</td>
<td>If the changes of the coding guideline make prior category assignments false, you have to rework the material from the beginning. List all category assignments linked to the recording units.</td>
<td>4.6.6 Step 6: Final Run Through of Material</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Step 7 - Complete Analysis | The result (of course after checking quality criteria like inter-coder agreement) is at first the distribution of categories per recording unit. Frequencies of assigned categories over all recording units or comparisons of frequencies in different groups of recording units can be analysed statistically. In case of several ordinal category systems assigned to the same recording units, a correlation analysis should be completed. | Chapter 4 – Table 19  
Chapter 4 – Table 19  
Figure 12 – Chapter 5  
N/A |
4.4 Research Methods

Research methods equate to research in action (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Chapter 3 addressed the rationale for the selected research methods in this research that involved judicious decision making between qualitative data collection methods: observation, interviews, focus groups, collection of extant texts (such as organisational records), elicitation of texts (such as participant diaries), and the creation or collection of images (such as photos and video). The rationale for the choice of directed content analysis was outlined over other alternatives described by Ritchie et al. (2013) such as constant comparison, memo writing, theory building.

Guba and Lincoln (2005) differentiated between four paradigms in the theory of science. Table 15 below characterises the basic beliefs (metaphysics) of alternative inquiry paradigms (Guba and Lincoln 2005, p. 193). That table demonstrates how the collection and analysis methods in this research adhere to my constructivist / relativist ontology. Knowledge is created through transactional / subjectivist understanding by way of constructed findings achieved through a deductive hermeneutical (directed content) analysis of text.

Table 15    Four Paradigms in Science Theory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Positivism</th>
<th>Post-positivism</th>
<th>Critical Theory</th>
<th>Constructivism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontology</td>
<td>Naïve realism – “real” reality but apprehendible.</td>
<td>Critical realism – “real” reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehendible.</td>
<td>Historical realism – virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time.</td>
<td>Relativism – local and specific constructed and co-constructed realities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>Dualistic / objectivistic; findings true.</td>
<td>Modified dualistic / objectivistic; critical tradition/community; findings probably true.</td>
<td>Transactional / subjectivist; value-mediated findings.</td>
<td>Transactional / subjectivist; created findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Experimental / manipulative; verification of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods.</td>
<td>Modified experimental / manipulative; critical multiplicity; falsification of hypotheses; may include qualitative methods.</td>
<td>Dialogical / dialectical.</td>
<td>Hermeneutical / dialectical.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Guba and Lincoln (2005)
4.5 Data Capture Methods

Researchers using the autoethnographic approach typically gather data through their own writings (Schwandt 2007; Ellis and Bochner 2000). Data captured in this manner allows for reflection upon experience with the potential to yield important qualitative analytic findings (Atkinson 2006; Delamont 2009). According to Hays and Gay (2011), professionals are expected to display enhanced self-regulatory skills and be able to understand how they perform, using this knowledge to plan their ongoing professional development, building on strengths, and addressing weaknesses. Larrivee (2008) argues that reflective practice moves us from a knowledge base of distinct skills, to a stage in in our career where we are able to modify our skills to suit specific contexts and situations, and eventually, to invent new strategies.

In terms of my own research, one method of data collection I employed was the use of a reflective journal. This was accessible to me 24 hours a day as my primary data capture template as it was held on my secure work laptop. As a phenomenologist, I believe that if adequate space is provided for a something to emerge, that which needs to, will become figure from ground organically. Consequently, I also wanted to create every possible space to allow thoughts and feelings to be captured in the immediacy of the here-and-now. I therefore supplemented the electronic journal with other data capture methods. For example, using wireless technologies, I could dial hands-free into a recording mechanism to capture thoughts whilst driving, and these were later transcribed to the main journal.

Another rich source of data captured in the dialogous tradition of gestalt was achieved through the transcription of academic supervisory meetings. According to Pettifor et al. (2011), supervisory contexts provide researchers with invaluable opportunities to gain insight through a relationship between supervisee and supervisor. Farber (2012) suggests that supervision also cultivates relationship competencies by providing an environment of authenticity, genuineness, and collaboration.
4.5.1 The Process of Reflective Journaling

In the previous chapter, the rationale for the use of reflective journal was outlined. It was justified as method of data collection as part of reflective thinking that occurs in situations of perplexity where uncertainty within situations triggers the person to inquire and find information to resolve this tension (Epp 2008, p.1380). The dynamic interaction of organism and environment in terms of work related stress constitutes an arena of perplexity and uncertainty. Also, in studying work related stress in contemporary terms, the necessity for ongoing and long term data collection was satisfied through the use of reflective journaling.

4.5.1.1 A Gestaltist Reflective Journaling Method

In keeping with my humanistic constructivist ontology, I deployed a humanistic gestalt approach to the construction of my reflective journal in contrast to other more structured methods such as the Progoff method. Such approaches restrict the reflector to record their experiences in a particular set format (Hermann 2014). Although frameworks such as Progoff are useful in fostering practice improvements, they do create parameters within which one adheres to a restricted format of reflection. As outlined in my literature review however, a gestaltist who operates from within an existential (meta-theory) gestalt (psychological theory) and phenomenological (method), my approach to journaling is based on the concept that what needs to emerge will, given time and space to create its own shape and form i.e. the dominant need will emerge as figural organically (Ellegard and Pederson 2012; Gregory 2014). My dominant mode of reflection therefore is to create the conditions of time and space for emergent gestalts (needs) to show themselves organically. Reflecting therefore from within a gestalt paradigm should be fostered in a climate of description, and not one of reduction or determinism.
4.5.1.2 The Journal Protocol

The type of journaling undertaken was personal journaling. This is a type of journaling that entails a “narrative description of inner processes” (Ortlip 2008, p.5). It involves the interpersonal looping of ideas that makes it almost impossible to stand outside ourselves. The choice of a personal diary in academia is somewhat contentious. Brookfield (1995) posited that it can lead to a “self-confirming cycle of uncritical assumptions” (1998, p.197). Other authors argue that the private nature of the personal journal is an ideal mode of self-reflection where practiced journal writers extol the use of this form of reflection (Bolton 2010).

According to Ortlipp (2008), rather than attempting to control researcher values through method or by bracketing assumptions, the aim is to consciously acknowledge those values. Keeping self-reflective journals is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity, whereby researchers use their journal to examine “personal assumptions and goals” and clarify “individual belief systems and subjectivities” (Ahern as cited in Russell and Kelly, 2002, p. 2). Whilst keeping a reflective journal is a common practice in qualitative research, particularly reflexive research (Etherington 2004), there is relatively little literature on the use of reflective journals in the research process, and limited guidance for novice researchers as to the purposes of keeping a reflective journal from a methodological perspective and how to use their reflections as an integral part of the research process (Ortlipp 2008, p. 696). Table 16 now offers specific detail regarding the process of reflective journaling.

Table 16 Journaling Details

| Reflective Journal Data Capture Period Start | 3rd March 2012 |
| Reflective Journal Data Capture Period End | 4th January 2015 |
| Reflective Journal Units | Daily |
| Writing Style | Biographical |
| Approx. Average Words Captured Daily | 300 |
| Type of Journal | Electronic |
| Approach to Data Capture | Typing and Voice Recognition |
| Data Security | Data Encryption at Rest |
| Data Backup Method | External Encrypted Hard Drive |
Capturing data on non-working days was seen to be as important as capturing data on working days. A recent observational analysis conducted by Zhou et al. (2015) looked at the impact of workplace toxicity on work related stress amongst individuals employed in second level education in the UK. Data collected from 76 full-time employees across 10 consecutive working days revealed that daily workplace incivility positively predicted end-of-work negative effects that reduced recovery in non-work time before returning to work. This is indicative of how affective states transfer across life domains (Mitchell et al. 2015).

One of the advantages of moving from architectural models of work related stress to a process model, is the appreciation of how affect transfers across domains because of the focus it places on the dynamic relationship of organism and environment (Dewe et al. 2010). Transactional theory for instance, conceptualises outcomes of work related stress in terms of impacting somatic health, morale and life satisfaction, social functioning and job performance. Because of this holistic approach to examining the mechanisms that underlie and best express the nature of that relationship, stress is no longer thought of in terms of detachable entities or structures. It is now thought of in terms of a process where the emphasis is on “tracing out the transactional nature of that process” (Aldwin 2007, p. 42). This dynamic nature of organism / environmental relationship is characterised by the Spillover-Crossover model (SCM). The SCM model combines the efforts of research identifying two different ways in which work related stress is carried over into non-work time (Ferguson 2012).

Spillover is a within-person, across-domains transmission of strain from one area of life to another (Bakker and Demerouti 2012). My study adds to previous research on spillover that has focused on how reactions experienced in the work domain are transferred to, and interfere with the non-work domain for the same individual (Eby et al. 2010). For example, an employee may experience a time-based conflict between work and private life when work overload results in overwork at the expense of leisure time. Similarly, a worker may experience a strain-based work-family conflict when confronted with something unfair during the day at work, about which he or she continues worrying during the evening at home (Bakker and Demerouti 2012).
In contrast, crossover involves transmission across individuals, whereby demands and their consequent strain cross over between closely related persons (Westman 2001). Thus, in crossover, job strain experienced by an individual may lead to strain being experienced by the individual’s partner at home. For example, a person who feels chronically fatigued and has become cynical about the meaning of work may transfer such feelings and attitudes to the partner during conversations at home. Indeed, research suggests that frequent exposure to a burned-out partner may increase one’s levels of burnout (Demerouti et al. 2005; Westman et al. 2001). Whereas spillover is an intra-individual transmission of stressors or strain, crossover is a dyadic, inter-individual transmission of stressors or strain. Crossover research is based upon the propositions of role conflict theory, recognising the fluid boundaries between work and family life. Crossover of work-related experiences actually implies spillover to happen first. However, the crossover approach adds another level of analysis to previous approaches by adding the inter-individual level (Westman 2001).

The Spillover-Crossover model (SCM) combines the spillover and crossover literatures, and proposes that work-related experiences first spill over to the home domain, and then cross over to the partner through social interaction (Bakker and Demerouti 2012). The SCM typically departs from the work domain where job demands are hypothesised to evoke strain which can spill over into the home domain, and lead to work-family conflict. For instance, employees who are confronted with high emotional demands may feel fatigued after a day at work, and may continue to ruminate about work when at home. According to the SCM, this state of work-family conflict will have a negative impact on the interaction with the partner at home and indirectly on the partner’s well-being. In contrast, job resources are hypothesised to foster engagement, which leads to work-family enrichment when these resources are high.

Employees who enjoy their work because they have, for instance, ample opportunities for professional development and interesting interactions with others (clients, colleagues), may feel self-efficacious after a day at work, and may go home in a positive mood. According to the SCM, this state of work-family enrichment will have a positive impact on partner’s well-being through positive interactions. The SCM suggests that
the impact on partner’s well-being occurs either through direct crossover of negative and positive experiences or through indirect crossover. The indirect crossover uncovers the mechanism through which the inter-individual transmission occurs. Evidence for indirect crossover, i.e., a transmission mediated by interpersonal exchange, can explain why crossover among partners happens. Transactional stress theory and spillover/crossover theory embrace the notion of continuous process, where non-work time cannot be seen as a detachable entity in one’s narrative. In addition, gestalt theory views human existence in terms of the ongoing relationship with one’s environment. In committing to journaling on non-work days, the continuous process of data capture is not artificially broken. Reflection will be possible in the here-and-now, if and when spillover and crossover take place.

4.5.1.3 Journal Vignette

A number of journal entries are provided in Appendix F in addition to the one provided below.

MD Journal Entry - Monday 18th March 2013

It’s the day after the bank holiday and I’m at work now feeling very disorganised. Dreamt again last night of being made homeless and woke up covered in sweat feeling an absolute sense of dread. I didn’t really enjoy the weekend. Recent client terminations are very much unsettling me. No positive sales leads appear to be coming through the pipeline and I'm panicking at night time now thinking that this is the start of the end; the kids are going to be out on the street because of me. It is a very, very unsettling time. My right eye is in a bad way and was very sore again this weekend after the treatment last week. I must say the intravenous sedation for the eye last week was about the most relaxed I’ve felt in months and since the last one. Super, my feeling of relaxation now equates to when I receive an injection directly into the eyeball. That can’t be good can it, and says a lot, doesn’t it! I really do like the feeling of drifting into numbness, because in waking, the reality is very, very hard.
Over the weekend, I couldn’t help but brood over the past again. It just feels like it has been one thing after another. Dealing with all the stress at work lately then just seems to tip the pot to overflow. I know I am taking everything personally particular lately again, because I’m in that place of feeling not good enough in everything. After getting through the first semester of the part time lecturing late last year, I felt my confidence return after a shaky start but then the usual, like last week, no matter whether they are inside or outside of my control, I lay the blame squarely at my own inadequate and awkward feet.

4.5.2 The Process of Using Transcribed Supervisory Meetings

The preceding chapter detailed the rationale for using data collected in academic supervisory session due to the importance of dialogue and relationship in gestalt. A choice exists between two types of transcription styles - naturalised or de-naturalised (Davidson 2009). Naturalised transcription is a detailed and less filtered method of transcription. It is as detailed as possible and focuses on nuances beyond discourse, such as breaks in speech, laughter, mumbling, involuntary sounds, gestures, body language, etc. as well as content. Denaturalised transcription is flowing, presenting ‘laundered’ data which removes the slightest socio-cultural characteristics of the data or even information that could shed light on the results of the study (Davidson 2009).

4.5.2.1 Transcription Type - Naturalised

It seemed a natural choice to proceed with a naturalised transcription protocol in this study! Gestaltists place enormous emphasis on awareness, transcending a cognitive engagement:

Emotional experience is stored within the amygdala and the limbic system of the brain as affect, visceral and physiological sensation without symbolisation and language. These significant memories are expressed in affect and through our bodily movements and gestures

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Consequently, a denaturalised transcription mode would have accurately described the discourse of the recorded sessions, but would failed to capture the full affect through ignoring bodily movements, gestures etc. Achieving transcription accuracy in this study depended on creating meaning through facilitating the subjective interpretation of all facets of the relational dialogue in the setting of the meeting. The relevant merits of both approaches were debated between supervisor and researcher prior to proceeding. From the outset there was recognition that bias would be assumed because the interpretation of gestures, pauses, utterances etc. rested with the researcher. It is a recognised risk in the naturalised method that the transcriber may wrongly interpret the meaning behind an event in the session thus influencing the outcome of the study (Davidson 2009; Oliver et al 2005; Forbat and Henderson 2005). Whilst the naturalised approach did add to workload, it also facilitated the layered account sought from the data befitting an autoethnographic study.

4.5.2.2 Transcription Protocol

According to Howitt (2010), it is crucial to decide on transcription rules and to employ them consistently throughout the research. The text analysis can only refer to the transcripts, and transcripts are never complete representations of their raw material. In addition to agreeing to use a naturalised approach to transcription, it was agreed that I, as participant researcher, would transcribe the data myself to ensure an intimate engagement with same. In addition, it was agreed that supervision sessions would be transcribed as soon as possible after each meeting to allow for the recall of all verbal and non-verbal activity in the meeting, so that this could be registered at the appropriate point of the transcription. Table 17 now outlines the process of data capture in terms of supervisory meetings.
Table 17  The Process of Data Capture from Supervision Meeting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Transcribed Meeting</th>
<th>3rd March 2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Last Transcribed Meeting</td>
<td>4th January 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Meeting Unit</td>
<td>1 Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription Type</td>
<td>Naturalised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approx. Average Words Captured Per Meeting</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recording Mechanism</td>
<td>Digital Voice Recorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcriber</td>
<td>Researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average time to taken to Transcribe 1 Session</td>
<td>4.5 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lag Time between session and transcription</td>
<td>&lt; 48 Hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Storage</td>
<td>Transferred to Secure PC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Security</td>
<td>Data Encryption at Rest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Backup Method</td>
<td>External Encrypted Hard Drive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.2.3  Record of Transcribed Supervision Meetings

Table 18 provides a list of all recorded and transcribed supervisory sessions including the number of pages of transcription and time taken to transcribe. All supervision sessions last for 1 hour.

Table 18  Transcribed Supervisory Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Supervision Meeting Date</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>File Size</th>
<th>No Pages</th>
<th>Time to Transcribe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>23/09/13</td>
<td>7,222</td>
<td>42KB</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>24/10/13</td>
<td>8,576</td>
<td>44KB</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.6 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>21/11/13</td>
<td>10,175</td>
<td>47KB</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.1 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>16/12/13</td>
<td>9,910</td>
<td>46KB</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>28/01/14</td>
<td>7,723</td>
<td>42KB</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>4.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>21/02/14</td>
<td>6,834</td>
<td>44kb</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.4 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>25/03/14</td>
<td>9,074</td>
<td>46kb</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>14/04/14</td>
<td>7,346</td>
<td>43KB</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>08/05/14</td>
<td>8,424</td>
<td>45KB</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.0 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>12/06/14</td>
<td>6,950</td>
<td>39KB</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3.9 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5.2.4  *Transcription Vignette*

A number of transcription vignettes are provided in Appendix E including an extended version of the brief one provided below.

**Supervision Excerpt 28th June 2013**

**Researcher**  
At the moment, with regards to work-related stress, and from a gestalt perspective, I've lost awareness of myself. I don't know what I'm doing, you know, that's the way I feel this week.

**Supervisor:** (Long Pause) So in my head it would be utterly bizarre to engage in a Ph.D. of this nature, and burn yourself out.

**Researcher:** Exactly yes. Yes, that would be counter-productive.

**Supervisor:** No go back to my phrase, it would be utterly bizarre. It would be the equivalent of when (Politician) in the UK was the secretary of state for health and he comes striding along the road in Westminster, very obviously overweight and chomping on a very large cigar.

**Researcher:** Emmm, Like (Irish Politician) for Minister for health in Ireland! (Laughing)

**Supervisor:** Yes. There is something not right about this (laughing). So it would be the internal conflicts generated by working on a stress thesis while burning yourself out. As a supervisor, I just think it's illogical, as somebody who works in the caring profession, it would make me very worried, but just as a personal thing, I think why, why, why are we doing this, this is daft (Pause). So the question becomes, if your awareness has gone down, that's fine, because it fluctuates. You've got the context, you got half of the American army looking at whether there is a cobweb
outside or whatever it is that they do, so the question becomes, as a reasonable agent in your own life, what are you going to do?

**Researcher:** (Fast Paced) So we're in a peak period of busyness. Remember a few weeks ago when I was here, and the level of actual demand was such that I was excited, energised, and everything. Obviously last week, it tipped into the realm of being ridiculously busy and this will continue into next week. Then, the next week after that, I have three days booked off work, so for me, this whole area of the GPS, the personal GPS, remember you made a very interesting point about systems, when I transcribed it really came out to me was that the whole piece of the system, and regulation, you know how the system has to be able to fluctuate, to be able to expand up, at times like this, and then down. So that's kind of what I need to hold I think, it is to basically say, there is a rest period coming up. I need to hold that dear.

**Supervisor:** Yes, you do, and I'm glad to hear that you've got your three days that are coming up and I think that's good, useful, but we want you to get your three days and enjoy them, as opposed to get your three days and fall in a heap. So the challenge is, what will you do? What can you do today to manage this? And tomorrow you ask yourself the question what will I do today to manage this? So bring this right to the forefront.

**Researcher:** To the here and now.

**Supervisor:** Absolutely, what is it that I need to do today to manage this time of peak activity, demand, in the knowledge that the peak demand isn't going away for two weeks, so what will I do right now?

**Researcher:** Yeah, because I'm not, I'm not good at caring for myself or protecting myself, and I just keep going on and on and on and I think that just comes from the home situation as well.

**Supervisor:** (Hands in air) So, just hold the question what will I do right now?

**Researcher:** To hold it or to answer?

**Supervisor:** I want you to do both. Hold it or use it and I want you to give me answer now as well.

**Researcher:** Okay. (Laughing)
Supervisor: Right now.
Researcher: For me tonight, I’d get out of work tonight,
Supervisor: Comeback.
Researcher: Which? To where I’ve left to go?
Supervisor: Yes, so what will I do right now?
Researcher: Oh now, here now, okay.
Supervisor: Yes
Researcher: Take a deep breath first of all.
Supervisor: Yes, because you haven't taken a breath for about an hour so (laughing)
Researcher: (Shallow breathing) Yes exactly (laughing). And it's funny that in any therapy…
Supervisor: You didn't do it.
Researcher: Which?
Supervisor: Take a breath
Researcher: I know, yeah.
Supervisor: So stop.
Researcher: I have a blocked nose as well.
Supervisor: (Hands in the air) Stop, you need to stop.
Researcher: (Takes a deep breath and exhales)
Supervisor: One of the things that happens to us is when we come to peak activity, is that we construe everything as needing to be active, and sometimes in peak activities, the activity has a life of its own as it’s going to happen, but somebody needs not to be active during that time, so that you keep awareness upfront, go back to our system that we talked about, if everybody in the system is going at 100 miles an hour, the guarantee is that the system will crash. When the system is going at 100 miles an hour, you want most of your people to keep up with it, but you want one person who is absolutely still and not moving, because they are the only person that can spot the trouble coming. And if they spot it in time, they can help to recalibrate the system so that it can sustain itself long-term.
Researcher: Oh yes, yes, yes (Nodding Vigorously).
4.6 The Process of Directed Content Analysis

In the previous chapter, the rationale for the application of a directed content method was presented as an appropriate tool where existing theory or prior research about a phenomenon is incomplete, and could benefit from further description. In this study, directed content analysis is used because existing gestalt theory based on process rather than structure can be applied to transactional stress theory in order to derive insight into the discreet emotions involved at various phases of the transactional process. This is the content-analytical method which is probably most central (Mayring 2015). It pursues the goal of extracting certain data from the material. Figure 6 in the previous chapter provides a graphical overview of the steps within the directed method and I expand now on how they were applied to this study.

1. Research question and theoretical background.
2. Definition of category system.
3. Definition of coding guideline.
4. Material run through initial coding adding anchor codes adding anchor examples and coding rules.
5. Revision of the categories and coding guideline after review of 10-15% of the material.
6. Final run through the material.
7. Analysis, category frequencies and contingencies interpretation.

4.6.1 Step 1: Research Question and Theoretical Background

From the outset, the central research question in this research was described in terms of how can the use of a gestalt analytical approach to interpreting my transactional relationship with my work environment in my practice of leadership mitigate effects of work related stress whilst improving my practice of leadership?
(ii) What hazardous work (environmental) factors permeate my practice of leadership?

(ii) What are the dominant primary and secondary appraisal patterns used to assess the significance of an event, an encounter, or a situation?

(iii) What are the habitual coping mechanisms employed in response to the appraisal of an event, an encounter, or a situation?

(iv) What are dominant outcomes in terms of a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale or life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health?

(v) What factors mediate healthy appraisal, coping and outcomes and how does a healthy cycle unfold?

4.6.2 Step 2: Definition of Category System

The data categories in this study were created based on the gestalt cycle of experience (Figure 9). There were two forms of deductive category assignment to be considered; analysing the text with nominal category systems or with ordinal category systems. Nominal category systems consist of a list of independent categories. The only similarity is that they are belonging to the structuring dimension. Ordinal category systems express a graduation of the structuring dimension. The categories are in a fixed order, following more or less the structuring dimension.

The gestalt cycle of experience allows for an ordinal category system because existence in this paradigm is said to be organised between various polarities (Figure 9). At one end of the spectrum is healthy living that follows a flow of sensation, awareness, mobilisation, action, final contact, satisfaction and withdrawal. For each one of those healthy ways of being (process), there exists a corresponding polarity; sensation (desensitisation), awareness (deflection), mobilisation (introjection), action (projection),
final contact (retroflection), satisfaction (egotism) and withdrawal (confluence). Gestalt does not explicitly identify specific points along the continuum, so gaining awareness of both polarities is key to achieving healthy living and integration.

**Figure 9** Gestalt Ordinal Category Framework
4.6.3 Step 3: Definition of Coding Guideline

The next step in directed content analysis is to formulate a table containing four columns (Mayring 2015):

- Category label,
- Category definition,
- Anchor example,
- Coding rules.

Each category represents one line and then category labels were filled in along with the category definitions. Anchor examples and coding rules were then input. It was precisely determined which text components belong in a given category. Concrete passages belonging in particular categories are cited as typical examples to illustrate the character of those categories. Where there were problems of delineation between categories, rules were formulated for the purpose of unambiguous assignment to a particular category. Test extracts were taken from the material to check whether the categories are all applicable and whether the definitions, anchor samples and encoding rules make categorical assignment possible.

This trial run-through, like the proper main run-through, is sub-divided into two steps of operation. First of all, the text passages in the material are marked in which the category concerned is addressed. These "points of discovery" (Hausser et al. 1982) were marked by noting the category code beside the relevant text. In the second step, the material thus marked was processed in accordance with the structuring intention and copied out of the text.
Table 19  Research Coding System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Anchor Samples</th>
<th>Encoding Rules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensation</td>
<td>S1 - Healthy Sensation</td>
<td>Balanced between cycles. Feeling, sensing, (a) disturbance, a change of status and so a figure forms to the forefront, ready to notice, to be aware.</td>
<td>“It was great to close off the annual reviews today, a sense of closure that will allow me to put more emphasis on next month’s plan tomorrow”.</td>
<td>All aspects of the definition must be present; balance, feeling, sensing of disturbance, figure formation, ready to notice and to be aware.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>S2 - Desensitisation</td>
<td>Shutting out sensation e.g. ignoring the (physical) pain of cutting the body; ignoring the continuing ache of an injury. Emotionally ignoring an ache from e.g. detachment, bullying.</td>
<td>“Now, there is a big disaster at work, that knocked me off equilibrium, and I went out and brought cigarettes and get a bottle of wine on the way home”.</td>
<td>Evidence must be present of a conscious or unconscious attempt to shut out pain in a manner to desensitise i.e. not being able to feel.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>A1 - Healthy Awareness</td>
<td>Gradually or suddenly we become aware of events impinging via our senses, or our feelings, or mentally onto our consciousness. As a form of experience, there is a fresh gestalten. You recognise that you have a need; this is not the same as knowing what the need is.</td>
<td>“I am curious why I woke this morning feeling the way I did because as they say, I wish I could capture it, put a formula around it, but I can’t explain it. I just felt at peace”.</td>
<td>There must be a recorded acknowledgement of a need. There is not a requirement to know what that need is, but that a need exists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A2 - Deflection</td>
<td>To avoid becoming aware, the person will seek to turn away from direct contact with another person. Instead of bringing awareness to a situation, the person deflects, or side steps from the situation, avoiding being aware; avoiding contact.</td>
<td>“Key practice issue – a dissonance between goal setting and day to day practice ‘put in drawer’”.</td>
<td>Evidence must be present of where energy is diverted from fulfilling a need. In the anchor example, goals are written up but not acted on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Framework Provided by Mayring (2015)

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Table 19 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Anchor Samples</th>
<th>Encoding Rules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mobilisation</td>
<td>M1 – Healthy</td>
<td>Usually follows awareness in that the person becomes aroused or emotional of the opportunities leading to satisfaction of the need. The healthy person is alive to the senses, to the surroundings, is open to information.</td>
<td>“I’ve seen the preparation you put into every visit like this, anticipating every little detail. The reason every one performed well is because you had prepared and planned well”.</td>
<td>The evidence must not be confused with action or awareness. The text must refer to arousal or discreet emotions in the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mobilisation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M2 – Introjection</td>
<td>Rather than mobilising the body and mind to the opportunities surrounding this new awareness the person switches to how he 'should' react in the predefined manner which seems appropriate to the situation. More energy would seem to go into deciding what the action should be, than is spent in exploring the breadth and depth of the experience.</td>
<td>“You do not live in a bubble. There's got to be space in this plan, first off for when stuff goes wrong. Also, and this is the one that I am probably more conscious of here; there also needs to be space just to be free to do nothing”.</td>
<td>Evidence must include references to introjection and not egotism. The former is a directed form of dictation versus the latter which is stepping outside me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>AC1 – Healthy</td>
<td>A punctuation - or figure formation - in the process of contact. The person chooses or rejects possibilities. Behaviours are relevant to the effective fulfilment of needs in the here and now. Action occurs at the boundaries of self and environment. Occurring within dialogue and within contact with others. The healthy self is able to take from and give to the interaction, and to experience its fullness.</td>
<td>“I was very well prepared and therefore felt grounded. I had all my facts and felt in control during the whole meeting. I was not self-conscious and because I was prepared, I feel like I came away with what I wanted”.</td>
<td>The evidence must not be confused with awareness or mobilisation. It should relate to post awareness, but pre-mobilisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Action</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AC2 – Projection</td>
<td>The organism is aware of his qualities but sees them in another. We see the qualities (or flaws) we possess but only in another, not in ourselves. Projection may be described as seeing in someone else the qualities you are not acknowledging in yourself. In projection, we can believe that people are difficult and rejecting, but in reality we are actually difficult and rejecting (Mann 2010).</td>
<td>“Every time I talked in the meeting, I could see them looking at each other thinking “who is this guy”. That got me angry inside and very nervous, so I could feel my voice going, and I completely lost my train of thought. Then I could feel our own guys looking at me and I started to lose it”.</td>
<td>The evidence must indicate an attribution to the other in terms of perceived behaviours, motivations, attitudes, ideologies etc. Am I commenting on the individual and labelling them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Framework Provided by Mayring (2015)
Table 19 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<th>Anchor Samples</th>
<th>Encoding Rules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Final Contact</td>
<td>F1 - Healthy Final Contact</td>
<td>Having healthily mobilised and acted there will follow full and vibrant contact, termed final contact by Goodman (Perls et al. 1951, p. 403). The whole (contact) is more than the sum of it’s parts - physical senses of touch, seeing, hearing etc., and more than these senses might provide. Contact occurs at the boundary of our self, and the environment.</td>
<td>“My tendency to create lists started about 10 or 12, when I was definitely in survival mode. I would be creating lists that were vitally important, you know, like get healthy, then I would do the exact opposite or nothing at all”.</td>
<td>Ask yourself if the evidence really supports full and vibrant contact. How did that feel? This could be positive or negative feelings but full contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F2 – Retroflection</td>
<td>Retroflection may specifically interrupt the final contact phase. There are two types of retroflection: (i) There are two types of retroflection: (i) You would do to yourself that which you want done TO the other (ii) you do to yourself that which you want done BY the other.</td>
<td>“I remember my therapist kept telling me that it looks like I am not breathing and to relax my jaw because I have a tendency to stick it out when I am stressed”.</td>
<td>Does the evidence satisfy one or other of the types of retroflection defined?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>SA1 – Healthy Satisfaction</td>
<td>Perls et al. (1951/1969) refer to this as post-contact. This is the afterglow, the satisfaction following the full and complete experience. This is the quiet after the storm prior to separation or withdrawal. In a full and vibrant contact-cycle the individual is able to savour the completion and is ready to move on with satisfaction and readiness of the next sensation.</td>
<td>“The _______ client contract signed today and what a relief. Absolutely over the moon and we are going to celebrate like never before”.</td>
<td>The passage must relate to satisfaction and not withdrawal, desensitisation or deflection. Is it healthy satisfaction?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SA2- Egotism</td>
<td>Egotism may occur/interrupt at any time in the Healthy Cycle and often interrupts satisfaction. This interruption may see the person being more involved with them self rather than the broader context of the contact and environment and thus miss the full impact of giving and receiving. Think of this in terms of the person who in watching the film spends most the time saying how wonderful it is, how superb the action, how exciting it is, and so on.</td>
<td>“It was my own stag party yet I couldn’t relax and enjoy it. I felt like an outsider looking in. I don’t know why I felt so uptight, I wanted to be able to have fun but I was shut off”.</td>
<td>The evidence must depict a situation where the self is removed. Does this evidence support the interruption of satisfaction?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 19 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
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<th>Definition</th>
<th>Anchor Samples</th>
<th>Encoding Rules</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W1 – Healthy Withdrawal</td>
<td>Following the satisfaction experienced in the post contact phase the person is able to withdraw to the balanced fore- and back- ground stasis. Another way of viewing this is moving into the resting void; where sensation as yet, is waiting to be felt.</td>
<td>I love that feeling on holiday when I am the first one down to the pool and have an hour to myself, that sense of drifting away in the sun. What a lovely morning (MD Journal Entry 12/8/14)</td>
<td>The evidence must present post satisfaction stage and prior to sensation. Care must be taken to be precise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W2 – Confluence</td>
<td>Confluence may be seen in individuals whose self becomes as much a part of their job or past time. So the computer programmer who lives to code, to socialise only through bits and bytes; the sport enthusiast whose whole happiness seems determined by whether or not there is a win on Saturday, or by how well the sporting idol performs on the field. Confluence is the lack of differentiation between the self and other.</td>
<td>I found that because of the lectures and things being so intense, because I had so little time, and because of the impact of doing 600 slides, I was having to work very hard to get my hundred slides together. There was no time to enjoy the end of a lecture and begin with the excitement of the new. Because I worked hard and not smart, I had no time at all to withdraw (MD Journal Entry 17/05/13).</td>
<td>The evidence must display a blurring of the boundary between self and environment such as work / people / study / pastimes etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Framework Provided by Mayring (2015)
4.6.4 Step 4: Coding

Data captured in my reflective journal and transcribed supervision meetings was coded starting at the beginning. When material was found fulfilling the category definition, the text passage was marked and the category label was noted. Where it was deemed a prototypical text passage for the category, it was added to the coding guideline as an anchor example in accordance with Mayrings (2014) guidelines.

Example from Transcribed Supervisory Meeting 24th September 2013

**Supervisor**-Start by answering the question I asked you, what benefit does having stress in your system have for you inside your body, in your work system, and your family system, you were quick to an answer, so if there isn't a little bit stress in your system you are completely bored (A2).

**Researcher**-Exactly, and people who really know me such as my wife, would say that the only time she ever really saw me depressed, was when I was in that environment (previous job).

**Supervisor**-Yes, yes.

**Researcher**-I enjoy the cut and thrust and busyness of the job, I suppose I don't like it if it is affecting me so much so, like the night before, that I can't sleep or didn't eat properly (F2). I feel that I work best when I'm managing the basics, when I'm exercising, when I'm sleeping well. That propels I suppose a clear state of mind (S1). Now, say there is a big disaster at work, then that would knock me off equilibrium, and I run out and buy a box of cigarettes and get the bottle of wine on the way home (S2). Often in therapy before, the therapist would say to me “you know you're not breathing” (F2), and, she would also tell me to relax my jaw, because I have a tendency to stick it out when I'm stressed but I don't realise.
Supervisor - If you take the literature around stress, it would show that people who are very stressed for prolonged periods of times make poor decisions, and one of the aspects of poor decisions that they make, is that they will continue to engage with that increased the amount of stress, so they know cognitively, that they are really stressed, they know physiologically they are really stressed, they know they should go to the pool, or to the sauna, or for a run out the road, but in fact they go “you know what, I’ll do that instead”. So what I’m saying, yeah okay, you're not someone who's going to sit around in the clouds, because that would drive you demented, but equally, you got to watch that, why is that there was meeting in Birmingham, and that you then absolutely had to be back in UL (University of Limerick), and how often do I do that (M2)? The question is, how can you manage the pattern better? And I think that is, the thing that we have touched on before, you know, it's okay to work in a very high stress environment, provided you know when to pull away from it. This is provided that when you get time away, that you do not fill it up, as you tend to do (A2).

Researcher - Sure, exactly yeah, and I have actually, being more cognisant of that since we spoke, and you know, definitely, there have been times where, I've actually recognised that this should be downtime (M2), and that's okay versus, “oh, I’ve got to get going, remember we talked about that that feeling of the vacuum.
4.6.5 Step 5: Revision of Categories and Coding Guidelines

Mayring (2014), provides the following guidelines in terms of revision:

If the coding guideline seems to be completed (at least with anchor examples) and the coding process seems to be smooth (usually after 10 - 50% of the material) or if severe problems arise, a revision of categories and coding scheme is necessary! Check all category definitions and coding rules in respect to the research question (face validity)!

If changes are necessary, use theoretical considerations!

(Mayring 2014 p.98)

To ensure validity in terms of categorisation, after approximately 10% of coding activity, I invited the assistance of two professionals as critical friends to complete intercoder validation. This is the process of providing researchers that are not involved in the study, with specific units of analysis, data categories, data codes and coding instruction. This is to assess if they identify and code all relevant passages based on information provided, in the same manner as I did.

- **Coder 1** is a qualified and practicing accountant with a special interest in forensic accounting. I chose her as a critical friend due to her logical and deductive approach to problem solving.

- **Coder 2** is a practicing company solicitor with expertise in contract law. She was chosen due to the nature of her day to day work around organising and interpreting text.

Table 18 presented in this chapter is the actual finalised coding table. The results of the first run through of the data intercoding exercise were 70% compliance. The secondary coders missed some of passages that I coded, but on discussion, agreed that, based on the category and anchor example, my coding was appropriate. In two instances however, an in-depth discussion with one of the coders identified that I had categorised one
passage as an M2 (Introjection) when on balance, it was more appropriate to code as an SA2 (Egotism). This highlights the subtlety and discreet nature of the phases of cycle of experience. It resulted in a change to the coding rules to ensure that a comparative analysis of similar categories was afforded more time for consideration, to ensure that they were coded correctly. The second test achieved 95% compatibility with one coder missing an opportunity to apply a code that was identified by me and the other coder. It was agreed that the change in coding rules was effective in ensuring the validity of the deductive coding framework.

4.6.6 Step 6: Final Run Through of Material

According to Mayring (2014), if the changes to the coding guideline make prior category assignments false, the material has to be reworked from the beginning (2014, p.98). I took the decision to re-analyse 10% of the entire sample affording more time to a comparative analysis of similar categories to ensure that the appropriate code was assigned to a particular passage.

4.6.7 Step 7: Analysis

The result was the distribution of categories per recording unit. The analysis and findings from the research are presented in subsequent chapters.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), as researchers, we are morally bound to conduct our research in a manner that minimises potential harm to those involved in the study. This presented an interesting consideration based on the decision of the ethics committee at the University of Limerick. Ethics are regarded as a set of principles that guide appropriate conduct in a given situation and are generally informed by a code, or set of principles (Fenton 2011). Developing an ethical framework for one’s research is a complex and time consuming endeavour. In my own study, the University of Limerick’s ethics committee deemed it unnecessary to receive ethical clearance due to
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the autoethnographic nature of the study. Although an apparently rational decision on
behalf of the committee, it resulted in an interesting discussion during my academic
supervisory meeting on the 28th June 2013.

**Supervisor:** Let's say you were my supervisor, and we were involved in brain
chemistry for example. I say to you that I have a cracking experiment
and that I've grown this stuff in the back garden. I've realised that if you
take a spoon of it every evening, it really does something to your head.
Then I say to you, I think it’s a bit risky doing it to anyone else, because
I don’t fully know what happens. So for the next month, for my PhD
research, I'm going to take an incremental dose of this each evening at
seven o'clock to see what it does to me. Now, I already know that it
makes my concentration go a bit funny, and it makes my speech go a bit
wobbly, but I am going to crack on for the next month, because I don’t
need ethical approval because this is an autoethnographic study, and there
is no risk to anyone else, except myself. What would happen in a month’s
time for example if you got a phone call, saying to you that I am dead?

In order to complete an authentic piece of research, the subject matter for this study
involved my subjective interpretations of my lived experiences of stress. No information
beyond a provision of the title was required to achieve a decision that ethical clearance
was not required for this study. It was reasonable to assume however that emotions
would be stirred in the completion of this research due to the nature of the phenomenon
being investigated. So whilst my research methods are not as drastic as the example
offered by my supervisor, this does raise a fundamental ethical dilemma. It is arguable
that assurances should have been sought by the ethics committee pertaining to self-
protection during an engagement with such an emotive subject matter. Indeed, the study
did elicit significant emotional responses. As a trained psychotherapeutic practitioner,
I was aware that I needed support, and was able to summon same from professional
peers. This activity was of my own volition however, and was not a pre-requisite for
achieving ethical approval.
Dauphinee (2010) raises another ethical dilemma regarding autoethnographic studies completed for the sake of academic endeavour. She questions the types of knowledge formulated in the name of academia. She argues that the “the academic gaze is an all-encompassing one, seeking to make sense of everything it encounters, and more significantly, to master what it encounters” (Dauphinee 2010, p.8). Autoethnographic studies are narrative accounts of lived experience, personal tales that include intimate disclosures. Although the autoethnographic style posits plot lines, characters and creativity, these stories are real, and therefore, relate to real people. The outputs from this study will be made public and great care has been taken to generalise the narrative as much as possible to protect identities. This was completed whilst affording a reasonable level of disclosure to ensure authenticity. Given that the gestalt nature of the study on work related stress would immediately infer reflections on interactions in the workplace at least, it is arguable that the protection of identities and the protection the researcher should have been of paramount concern to the ethics committee.

4.8 Treating Validity in this Research

My research addresses the task of validation through crystallisation, an approach relatively unique to ethnography and autoethnography. In this section, I proceed to describe crystallisation, as an alternative to traditional qualitative research validation methods. The underlying principles of crystallisation are described along with specific evidence justifying its use in a gestalt study. Limitations of crystallisation are attended to in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

4.8.1 Crystallisation - From Validity to Truth

According to Reilly (2013), the aim of crystallisation is to break the generic boundaries between scientific and artistic approaches to sense-making and representation. The objective of crystallisation is “to move readers past a dualistic partitioning of qualitative methods into art and science, and instead, to encourage a productive blending of the two” (Reilly 2013, p. 7). Traditional methods of achieving validity emphasise criteria for quality in social research. Ellis (2011) however writes
In autoethnographic work, I look at validity in terms of what happens to readers as well as to research participants and researchers. To me, validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. You also can judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves, or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers, or even your own.

Ellis (2011, p. 124)

The burden of proof on autoethnographers is, and should be, different to other forms of social scientific enquiry (Bochner 2002). It is not so important that narratives represent lives accurately, only “that narrators believe they are doing so” (Bochner and Ellis 2002, p. 86). We can judge one narrative interpretation of events against another, but we cannot measure a narrative against the events themselves, because the meaning of the events becomes clear only in their narrative expression (Bochner and Ellis 2002). Ellis (2011) emphasises the ‘narrative truth’ for autoethnographic writings versus traditional forms of validity. She proposes trying to construct the narrative as close to the experience as one can remember it, especially in the initial version. In completing same, crystallisation offers a more comprehensive and authentic meaning of the story than traditional forms of triangulation could achieve.

4.8.2 Crystallisation Conceptualised

Richardson (2000) first introduced the concept of crystallisation into qualitative methodological discourse. She advocated crystallisation in qualitative research as the capacity for writers to break out of traditional generic constraints.

We do not triangulate, we crystallise. I propose that the central image for “validity” for postmodern texts is not the triangle - a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imagery is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionality’s, and angles of approach. Crystallisation provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more, and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know.

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According to Ellingson (2009), although few outside of the community of those writing about ethnography and autoethnography use the term crystallisation, but signs indicate that qualitative researchers are using it more and more. This she argues, is a natural consequence of more writers favouring narrative representations in many arenas. These include communications (Jago 2006), sociology (Ronai 1995), anthropology (Behar 2007), nursing (Sandelowski 2010), clinical social work (Carr 2003), and aging studies/gerontology (Blair and Minkler 2009). Crystallisation builds on feminist theory and the disruption of conventional methodological practices such as positivist interventions and hegemonic (masculinist) disciplinary norms (Fonow and Cook 1990; Fine 1994; Spitzack and Carter 1989).

According to Polsa (2013), crystallisation calls for an interaction between mind, body and spirit. Whilst the knowledge of the mind is how we are used to seeing knowledge creation, the body influences co-creation and the embodied experience between the researcher and the participant as a human instrument for understanding. Spirit refers to the sensitivity to ethics in preventing the reaffirmation of the stereotypical narratives. Body and spirit, in addition to mind, can provide alternative insights on a research topic.

### 4.8.3 Main Principles of Crystallisation

The assertion by Ellingson (2009) that crystallisation is a postmodern re-imagining of traditional triangulation is congruent with Kierkegaard’s “gritty” conceptualisation of human existence because it is “a messy, multigenre, paradigm-spanning approach to resisting the art / science dichotomy” (Ellingson 2009, p.8). Whilst triangulation uses a number of different methods to validate findings, crystallisation goes beyond triangulation. Richardson (2008) advocates the construction of evocative mixed-gender texts such as narratives of self, ethnographic, fictional representations, poetry and drama that crystallise findings reflecting externalities, but also reflecting the researchers themselves.
According to Struthers (2012), triangulation is thought to be too limited due to its positivistic nature when considering autoethnography’s alignment to social constructivism. The ability for crystallisation to enable contrasting perspectives to be included in the analysis supports the qualitative interpretative approach within autoethnography. The multiple theoretical perspectives from various social science sources can also be incorporated within analytic autoethnography to provide alternative perspectives. While triangulation by definition, calls for a triangle of methods that are compared against each other, crystallisation refers to a myriad of crystals that all reflect different views, dimensions, shapes, colours, patterns and arrays of the phenomenon that we study. Therefore, crystallisation does not validate the data as triangulation does, but it provides room for multiple voices to be heard and it acknowledges the voices that we are unable to hear and see.

The purpose of crystallisation is to identify deeper and most likely more complex findings that still only reflect a partial, situated, constructed, multiple, embodied reality. Rather than calling attention to the researcher’s knowledge, crystallisation proposes an emphasis on how much we value the opportunity to learn about our world. We are advised therefore to blur the dividing line between the knower and the known (Liu et al. 2014). It also involves respecting those who are studied, thereby providing room for their voices. Consequently, more complex findings are generated, and dualism is diminished. Ellingson (2009) does not promote a rigid, recipe-like, or formulaic approach to crystallisation, but instead, she sought to provide a rough map to help researchers learn more in terms of benefiting from loose instructions. She has thus developed Richardson’s (2000) original concept into a nuanced framework for qualitative research projects and a detailed set of recommended practices, defined as follows:

1. Crystallisation combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematises its own construction, highlights researchers’ vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about
socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them.

2. Crystallisation fits within social constructionist (Holstein and Gubrium 2008) and critical paradigms such as feminism (Reinharz and Davidsman 1992). Scholars who embrace a wide range of methods, practices, and perspectives can adapt crystallisation to their needs and goals.

3. The only position crystallisation does not compliment is positivism; researchers who truly believe in objectivity and the discovery of ahistorical, unbiased, universal truth will not find crystallisation amenable.

4. Virtually all qualitative researchers may benefit from understanding the principles of crystallisation, even those who choose not to practice it. Awareness of these ideas serves to widen our methodological and epistemological horizons, enriching understanding of the breadth and depth of the qualitative methodology.

5. Crystallisation does not depart radically from other recent developments in the wide field of qualitative methodology, but rather offers one valuable way of thinking through the links between systematic analytical methodologies and creative genres of representation.

6. Crystallisation necessitates seeing the field of methodology not as an art/science dichotomy but as existing along a continuum from positivism (i.e., scientific research that claims objectivity) through radical interpretivism (i.e. scholarship as art). Art and science do not oppose one another; they anchor ends of a continuum of methodology, and most of us situate ourselves somewhere in the vast middle ground (Ellis and Ellingson 2000).
4.8.4 Compatibility of Crystallisation with Gestalt

Whilst triangulation employs a rigid comparison of methods, crystallisation prefers the use of multiple crystals embracing difference in views, dimensions, shapes, colours, patterns and arrays of a phenomenon (Polsa 2013). Gestalt also seeks to understand the shape, pattern and holistic reality of the organism (Yontef 2012). Crystallisation provides room for multiple voices to be heard replicating the relational and dialogous tenure of gestalt. It embraces “the dynamics of fragmentation, plurality, fluidity, and intermingling” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p. 869). Gestalt embraces integration, pluralism, flow and the relationship between organism and environment (Mann 2010; Stevenson 2010; Angus et al. 2014).

Richardson (2000) promotes an evocative blending of narratives of self, ethnographic fictional representations, poetry, and drama to crystallise research findings. This type of latitude is commensurate with the experiential and experimental thrust of gestalt in utilising multiple heterogeneous approaches to heightening awareness (Wedding and Corsini 2013; Wheeler 2013). In researching any phenomenon, crystallisation promotes the use of multiple lenses to offer alternative theoretical explanations. As a humanistic methodology, gestalt also employs an approach achieving a type of awareness that Silverman (2011) likens to the kaleidoscope i.e. looking at a phenomenon through as many lenses as possible to view the different colours and shapes that emerge.

Gestalt is process oriented and uses the notion of continuous homeostatic flow. Therefore, I believe that a natural incompatibility exists with the structured and rigid notion of triangulation. Crystallisation sees us not as reaching an end point in the pursuit of truth, in the same manner that gestalt proposes that life is actually comprised of continuous cycles of need formation, and satisfaction. There is also a rejection of fixed outcomes in both gestalt and crystallisation (Struthers 2012). The creation of knowledge in both concepts is a function of continuous environmental interaction, in contrast to the positivist notion of fixed reality.
4.9 Chapter Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has justified the methodological approach chosen to address my research aims, objectives and specific questions. It concluded that the qualitative approach taken was commensurate with the goals of this investigation. Social research can be meaningfully interpreted only when the reader has a sufficient understanding of the philosophical principles and the theoretical assumptions of the researcher (Moon and Blackman 2014). I have also therefore articulated how my ontology and epistemology informed methodological choices made within this study.

The methodology chapter also “involves a discussion of the methods you are going to use and more importantly, why you are using them” (Thomas 2013, p. 70). This chapter included therefore a linear overview of the research steps taken, and a description of the data capture methods of reflective journaling and transcribed supervisory sessions. A description of the directed content data analysis method including the coding structure was provided also. The rigidity of traditional concepts of triangulation was deemed inappropriate for this study and consequently, I concluded this chapter with an overview of the solution I found for this problem. This relates to crystallisation, an approach to trustworthiness almost unique to that of ethnography and auto ethnography. The findings from this study are now addressed.
CHAPTER FIVE - RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter was concerned with providing sufficient information regarding how my research was completed. It set forth the approach taken to apply the gestalt cycle of experience to my own narrative, within an overarching transactional stress conceptual framework. Having justified decisions made in the design and delivery of this study, that chapter dealt explicitly with how those decisions translated into research action. The specifics around how data was captured and analysed in this research has been attended to, and this present chapter now progresses to describe the findings that emerged, through the deployment of directed content analysis of data gathered. At the outset of this chapter, I report the frequency of various cycles of experience processes captured in my reflective journal and transcribed supervision meetings. This approach is useful in supplementing the qualitative data presented in terms of identifying recurring themes (Bloomberg and Volpe 2015), i.e. dominant patterns of environmental contact in the case of this study. Lazarus (2003; 2000; 1990) advises that the most desirable research designs should show the stress process again and again in the same person so that we can understand stressful encounters within the total context of a person's life (Mazetti 2011, p.3). In selecting autoethnography as a preferred research methodology, my investigation showed that such research findings tend to be presented in the format of vignettes. A vignette is a short impressionistic scene that focuses on one moment or gives a trenchant impression about a character, idea, setting, or object. Humphreys (2005), an auto-ethnographer based at the University of Nottingham advocates the use of the vignettes as a means of enhancing the representational richness and reflexivity of qualitative research. A summary of my findings and related vignettes are now provided in table 20 and graphically illustrated in figure 11.
Table 20  Summary of Research Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Research Finding Summary</th>
<th>Vignette</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What hazardous work (environmental) factors permeate my practice of leadership?</td>
<td>3 main environmental hazards were identified a) permanent toxicity exposure (PTE), b)</td>
<td>(1) “Fighting for Pie” (PTE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>holistic work overload (HWO), c) uncontrollable field threat.</td>
<td>(2) “Attacks from Space (UFT)”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3) “Overloaded: The Coiled Spring” (HWO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the dominant primary and secondary appraisal patterns used to assess</td>
<td>Primary appraisal is dominated by de-sensitisation and deflection and secondary appraisal domi-</td>
<td>(4) “The Dis-eased Leader” (Desensitisation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the significance of an event, an encounter, or a situation?</td>
<td>nated by introjection.</td>
<td>(5) “The Great Deflector” (Deflection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(6) “Saboteur” (Introjection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the habitual coping mechanisms employed in response to the appraisal of</td>
<td>Habitual coping mechanisms are damaging; self-defeating; and are grounded in neurosis. They</td>
<td>(7) “The Unaware Projector” (Projection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an event, an encounter, or a situation?</td>
<td>are invoked in even the mildest of environmental encounter when the slightest of threat is</td>
<td>(8) “Turning the knife Inwards” (Retroflection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>sensed.</td>
<td>(9) “Outside In” (Egotism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(10) “No Boundary” (Confluence)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are dominant outcomes in terms of a) functioning in work and social</td>
<td>A number of negative outcomes include poor decision making ineffective use of energy, a</td>
<td>(11) “Drowning in a Swirling Sea” (Functioning in Work and Social Living),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>living, (b) morale or life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health?</td>
<td>paradoxical approach to self-actualisation, significant health issues such as stomach, nervou-</td>
<td>(12) “A Life of Low Grade Vitality” (Morale and Life satisfaction),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>s system, disturbed sleeping and eating patterns.</td>
<td>(13) “Wear and Tear” (Somatic Health)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What factors mediate healthy appraisal, coping and outcomes and how does a</td>
<td>Goal congruent demands, mastery based self-efficacy and sensing the possession of necessary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>healthy cycle unfold?</td>
<td>intrinsic (e.g. skill) and extrinsic (e.g. time, subordinates) resources can lead to</td>
<td>Environmental Opportunity and Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>aware appraisal and the conscious choosing of effective problem solving based coping</td>
<td>(14) “Opportunity Knocks” (Opportunity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>strategies that fulfil my need in a healthy cycle of awareness.</td>
<td>(15) “Someone to Lean On” (Support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Factors Mediating Healthy Appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(16) “You Don’t Scare Me Now” (Appraisal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Healthy Coping Facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(17) “The Craftsman” (Efficacy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(18) “My Humanistic GPS” (Grounding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(19) “Frankl Would be Proud” (EI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Healthy Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(20) “Connected” (Healthy Contact)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(21) “The Elan Vital” (Morale/Satisfaction)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(22) “Body and Mind” (Somatic Health)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Outcomes (Cycle of experience disruption manifesting in interruptions to healthy 
   a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale or life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health.
Figure 11  Frequency of Findings

Frequency of Unhealthy Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desensitisation</th>
<th>Deflection</th>
<th>Introjection</th>
<th>Projection</th>
<th>Retroflection</th>
<th>Egotism</th>
<th>Confluence</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency of Health Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensation</th>
<th>Awareness</th>
<th>Mobilisation</th>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Contact</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
<th>Withdrawal</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chapter Five - Research Findings
5.2 The Vignette – Presenting Autoethnographic Findings

Lazarus (1966) advised that in attempting to understand stress, we should look at the patterns of environmental contact that a person employs (Lyon 2012; Mazetti 2011). In selecting autoethnography as my qualitative methodology, my analysis showed that findings in such studies tend to be presented by way of vignettes. These are used as a means of enhancing the representational richness and reflexivity of qualitative research (Ellis 2011; Humphries 2005; Doloriert and Sambrook 2011; Learmonth and Humphreys 2012). The purpose of the vignette is to achieve the thick description called for in qualitative research (Denzin 2011), a layered account of experience within a wider context (Ronai 2014; Humphreys (2005). The vignette allows readers to effectively enter into, and view emergent processes as narrative story telling techniques that are applied in autoethnographic writing (Ellis 1991; Ronai 1992; Rambo 2005; Ronai 1996).

A vignette is neither a total plot nor a full narrative description, but a carefully crafted verbal sketch that might be part of some larger work or complete description in itself. Van Maanen (1998) recommends presenting ethnographic research through different tales as a way of presenting truth through cultural portraits. Miles and Huberman (1994) and Miles et al. (2014) describe a vignette in terms of being a “concrete focused story” (2014, p.83). Several autoethnographic studies were reviewed to witness the application of the vignette. These included Doloriert and Sambrook (2011) whose autoethnographic study looked at challenges in accommodating an autoethnographic Ph.D. in a traditional business school in terms constructing and completing the viva voce. Other studies reviewed included Ellis (1998b); Tom and Herbert (2002); Humphreys (2005); Rambo (2005); Learmonth and Humphreys (2012); Ronai (2003, 1995); Rambo (2005); Moreira (2008a, 2008b); Erickson (1986); (Ellis 1998a, 1998b); Watson (2000) and Humphreys and Watson (2009). In Appendix 7, I provide three different examples of vignettes used in recent autoethnographic published studies.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Title</th>
<th>Vignette Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wolters, L. l. (2014) From Discord To Harmony: An Autoethnographic</td>
<td><strong>My Entangled Domain</strong> - Charting the author’s description of a “chasm” between the pedagogical content knowledge she brought into her classroom and the curricular knowledge that she was being asked to utilize in her practice of lecturing and the ethical dilemma this presented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration Of Belief and Possibility In The Era Of High-Stakes Assessment (2014) – Nevada University.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep, J. A. (2013) Developing self-care at work. PhD, University of the</td>
<td><strong>What am I feeling? What are the indicators in the body and what is the effect on work? What then is the impetus to change?</strong> The researcher began an auto-ethnographical journal at a time when she could feel her health was about to take a further turn for the worst, if she didn’t take some time to reflect. This was the beginning of this study. She felt that if she self-observed and became more self-aware she may understand more and find options for the way forward from this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West of England.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodward, A, M., &quot;Tapestry of Tears: An Autoethnography of Leadership,</td>
<td><strong>The Darkest Hours.</strong> The author was invited to lead a team of music therapists in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2003, a country that had been recently savaged by two brutal inter-ethnic wars. The Darkest Hours Vignette tells of the most challenging times she experience during immersion into the complexities of post-conflict recovery, and the cultural confusion that followed the atrocities of those wars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Transformation, and Music Therapy in Humanitarian Aid in Bosnia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Unhealthy Cycles of Experience Findings

An emphasis on appraisal (how we personally assess the significance of an event, an encounter, or a situation) distinguishes the transactional approach to stress from other approaches by focusing our attention on capturing the personal meaning of the stress experience (Dewe et al. 2010; Dewe and Trenberth, 2004; Cooper et al, 2001). The stress process involves: our assessment of the personal significance of a situation, encounter, or event (primary appraisal); our assessment of our available resources to cope with the situation (secondary appraisal), and our deployment of cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage and reduce the stress reaction to situations we appraise as significant (coping), (Dewe et al. 2010; Dewe and Trenberth 2004; Mazetti 2011).

In the next chapter of this thesis, findings will be synthesised to answer the overarching research concerns, namely, how gaining awareness of healthy and unhealthy processes of appraisal and coping can assist in achieving greater mastery over work related stress. The resolution of that primary research question is addressed in this chapter by addressing a number of subordinate questions. The research questions that were asked in this investigation constitute a gestalt constructivist approach to meaning making. In seeking to understand existence, a gestalt approach affectively addresses, or peels away layers of narrative, in order to illuminate both the bright and dark sides of existence. Gestalt theory posits that this approach promotes the authentic change and healthy growth through heightening awareness (Tonnesvang et al. 2010; McConville 2014; Novack et al. 2012).

Although at a conceptual level, there is agreement that stress is a subjective and dynamic process informed by individual and situational factors, there has been much criticism that the methods used to research appraisal and coping are too simplistic and have failed to capture stress as it is experienced (Dewe et al. 2010; Aldwin 2007; Daniels et al. 2004; Dewe and Trenberth 2004; Dewe 2004; Cooper et al. 2001; Lazarus 2003; Folkman and Moskowitz 2004; Somerfield and McCrae 2000; O’Driscol and Cooper 1994). In particular, traditional self-report questionnaires have been criticised as they are structured in such a way that they de-construct the stress process into its constituent
parts: the individual and the environment, resulting in ‘bits’ of the stress process being taken out of their relational context (Aldwin 2007; Arthur 2004).

Using the analogy of the blind men and the elephant, Arthur (2004) suggests that there is a tendency for stress researchers to compartmentalise, but that only if we examine the whole, “that the gestalt of the elephant will appear” (Arthur 2004, p158). This compartmentalisation has led to much stress research focusing on the extent to which a stressor is objectively present rather than if the stressor is indeed a stressor for the individual concerned, and if so, why they have appraised it as such (Aldwin 2007; Daniels et al. 2004; Newton 1995). Appraisal is the critical dimension in this process and failure to explore its significance, impacts our understanding of the subjective nature of stress (Dewe et al. 2010; Cooper et al. 2001; Lazarus 2000; Dewe 1992). What some may perceive as stressful, others may not, and therefore situations cannot be categorised as ‘stressors’, independent of a person’s reaction to them (Lazarus 1990).

According to Mazzetti (2011), a further criticism of self-report questionnaires is that they capture but a static moment in time and therefore they fail to capture the dynamics of the stress process and how appraisal and coping may develop and adapt over time (Aldwin 2007; Daniels et al. 2004; Cooper et al. 2001; Lazarus 1990). We have ‘histories’ and ‘futures’ which shape our understanding and thinking. Appraisals occur at points between these ‘histories’ and ‘futures’ and are therefore informed by what happened in the past and what we anticipate in the future (Daniels et al. 2004). Self-report questionnaires cannot capture this sense of history and future (Daniels et al. 2004) and therefore fail to capture the dynamics of the process and the context in which appraisal and coping take place (Lazarus 1993; Dewe 1992), as they assume that any given stressful encounter is representative of an individual’s life situation (Lazarus 1990). Lazarus (1966) advised that in attempting to understand stress, we should look at the patterns of environmental contact that a person employs. My findings are presented by way of vignettes that constitute a suitable approach to narrate my patterns of environmental contact.

Contemporary conceptualisations of stress theory posit three components of the stress process (i) antecedent factors, (ii) cognitive perceptual processes that give rise to the
emotional experience of stress, and (iii) outcomes of that experience e.g. somatic health outcomes (Lyon 2012; Houdmont 2009; Cox 1978; Cox and Griffiths 2010). Antecedent factors include hazardous environmental factors and although stress triggers are different for all individuals (a product of individual appraisal), the Health and Safety Authority (2014) outline some common factors associated with work related stress. These include role conflict, unfair management practices, levels of job control, training and support provided.

Architectural stress researchers would place greater emphasis on identifying the structures of these components. Lazarus however was not so concerned with trying to identify a fixed set of stressful work components, due to the dynamic nature of the continuous organism/environment relationship and the fact that what might be considered stressful at a point in time can be re-appraised as not being stressful. Wall (2015) talks of autoethnography as “being research for the individual” (2015, p.17). The fact that my study was completed over an extended period of time means that what emerged in terms of environmental hazards, is not a type of compartmentalised self-questionnaire generated data, but patterns of environmental hazard, in keeping with the transactional and gestalt approach to experiential interpretation.

5.3.1 Finding 1 – Hazardous Environmental Factors

My research data yielded three key environmental factors that constitute work stress hazards. The psychological basis of gestalt therapy is gestalt psychology and is predicated on field theory. This is rooted in the principle that understanding the organism must be done by considering them in the context of their relational environment (Corey 2015; Joyce and Sills 2011). As such, it posits that we are continuously relationally involved in flux, interrelated, and in process. Gestalt therefore pays attention to, and explores what is occurring at the boundary between the person and the environment (Corey 2015). Thus it aligns with contemporary stress theory in acknowledging the role of environmental factors as part of the overall transactional stress process (Zwetsloot and Leka 2010; Cox and Griffith 2010; Houdmont 2009). Table 22 summarises the three environmental and uncontrollable work hazards posed by my work environment, specifically related to my practice of leadership.
Table 22  Finding 1 Vignettes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Finding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;Fighting for Pie&quot;</td>
<td>Permanent Toxicity Exposure (PTE). The emergence of retroflection and projection in particular were invariably linked with toxicity. These findings joined together to form a pattern indicating that my leadership role is set within conditions of permanent exposure to toxicity. Whilst employees and managers may be exposed to toxicity on occasion, the nature of my role means that I am continuously exposed to negative and damaging behaviours that do not serve the organisation, but are aimed at serving the needs of the perpetrator(s). The title “Fighting for Pie” is a cultural reference to an increase in toxicity during the time of this study, when leading in an economic depression was particularly hazardous. It depicts the type of excessive, negative, dishonest behaviour that I have to habitually contend with due to my leadership role, as others try to get their share of the fixed pie, through me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;Attacks from Space&quot;</td>
<td>Generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) is a relatively common condition, associated with chronic uncontrollable worry, compounded by physiological symptoms such as disturbed sleep, muscle tension, and difficulty concentrating (Hoge and Ivkovic 2012). GAD is a generalised state of anxiety not necessarily related to a particular issue in the here and now although a number of antecedent factors are believed to be contributors to this condition. Several studies have suggested that psychosocial characteristics of the work environment may play a role in mental disorders (de Lange et al. 2003; Stansfeld and Candy 2006; Tennant 2001; Wilhelm et al. 2004). My findings suggest that the uncontrollable environment, in which I lead, is a psychosocial hazard because I know that something is going to go wrong, outside of my control – why? Because it always does. Therefore, I have developed a type of generalised anxiety, knowing that an event, encounter or person from the external environment will imminently emerge as a threat to homeostasis. This finding was identified by examining the narrative behind the most frequent pattern of environmental unhealthy contact – de-sensitisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>&quot;Overloaded: The Coiled Spring’</td>
<td>Although stress theories differ in their framing of stress in terms of trait, behaviour, structure or process, a common psychosocial hazard in terms of work related stress is situations where the perception is that demands exceed available resources. Indeed, my literature review illustrated how the term stress as we know it today, can be traced back to an engineering model of strain. Gestalt therapy considers the sum of the parts to be greater than a mere culmination of individual components. The term gestalt itself is translated from German to English meaning – shape, pattern, whole. Narratives behind the emergence of disturbances in the sensation, satisfaction and withdrawal stages of my gestalt cycle resulted in patterns of what I have termed, holistic work overload (HWO) i.e. the psychosocial hazard of cumulative demands where the execution of one demand in isolation would not necessarily be a hazard. Before one gestalten (need) is allowed to close, several</td>
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other needs tend to emerge that require immediate awareness, thus preventing the phases of satisfaction and withdrawal to happen. This leads to significant feelings of unfinished business where the sensation of a cycle closing is not allowed to take place.

5.3.1.1 Vignette 1: “Fighting for Pie”

After a particularly stressful week at work, the issue of toxicity came up in conversation with my supervisor, Dr Patrick Ryan.

As a leader then, I’m the point of escalation for over 260 clients, so basically when a client comes to me, it’s when all has failed and they are in an unhappy situation (Large exhalation). Also there is the allocation of limited resources, failures of software systems, and they all lead to negative behaviours, that I encounter. “That is not my fault that is not my problem”. So nearly on a daily basis, because I lead the organisation, I am exposed to toxic situations (MD Supervision Meeting 8/5/14).

That brought a funny response from Dr. Ryan

I’m taken by the word toxicity and the word toxic. The image that it conjures up is of barrels of toxic substances etc. The Italian mafia drop people they don’t like into this (laughing) (PR Supervision Meeting 8/5/14).

Reflecting after the session I thought to myself “what a fitting analogy that is; being dropped into a barrel and being surrounded by acidity”. In the session, I retorted with an analogy of my own, well one borrowed from my studies in strategic human resource management.

Yes, everybody is fighting for their own piece of the pie, and more. We use the pie analogy to describe the goal of distributive bargaining actually, an approach to negotiation that does not to assume that both sides win, but rather that one side wins as much as it can, generally meaning that the other side will lose, or at least, will get less than it had originally wanted (MD Supervision Meeting 8/5/14).
When codes S2 (Desensitisation) and AC2 (Projection) in particular were imposed on the entire data set, the validity of that conversation that day came back to me in stark realisation. What emerged from my data was that the reality of my working life is set with a predominantly hazardous environment? It is an arena, like many other areas of employment where toxicity is pervasive, but my findings suggest that it is specifically because of my role as leader, that I am continuously exposed to chronic stress-inducing toxic situations, encounters and people. I am not advocating that managers, employees and students in my organisations do not experience stress. On the contrary, managers and employees in my organisation are involved in interpersonal roles and my literature review demonstrated that interpersonal roles are empirically shown to be the most stressful types of role (Johnson et al 2005). The problem with being a leader appears to be around the severity of the nature of issues that I face in terms of their gravity. To illustrate, my data threw up dramatic examples of habitual issues that I have to lead:

The auditor coming from the US actually made contact with me on Sunday “just to reach out” to me for the location of the building (throwing my eyes up toward the ceiling). He then arrived unannounced on Monday, even though the audit wasn't due until Tuesday, to try to catch us out around door access control (MD Supervision Meeting 28/03/14).

We came in this morning and all of pictures in the hallway had been turned upside down. He had gone into my office in the evening and basically removed my connections to the network and rewired my phone to a dead port, because I had to take him to task over his performance (MD Journal Entry 1/10/13).

Yesterday, in the middle of everything, I had to complete a grievance meeting with two employees. It is so messy, and that alone took up all of the day between speaking to witnesses etc. Then there are all the notes to do afterwards. You really do see the worst of people in these situations, the lies, manipulation, cover-ups (MD Supervision Meeting 21/11/13).
There is a colloquial saying often used in Ireland to bemoan the impact of people on each other i.e. “they’d put years on you”. This is particularly apt in terms of my subjective experience of toxicity exposure. There is of course empirical support for that adage however as demonstrated by my review of literature on allostatic loading due to work related stress. Toxicity has been extensively linked with the phenomenon of allostatic loading (Duree 2010; Roberts 2015). Allostatic loading (AL) is labelled as the price of adaptation or the “wear and tear” from experiencing chronic stress (Juster and McKewn 2014, p.12). Work related stress was shown to be linked with physical disorders such as heart disease, hypoadrenia, immunosuppression, and chronic pain (Juster and McKewn 2014; Koob and Le Moal 2001). Over-activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis leading to chronic elevation of glucocorticoids (e.g. cortisol and pro-inflammatory cytokines); processes linked to accelerated biological ageing and brain ageing is also associated with work related stress (Andel et al. 2012).

They are never happy. I’ve just negotiated extensive pay increases for them all and we’ve promoted nearly 25% of the work population in the space of one year. Within hours of me announcing the results of the pay review, which as actually the result they were looking for, I heard someone giving out about the windows in the building. I mean for god sake, that just shows you on the day where they have achieved collectively the biggest % pay increase in our history, the good mood lasted about an hour and a half. If they only knew the hoops I had to get through to achieve it and not one person, acknowledged that (MD Journal Entry 7/5/14).

It is therefore the chronic nature of exposure to toxicity that hangs like a black cloud over my practice that constitutes an environmental hazard that literally feels like it is “putting years on me”.
5.3.1.2 Vignette 2: “Attacks from Space”

I have never been a fan of space fiction! As a child, I used to find the concept of the vast expanse of darkness very threatening when watching space films. I felt a continuous sense of dread for poor Captain Kirk and his crew - why an attack could come from absolutely anywhere out there, and it usually did! My research findings suggest that I experience this sort of generalised anxiety regarding the vast expanse of the uncontrollable macro-environment that I practice in as a leader. Interruptions from this anxiety appeared most in my cycle of experience at the sensation and awareness stages of my appraisal process. A narrative that emerged from the data to which aligned to codes S2 – desensitisation and A2- deflection demonstrated patterns of continuous reflection on a significant unforeseeable issue that had happened, or worrying about something that could happen.

This week already, I have 3 people out sick now, with no adequate cover for them due to annual leave. Then we had the power cut yesterday about 3pm and that wasn’t too bad except it was still off this morning so I had to scramble people home, where they still had electricity to keep working. We just barely got bank files out by midday, and then the phones were still down all afternoon. I have no notes ready for Friday’s lecture and I am so far behind now at work in both places (MD Journal Entry 26/11/13).

Generalised anxiety disorder (GAD) is a relatively common condition, associated with chronic uncontrollable worry, compounded by physiological symptoms such as disturbed sleep, muscle tension, and difficulty concentrating (Hoge and Ivkovic 2012). GAD is a generalised state of anxiety not necessarily related to a particular issue in the here and now, although a number of antecedent factors are believed to be contributors to this condition. Several studies have suggested that psychosocial characteristics of the work environment may play a role in this type of mental disorder (de Lange et al. 2003; Stansfeld and Candy 2006; Tennant 2001; Wilhelm et al. 2004). My findings suggest that the uncontrollable environment in which I lead, is a psychosocial hazard that contributes to generalised anxiety because I know that something is going to go wrong, outside of my control – why? because it always does! My generalised anxiety is based on knowing that an event, encounter or person from the external environment will
imminently emerge as a threat to homeostasis, because that is what happens. I think this finding demonstrates what drew me to Perls (1973) conceptualisation of modern man living in a mode “anxious automation” (1973, p.1).

The term macro-environment refers to conditions that exist in the economy as a whole, rather than in a particular sector or region. In general, the macro-environment will include trends in gross domestic product (GDP), inflation, employment, spending, and monetary and fiscal policy. The macro environment is closely linked to the general business cycle, as opposed to the performance of an individual business sector. In figure 13, the specific forces applied by the macro environment are demonstrated. My practice is positioned within the centre of these forces as I am tasked with creating strategies to both predict and respond to, factors beyond my control.

The US have decided to give the investment to Mauritius after all of the effort we have completed to ready the Irish operation for same. It came down to cost and there’s nothing I can do about the cost differential between here and there. I don’t know what I am going to do now (MD Supervision Meeting 24/09/13).

We are still dealing with the impact of the government introduction of minibudgets. The software simply can’t handle them. My costs have literally doubled because end of year reconciliations now don’t tally post the introduction of the universal social charge. What was automated now has to be manually checked adding huge time and cost pressures to the business (MD Journal Entry 15/01/15).
Lazarus (1991) advised against compartmentalisation in studying stress. That guideline constitutes one of the criticisms of architectural models of stress that conceptualise it as a structural entity versus being a dynamic process. In doing so, they fall into the trap of the blind men and the elephant (Arthur 2004). By compartmentalising without allowing for an examination of the whole, the gestalt of the elephant will not appear! What emerged from my data, when I mapped codes onto relevant passages in the text is that work related hazards interplay with other macro-environmental, but equally uncontrollable factors, that are not related to my own practice, from what Bronfenbrenner (1979) conceptualised as the socio-ecological system (Figure 14). The socio-ecological system includes family, community, church, media etc. (Dunn et. al 2014).
Here is one example of such a scenario discussed in supervision:

There’s another impact of working with stress in that, my wife is an accountant. She’s leading a team here and leading a team in Bangalore. She’s just stressed beyond belief. Last night it was ten o’clock when she got home, and she was there “I just can't keep doing this”. It feels like we’re just in a melting pot of stress, you know it’s like the mortgage, the normal pressures of two young kids, plus these very demanding jobs – careers. *(MD Supervisory Meeting 24/09/13).*

The capacity I have to deal effectively with issues related from the socio-ecological system are greatly impacted by demands placed on me in work. In that example, I have limited capacity to be present for my wife due to my own work stress. Conversely, when I went back to work the following day, of course her situation weighed heavy on my mind, thus limiting my ability to interact effectively in my environment. According to Johnson et al. (2005), this is an example of the spill-over between experiences at work and those off the job.
Over the space of week in my journal entries in 2014, our child-minder had a crash and was unable to look after our children. My wife had to work late each night of the week; my disposable income has just been diminished due to the introduction of new water charges. Roadworks commenced on the main route to work adding significant delays to journey times, we lost out on a major contract at work, several students on the entrepreneurship programme had missed class due to the flu the previous week meaning I had to change all structures in place for the present weeks presentation, and someone disabled our electricity at work due to inadvertently cutting through our power line with a digger. To illustrate my finding of uncontrollable field threat, I have created an expanded model to link the P.E.S.T.E.L and Socio Ecological Models to create an expanded concept of the field in which there is a constant threat to homeostasis.

**Figure 14**  My Expanded External Uncontrollable Environmental Model
5.3.1.3 **Vignette 3:** “Overloaded: The Coiled Spring”

**Figure 15** Stress-Strain Graph for a Ductile Material

- L = the limit of proportionality, Hooke’s law applies up to this point.
- E = elastic limit, beyond this point, the material is permanently stretched and it will not go back to its original length. Elastic behaviour is when a material returns to its original length, plastic behaviour is when the stretched material does not return to its original length.
- Y = yield point, beyond this point small increases in force give much big increases in length.
- B = breaking point / breaking stress, the material breaks at this point.

The above diagram depicts Hooke’s law used to calculate ratio of stress and strain an object can bear before it breaks (Lee et al. 2013). Such calculations are integral to the design of protective mechanisms to ensure non-catastrophic breakdowns in the fields of engineering and construction. My evidence suggests that no such safety mechanisms exist in reality in my practice of leadership. There is no defined breaking point to which a careful watch is paid to ensure that my health and wellbeing are not compromised. No precise calculations exist to ensure that, as a person, my leadership role does not stretch me beyond my elastic limit.
Although different paradigms frame stress in various ways i.e. trait, behaviour, structure or process, a common psychosocial hazard in terms of work related stress relates to the recognition of stress in terms of perceived demands exceeding available resources (Dewe et al. 2010; Xie et al. 2011). Indeed, my literature review illustrated how the term stress as we know it today, can be traced back to an engineering model of strain (Ravalier et al. 2013). When data codes of W2 (Confluence) and SA2 (Egotism) were applied to relevant passages in the in the reflective journal and transcribed supervision meetings, what emerged in the content of that data was a continuous pattern of perceived overwhelmment. Consequently, satisfaction and withdrawal phases of the cycle are continuously interrupted.

I have termed this phenomenon as holistic work overload (HWO) i.e. the psychosocial hazard of the presentation of multiple contemporaneous demands where the execution of one demand in isolation would not necessarily be hazardous. Before one gestalten (need) is allowed to close, several other needs tend to emerge that require immediate awareness, thus preventing the phases of satisfaction and withdrawal from happening. This leads to significant feelings of unfinished business where the sensation of a cycle closing is not allowed to take place. Gestalt theory is predicated on the notion that the whole is more than the sum of the individual parts. My experience of overload is that it is a holistic experience where the stress is greater than the sum of the individual demands.

I am receiving over 200 emails per day - minimum. I think they say that for every distraction it takes 15 minutes to recover concentration- I have no hope”

(MD Journal Entry 25/01/12)
In addition to day-to-day demands experienced by my managers, employees and students, as a leader I am required to develop strategy. This is the setting of an overarching vision to ensure the continuous achievement of success (Hoffman and Woody 2013). My leadership practice habitually involves a level of ownership, accountability and responsibility that others will not have to endure. My findings are corroborated by Kidd et al. (2013), who completed a qualitative analysis of leadership performance at a large educational establishment in New Zealand. Their study highlighted key barriers to educational leadership achievement, but significantly, they posit that these barriers are endemic of leadership challenges in any large institution. Leadership work related stress hazards identified in that study included competing priorities, time table clashes, and the negative impacts from constant interruptions. The researchers also found however, that leaders themselves were complicit in the creation of their own work related stress by taking on new activities without reducing the number of those already in existence (Kidd et al. 2013).

An error by an employee has led to a major data protection breach. This happened yesterday afternoon Friday, and I was in there until 1 am in order to provide their management team with a full update today, yes Saturday. We had a follow up call at 5pm to see if we could identify all potentially impacted employees. I have not been able to identify a definitive list, and so further calls are scheduled for tomorrow, yes Sunday. I am just updating my journal as I await more diagnostic results but I am absolutely exhausted. Next week was completely full already but this is serious and so somehow, I’m going to have to find a way to keep on top of this also (MD Journal Entry 12/12/13).

Extant literature on employment trends reviewed for this study showed that between 2005 and 2010 there has been a significant increase in the speed of work (Steiber and Pichler 2014). Evidence also showed how many jobs have intensified in the wake of the economic recession (Gallie and Zhou 2013; Russell and McGinnity 2011b). Theoretical predictions about trends in work pressure tend to be unanimously pessimistic. Scholars anticipate an intensification of work pressure in more highly skilled jobs that carry greater responsibility, involve more complex tasks and require the constant updating of skills (Steiber and Pichler 2014).
Chapter Five - Research Findings

I literary have to drive like mad to get to the college to deliver the lecture, drive like mad to get back to work and then start preparing for next week’s lecture on Friday evening before I start studying on Saturday and Sunday but invariably, something happens on a Friday at work, so I need to work at the weekends also (Journal entry 28/11/12).

Therefore, in addition to toxicity and the uncontrollable nature of the leadership role, the sheer volume and speed of demand creates a significant psychosocial work environment hazard. I conclude this section by exemplifying the serious nature of this issue through a stark warning given to me by my supervisor:

You've got to make changes. What you don't want to be is the guy who did the PhD on managing stress using a gestalt oriented framework that everybody goes around and tries to practice, and just before you’re about to deliver your first workshop on this, you drop dead of a heart attack (Supervisor 24/09/13).

5.3.2 Finding 2 – Unhealthy Appraisal Processes

My research indicates a damaged mode of environmental interaction where I tend to habitually perceive work situations as threatening. My evidence suggests that primary appraisal tends to automatically invoke secondary appraisal where unhealthy boundary disturbances ensue as dominant coping mechanisms. Lazarus (1966) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984) asserted that the primary mediator of person-environment transactions is appraisal. Primary appraisal is a judgement about what the person perceives the situation holds in store for them. Specifically, a person assesses the possible effects of demands and resources on well-being. If the demands of the situation outweigh available resources, then the individual may determine that the situation represents (a) potential for harm or loss (threat), or that (b) actual harm, has already occurred (harm), or (c) the situation has potential for some type of gain or benefit (challenge).
Goal congruence or incongruence has to do with whether a demand is deemed harmful or threatening to the goal (incongruence) or beneficial (congruence). This evaluation determines whether the emotion will be negative or positive (Lyon 2012). If there is incongruence, the emotion will be negative; if there is congruence, the emotion will be positive. My research has found that at the primary stage of appraisal when confronted with a demand, I will normatively perceive it to be goal-incongruent and a threat. Through automated learned responses, secondary appraisal, the process of determining what coping options or behaviours are available to deal with a threat and how effective they might be appears to happen autonomously in the main, invoking unhealthy coping. In the general population, often, primary and secondary appraisals occur simultaneously and interact with one another, making measurement very difficult (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). In my research however, evidence suggests that through introjection and egotism I have a tendency to set unrealistic expectations that require circumstances and my own performance to be perfect, and therefore situations, encounters, and people are habitually deemed as being goal incongruent, thus I defer autonomously to unhealthy coping mechanisms.

Table 23 Finding 2 Vignettes

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<th>Vignette</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<td>4</td>
<td>“The Dis-eased Leader”</td>
<td>An analysis of content behind data linked with codes S2 (Desensitisation), A2 (Deflection), and M1 (Introjection), indicate that primary and secondary appraisal processes involved in the majority of situations, events and encounters are perceived to be threatening. The term dis-ease in gestalt is used to describe a dominant mode of unhealthy living (Wheeler 2013). “The Dis-eased Leader” tells of how instead of allowing needs to reach awareness, they are continuously blocked. This works in two ways i.e. a conscious effort to block the pain of awareness and/or ignoring the pain to ensure that the performance I believe I need to deliver can be delivered. In this vignette, I tell of a situation where an emergent medical need is need is ignored with potentially catastrophic consequences from a health perspective.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>“The Great Deflector”</td>
<td>At the point of primary appraisal where energy is required to allow for full awareness, deflection is used as a means of dispersing that energy. Because desensitisation at the sensation phase, the need has not</td>
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been allowed to progress to awareness. Instead of healthy environmental contact, energy is displaced in other directions, incongruent with the achievement interrupting healthy flow which will ultimately result in the interruption of secondary appraisal through introjection. There is an urge to side step the need, because it has been perceived to be a threat. It is a method of avoidance that ensures a healthy cycle cannot progress by blocking the transition to healthy and mobilisation, in favour of introjection, negative thoughts in secondary appraisal.

6 “Saboteur” (Introjection)

Rather than mobilising the body and mind to available opportunities to fulfil a need, my evidence suggests that I convince myself I cannot succeed. Therefore, insufficient energy is placed into exploring the breadth and depth of problem focused solutions that could be deployed. Instead, the proliferation of M2 (Introjection) blocks the mobilisation phase resulting in the habitual choosing of unhealthy palliative based coping.

![The Appraisal Process Diagram]
5.3.2.1  **Vignette 4:** “The Dis-eased Leader”

Although the term “disease” usually involves connotations of an illness, where medical and / or psychological experts are consulted, gestaltists prefer to reframe the term as “dis-ease” to describe a condition in which the person is not fully functioning, to emphasise the process of not-being-at-ease or not-being-in-harmony (Clarkson and Cavicchia 2013, p.52). An analysis of content behind data linked with codes S2 (Desensitisation), A2 (Deflection) and M1 (Introjection) indicates the perception of threat in primary and secondary appraisal, in the majority of situations, events and encounters. Dis-ease in gestalt is used to describe a dominant mode of unhealthy living (Wheeler 2013). Perceiving all situations as threatening may have had a useful survival purpose in the past, but such behaviours become problematic when they evolve to being the organism’s dominant mode of dis-eased contact with its environment (Corey 2015). Instead of allowing needs to reach awareness in primary appraisal, they are blocked through desensitisation and deflection. Consequently, appropriate choices for healthy coping cannot be made at secondary appraisal stage. My evidence suggests that this works in two ways i.e. through efforts to block the pain of awareness through fantasy, avoidance, alcohol, smoking etc. and / or ignoring the pain to ensure that the performance I believe I need to deliver can be delivered.

I equate my experience of being a leader in an organisation to being hit by a battering ram several times every hour, every working day. Non work days seem to be filled with recovering from exhaustion and worrying about what has happened, or what will happen. The burden in leadership can be immense; get it right and you receive praise, get it wrong and the consequences can be stark for individuals, the organisation and wider society (Seguino 2010).

My one night off in months and we decided to go for something to eat, next thing a text from the course director to ring him. The students are complaining about workload. I had a feeling when we were going out that this is wrong, I should be working. Boy, I was not wrong. I couldn’t have one night without something. I just got a bottle of wine on the way home because I was so worked up and sat in my own world in front of the telly for the night. This is crazy (MD Journal Entry 28/10/13).
Contemporary conceptualisations of health have moved beyond a narrow foci of the absence of disease to being “a subjective representation of a person’s composite evaluation of somatic sense of self (how one is feeling) and functional ability (Lyon 2012, p.14). The European Commission defines work related stress as -

An emotional and psychological reaction to aversive and noxious aspects of work, work environments and work organisations. It is a state characterised by high levels of arousal and distress, and often by feelings of not coping (European Commission 2002, p.7).

This journal entry is an example of desensitisation, the process of ignoring an emergent need. This example is specifically related to a stressful work related incident, with potentially very serious consequences. It demonstrates how aversive and noxious work related demands caused me to ignore (desensitise) a dominant need that was presenting, with almost catastrophic consequences.

I was watching my usual ITV This Morning programme before I got out of bed this morning as I do and there was a segment that immediately hit me as being of interest. It was in relation to the fact that the British Heart Foundation has just released a report called Health at Work. I’ve tried to access it on their website but couldn’t, but I have e-mailed them. One of the stats called out was that 41% of British Workers admitted to missing a necessary medical appointment due to work pressures. Of course I could relate to that with the eye. One month away from handing in my HR Masters and after the bank holiday weekend, _______ (Boss) and _______ (HR) were coming over to facilitate two meetings with problematic employees. These weren’t disciplinary meetings but an attempt to draw attention to their behaviour. These two had caused me so much stress. Remember the long weekend was nice and did relax me somewhat, well at least at times, I forgot about work. My blood pressure had been sky high, I know because I had brought the machine. I felt fine going to bed on the Monday night, a bit tired after the driving that day, but not exhausted by any means, certainly not like after a day in there. It was the weirdest thing, the alarm clock went off and looking up to the ceiling I thought “what the hell is going on”? I could see out of my right eye something resembling a big black balloon up on the ceiling, and as if I was looking out from behind a brownish veil. I got a right hop but immediately thought, I have to get to work, because they were coming. The meetings were disastrous. _______ _______ was useless, and allowed both of them to talk their way out of things.
Worse than that, she started to turn it around on me as if I could me more facilitating and understanding. What’s so frustrating is that we subsequently had to deal with both of them and they are no longer in the company. How _______ _______ portrayed it back to my boss at the time though really annoyed me and being his HR business partner, he went with her version, of course. So Wednesday morning, I rang Dr. ______ and made an appointment. I started off by describing what I saw when I woke up on Tuesday morning and when I clarified that it happened the day before, the usually gentle Dr. ________ (my GP) went ballistic (relatively speaking). He told me to go out to the hospital. I said I would and then started complaining that my blood pressure was remaining stubbornly high. He stopped me and said “you’re not getting me; you need to get to the hospital now”. It transpired that I I had suffered a vitreous haemorrhage in the eye, a very, very serious issue indeed, but one that had to wait to be addressed until I had gone through that horrific day at work (MD Journal Entry 13/09/13).

5.3.2.2 Vignette 5: “The Great Deflector”

In gestalt, the term deflection is used to describe the process of of turning aside from direct contact with either internal stimuli or the environment, often in the form of other people (McConville 2014). It is a method of avoiding pain, but in doing so, the organism denies themselves opportunities for environmental contact, thus ensuring that their authentic needs remain unment. My evidence demonstrates that energy blocked in the sensation phase of my cycle is habitually deflected away from the awareness phase. The emergence of data patterns captured under code A2 displays the dispersment of energy in non goal fulfilling directions as a method of avoiding, or sidestepping away from fulfilling needs.

This is a little bit like going into your first lecture with a 100 slides and using 12 of them. There is something about, you have a lot of energy, and you have a lot of ability but you’re sending it into many directions, simultaneously (Supervisor 4/4/14).

Energy that should be concentrated and focused is however deployed sporadically and with furious enthusiasm. It is a way of reducing one's awareness of the impact of environmental contact, making it vague, generalised or planned (Denton 2014). As the word suggests, this process is a method of “sidestepping away from direct contact”
(Mann 2010, p.43). The process of habitual deflection involves not using energy in an effective way in order to get feedback from self or the environment. Perhaps no criticism can get through, but appreciation or love cannot permeate either. The deflecting person does not reap the harvest from his activity, and things just don't happen.

The person may be talking yet feeling misunderstood. His interactions misfire, not accomplishing what he might reasonably expect. Even though an individual may communicate validly or accurately, if he doesn't reach into the other person, he won't be fully felt.


I believe that I have been aware of my tendency towards deflection for a long time. It was a particularly useful defence mechanism in childhood because if I was accessible, then trouble would follow. I therefore learned to become busy, and it really didn’t matter what I was doing, as long as I could not be reached. I describe this defence mechanism as a type of armoured coating that deflected threats. I found it to be a very effective tool at a time where my agency for self-protection was habitually compromised. This useful tool however began to morph throughout the years into a spontaneous reaction when threat was sensed.

For example, I developed a fear of time running out in examinations and I would get busy writing, often without reading the questions fully. My mentality was that if I was busy, I was at least someway safe. The exam would finish and I would have answered all of the questions but would have written everything I knew about the particular question. Questions were half interpreted and no skilful discrimination was employed between offering useful and non-useful information by way of constructed answer. The uncontrollable field threat still elicits similar responses by way of animating significant amounts of effort in an unstructured way:

Your survival mode is a set of assumptions that isolates you from sources of support that could relieve distress (Supervisor 17/05/13).
Another way that I deflect is that I spend a lot of time creating lists of what I should do, but the minute I close the notebook, they do not translate into positive action (MD Supervision Meeting 04/04/14).

According to Mann (2010), the deflector can produce vast amounts of energy, but the proportion of useful energy deployed may be miniscule. In deflection, the person tries to avoid the impact of stimuli on themselves from the environment. Deflection metaphorically strips the flavour of rich and vivid contact (Joyce and Sills 2014). Work related stress is therefore a perpetual trigger of behaviours that dissipate healthy contact. The issue with the uncontrollable field threat (UFT) is just like Montaigne (1958) articulated, that in contrast to toxic situations that do happen, the stress of threat from the environment means that boundary disturbances are also invoked from environmental hazards that may or may not happen.

It is, as Lazarus (2001) suggests, the process of appraisal that acts as a “conduit” between stressful encounters and the emotions that follow. The authority of appraisals lies in the fact that they act as a bridge between what one experiences, and how one feels in a particular encounter (Lazarus 2001). This also provides a conceptual pathway for more closely examining the role of discrete emotions. If appraisals trigger the emotional response then, as Cohen-Charash (2001) suggests, stress always implies emotion so “stress and emotion should be treated as a single topic” as “emotion encompasses all the phenomena of stress” (p. 2001, p. 53). In the gestalt cycle, we become aware of events impinging via our senses, or our feelings, or mentally onto our consciousness. As a form of experience, there is a fresh gestalten. You recognise that you have a need; this is not the same as knowing what the need is (Mann 2010). Therefore, in secondary appraisal, the need i.e. coping strategy is decided upon, but because the need is deflected, the appropriate choice cannot be made.
Extract from Supervision Meeting (04/04/14)

Supervisor-is there any validity back as to what I've just said? (Regarding deflected energy quoted earlier in this vignette)

Researcher- Yes there is indeed, and it is good, because when I come in with the projector flying around etc., it is a very accurate reflection of where I am with the busyness etc., and both, and I suppose, it is not all bad, because it is quite productive.

Supervisor- Absolutely.

Researcher- You are absolutely right, and we have been here before, and at this point in time, my sense of direction gets lost.

Supervisor- so if we listened back to today’s tape, you would hear a comment that I made at the beginning, that you have got tremendous energy and ability, but you send it in too many directions simultaneously.

Researcher-That is funny, because as you were saying that, it was as if there was a bell going off because it is so true.

Supervisor- So someway, we have to get this tightened down, so I brought you right back, and I'm holding you.

Researcher-Can I ask a question? (pause as supervisor nods) - this is to do with, given that I don't have a lot of self-confidence, and not great self-efficacy, is there any argument in favour of being able to displace a lot of energy in various different directions simultaneously, a lot of energy being dispensed but it's keeping the plates in the air.

Supervisor- So here's the bit, and we have been here before, that is fine, so come back. If something happens in your work environment that is controlled externally, there is nothing to do but the question becomes, what can we do in the internal environment that we influence? The only thing we can influence is our response.
Researcher- Yes

Supervisor- and when your director says to you, that I might close the company down I might take out your job and three others, so if you feel that you are desperately panicked by that, and frightened (pause), I think that that is an absolutely legitimate reaction and I would say have this, have that feeling, have the response, and have that reaction, because if you don't, you are in some sort of denial, and then have that, and then the next bit is, well what can I do? And again, you do not know if what you do will or not make a difference, but it is about you having some efficacy in the situation. So again, it is about taking responsibility for your response. Have the panic, have the fear, have the goal, and then say what would I do?

Researcher-Yes, yes

Supervisor- I hear you say that you manage the current workload. And I rarely hear you say that if we get supervision in two weeks’ time, you would come back and tell me, this is what I did in the last two weeks, that, that, and that. So there is something about learning, when you get into those stressful situations, that as well as being responsible for your response to the stressor, you may also have to take out one or two of the stresses, and you don't do that very well.

Researcher - No.

Supervisor -No

Researcher - I set goals, ambitious goals and there isn't any wiggle room really. Therefore, and I don't stop until I get them, my health has been one of the most disastrous areas in my life

Supervisor - Whose health?

Researcher - My health.
Supervisor - Whose health?

Researcher - My health.

Supervisor - I will ask you again, who's health?

Researcher - Yeah, yeah (long sigh)

Supervisor - So my health and disaster in the one phrase, just stay with that.

Researcher - Yeah, that doesn't sit well.

5.3.2.3 Vignette 6: “Saboteur”

The main characters in the vignette entitled “Attacks from Space” were the uncontrollable elements of the expanded macro-environment that pose a habitual psychosocial threat to me as a leader. The impact of the routine and unforeseen nature of those threats was attributed to living in a type of generalised anxiety from the knowledge that some threat will emerge as figure from the environmental ground, because it always does. Also, in the previous vignette, I speak of how interruptions to the primary appraisal phase of the transactional stress process through desensitisation and deflection in response to such threat, commences what gestaltist term a paradoxical approach to change (Nevis 2013; Chidiac 2013).

This theory states that all forced attempts to change without holistic awareness through excreting effort, self-control or avoidance to achieve a goal, are unlikely to bring about change. Authentic change is seen to happen spontaneously and naturally only when we are wholly and truly aware (Chidiac 2013). Thus, trying to force change is seen as increasing the likelihood of displacing energy in an unnatural and in-authentic direction that will eventually, sooner or later, lead to increased tension, strain and stuckness (Chidiac 2013). There is some debate over who coined the phrase that the definition of
insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, whilst expecting differing results! Many credit Albert Einstein with this saying but regardless of how the phrase originated, it captures my paradoxical approach to achieving change and need satisfaction, during the secondary appraisal phase.

Evidence captured in response to the imposition of code M2 on the data revealed that introjection interrupted the secondary appraisal phase (transactional stress) and corresponding mobilisation (gestalt) phase of my appraisal process. Mobilisation usually follows awareness in that the person becomes aroused or emotional of the opportunities leading to satisfaction of the need. The healthy person is alive to the senses, to the surroundings, is open to information (Blom 2010). Through introjection however, rather than mobilising the body and mind to the opportunities surrounding this new awareness, the person switches to how he 'should' react in the predefined manner which seems appropriate to the situation (Clarkson and Cavicchia 2013). More energy would seem to go into deciding what the action should be than would be spent in exploring the breadth and depth of the experience.

Patterns emerged from my data showing that following desensitisation and deflection during primary appraisal, the self-critic will define what action is required of me under the perception that I do not have adequate resources to meet the demand. Therefore, unhealthy coping processes will be selected as inauthentic attempts to satisfy a need are invoked. Introjection often interferes profoundly with mobilisation, preventing the person from taking appropriate action to meet his or her needs (Clarkson 2008, p.62).

I constantly think I am not good enough, as good and others, and I always identify someone who I see as an ideal model in a specific area and I say they are far brainier, sexier, more sporty, and that I am a fraud. So I am constantly negatively benchmarking myself against someone who I see as being a model of whatever. My radar is out there, it is like they are stars in the sky and I am down here. What I am doing to myself now is what was done to me all the way throughout childhood. They would point someone out to be and say “why can’t you be as good as them”? (MD Supervision Meeting 8/5/14)
Evidence reviewed for this research suggests that the impact of routine attacks by the self-critic deems my sense of efficacy to lead. Den-Hartog and Belschak (2012) assert that those with weak self-efficacy are less likely to engage with their environment in a proactive manner. Leadership assumes a heightened sense of self-efficacy and self-worth in affording belief in one’s moral authority to set the agenda. The emergence of the self-critic finding suggests that a lack of self-esteem serves as a major threat to my leadership practice.

Every meeting I go into I think that I’m going to be found out. I am that scraggy child from the country who isn’t as good as his city cousins. I don’t feel worthy to be anywhere and when I start to give my team individual feedback, I hear the voice within saying “who are you to be saying this to them”? So, in every situation that I am in, I am battling myself before I can even think about the other (MD Journal Entry 3/2/15).

It appears from the evidence that persistent and severe childhood trauma underpins my self-critical debilitation in terms of my perceived authority to lead. DeRue and Ashford (2010) suggest that aspiring leaders who lack self-confidence are in an understandably disadvantaged position. They propose that leadership identity is co-constructed in organisations when individuals claim and grant leader and follower status, in their social interactions. Through this process of claiming and granting, individuals internalise an identity as leader or follower. Because threat is perceived in almost every situation, resulting in desensitisation and deflection (primary appraisal); introjection habitually presents at the secondary appraisal phase of the environmental transaction resulting in repeated patterns of self-defeating behaviour. This is because the critic automatically invokes unhealthy coping (boundary disturbances).

It’s the same patterns the whole time. I can do good for a few days but something will rock me and I’m shaken to the core. It seems to tap into tried and trusted ways of being. I can’t cope and I run to a crutch. Today, I just could not face anything or anyone. I was literally locked away in the office doing anything but facing what I needed to (MD Journal Entry 07/10/14).
The self-critic, a product of substantial negative introjections throughout life emanating from childhood, is my saboteur, the one who blocks healthy mobilisation and thus results in cycles of unhealthy coping.

5.3.3 Finding 3: Unhealthy Coping Processes

Unlike the response-based or stimulus-based orientations to understanding stress, the transactional model explicitly recognises individual approaches to coping. Coping is defined in transactional terms as:

Constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts, to manage specific external, and / or internal demands that are appraised as taxing, or that exceed the resources of the person.

(Lazarus and Folkman 1984, p. 141)

Coping involves managing the stressful situation; therefore, it does not necessarily mean mastery of the situation (Dewe et al. 2010; Mark and Smith 2012). Managing may include efforts to minimise, avoid, tolerate, change, or accept a stressful situation as a person attempts to master or handle his or her environment. The third research question relates to identifying patterns of interrupted habitual coping mechanisms, employed in response to the appraisal of an event, an encounter, or an individual. Table 24 summarises this finding and the vignettes used to describe it.

Table 24 Finding 3 Vignettes

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<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Finding</th>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>“The Unaware Projector” (Projection)</td>
<td>Having moved from an interrupted mobilisation phase of the gestalt cycle through secondary appraisal where introjection results in my believing that I am not capable of mastering the demand / threat, that same voice perpetuates projection, thus interrupting the action stage. Action occurs at the boundaries of self and environment, occurring within dialogue and within contact with others. The healthy self is able to take from, and give to the interaction, and to experience its fullness (Greenberg and Kahn 2012). The organism is aware of his qualities, but sees them in another. We can believe that people are difficult and rejecting, but in reality we are actually difficult and rejecting (Mann 2010). Mapping code AC2 (Projection) to the data</td>
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resulted in findings depicting where I meet the other by idolising them, and negatively benchmarking myself, or meeting them with latent hostility because they invoke a stress reaction by my being able to identify in them, that which I wish to disown in myself. I call this vignette “The Unaware Projector” because it is a quality that I am deeply unaware of, and its proliferation in the data was surprising.

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<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>“Turning the Knife Inwards”</strong> <em>(Retroflection)</em></td>
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<td>“Turning the Knife Inwards” tells of how hostility that would be directed toward the other is internalised, or turned back in on itself. It is one of the most significant and damaging points of the cycle for me because it interrupts the final contact phase. This is the phase where the whole is more than the sum of the parts – physical senses of touch, feel, hearing etc. (Goodman 1951). It occurs at the boundary between person and environment but because I see the other as a threat or an unnecessary burden, anger and frustration projected at them, must now be turned inward. The emergence of text linked with code F2-Retroflection talk of lying awake without sleep, dreaming of getting revenge, feeling so angry I can’t eat etc. The inwardly directed hostility hurts and deprives me, and therefore a healthy encounter with the other(s) is impossible.</td>
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<td><strong>9</strong></td>
<td><strong>“Outside In”</strong> <em>(Egotism)</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>When code SA2 (Egotism) was applied to the research data, what emerged were patterns of unhealthy coping where I identify as to what an ideal response should be i.e. what those I idolise through projection would do. The evidence suggests that instead of doing what is best for me, I push myself to be the ideal model of perfectionism in that task, but it is a false ceiling that can’t be reached and therefore shame is the habitual outcome. This blocks the satisfaction phase of the cycle. In healthy cycles, this point is the quiet after the storm, prior to separation or withdrawal. In a full and vibrant contact-cycle, the individual is able to savour the completion of a need and is ready to move on with satisfaction and readiness of the next sensation. The reality for the egotist is to experience habitual unfinished business, and to lead a life full of “self-castigation and shame” (Clarkson and Cavicchia 2013, p.53). The vignette “Outside-In” tells of how my leadership practice is denoted by my treating myself life a means of production in order to get results.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>10</strong></td>
<td><strong>“No Boundary”</strong> <em>(Confluence)</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>“No Boundary” describes how in terms of work, no self-protection is afforded due to permeable parameters that mirror those experienced in childhood. When code W2 (Confluence) was applied to the data, it extracted a pattern of interruption to the withdrawal stage of the cycle. In healthy withdrawal, the person is able to withdraw to the balanced fore-and-background stasis. It is the moving into the resting period, where sensation is waiting, to be felt. Confluence is seen in individuals whose self becomes as much part of their job for instance; in a lack of differentiation between self and others. Because the previous phase of satisfaction has been disturbed,</td>
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5.3.3.1  Vignette 7:  “The Unaware Projector”

Figure 17  The Unaware Projector

The previous vignette told of how the process of secondary appraisal is interrupted through introjection. I referred to this as my saboteur, the self-critic who looks at the threat and dictates, that although I must push through even though I do not have the resources to achieve my goal. When code AC2 (Confluence) was mapped to the data, what appears is a pattern of response where the organism is under so much perceived threat, that he meets his environment with projection; the outcome being a damaged mode of environmental contact characterised by idolisation or latent hostility. This interruption occurs at the awareness phase (gestalt) of the coping (transactional) cycle.

At the action phase, another punctuation point in the process of contact (or figure formation) as a single whole can be identified as the contacting phase of choosing and implementing appropriate action (Perls et al. 1969). This includes the organisation of perceptual, behavioural and emotional activity. We choose and reject possibilities. The person actively reaches out toward possibilities, seeking to overcome obstacles and experimenting with different forms of appropriate action. An unemployed thirty year old man makes numerous applications for jobs, regularly investigates job centre opportunities and engages in voluntary work to keep himself alert and interested at the
same time as maintaining continuity in his employment experience, by keeping up with the latest methods (Clarkson 2008). Action occurs at the boundaries of self and environment, occurring within dialogue and within contact with others (Mann 2010). The healthy self is able to take from, and give to the interaction, and to experience its fullness (Greenberg and Kahn 2012). Because of a blockage in this action phase, projection is a reality where I am unaware of my own qualities and see them in others.

In projection, we can believe that people are difficult and rejecting, but in reality we are actually difficult and rejecting (Mann 2010). Figure 18 demonstrates my projection process because even though the demon stares back me in the mirror, I view myself always as the victim and not the perpetrator. Repeated analysis of my research data revealed several layers of reality pertaining to my projections. Some of these layers I found uncomfortable in owning. For example, it appears that there are aspects of my personality that may in fact be a major contributor to my PTE experiences. Evidence gleaned from the data suggests that I can be overly defensive, latently aggressive, judgemental, jealous, petty, and argumentative.

It was hard for me to understand why the class objected to the lifeline exercise. My God, these are supposed to be adults, teachers of the future and yet they were giving out about a bit of self-reflexivity (MD Journal Entry 25/05/13).

Wow, my wife has just told me not to meet the prospective tenants because I am not instantly likable. She said I scared off another couple with my rules and my regimes. They tell me at work also that they would hate to be interviewed by me again (MD Journal Entry 21/12/14).

Because my formative years were tainted by permanent exposure to toxicity in the home, empirical evidence would point to negative outcomes for my adult life (Juster and McKewn 2014; Andel et al. 2012). Although I provided numerous examples of external sources of permanent toxicity in my practice of leadership, there is a circular, internal aspect to this to that I have hitherto been unaware of. Because I negatively benchmark myself against others, I turn anger inwardly, thus castigating myself for my failures.
Because I want to disown negative elements of my personality, I project failings onto others. At best, this could be a contributory factor to toxicity itself.

You see us as being at the other side of the table, we are smarter than you, we are sexier than you, and you punish yourself accordingly (Supervisor 24/09/13).

At worst, I suspect that projection could be the cause of much toxicity I experience. Perhaps, the self-perpetuated element of PTE is an attempt to replicate the familiar of home. If I can attribute toxicity to external sources, I do not have to take responsibility for my own shortcomings. Extant literature suggests that as a coping mechanism, this behaviour does exacerbate toxicity. Zapf and Einarsen (2011) state that environmental retreat often tends to invite further hostility. Evidence from Coyne et al. (2003) suggests that victims of workplace bullying tend to be easily upset in comparison to others. They are also more likely to experience difficulty in coping with any type of personal criticism and are generally anxious, tense, and more suspicious than others. Brousse et al. (2008) found that victims of workplace bullying reported higher neuroticism traits when compared with others. The identification of projection has therefore introduced a substantial self-propelling element of toxicity due to neurotic patterns of coping.
5.3.3.2  **Vignette 8: “Turning the Knife Inwards”**

The application of code F2 – (Retroflection) to the research data uncovered patterns of coping where the anger that would be projected externally, is turned inwardly with negative consequences, particularly to the final contact phases of my gestalt cycle of experience. In a healthy cycle of experience; having mobilised and acted; there follows full and vibrant contact termed final contact by Goodman (Stoehr 2013). The power of the whole (contact) is more than the sum of its parts i.e. physical senses of touch feel, hear etc. Contact occurs at the boundary of our self and the environment. There are two types of retroflection: (i) You would do to yourself that which you want done to the other (ii) you do to yourself that which you want done by the other. The type of retroflection typically captured in my data relates to the first of these behaviours i.e. doing to myself what I would do to the other i.e. the anger that is initially projected is then turned inward sharply as it cannot be externalised.

My earliest memory of turning anger inwardly was, as a child, probably about eight years of age, repeatedly charging at a wall with my head as hard as I could, in the midst of another parental row at around 2am in the morning! Just another disrupted night’s sleep where the angry child could not vent his anger to his parents, so he did to himself, what he wanted to do to them by way of banging their heads together. Through popular media, we have become more familiar with this type of behaviour that can manifest in many forms. Quigley et al. (2016) have completed much research into self-harming amongst teenagers who constitute a significant risk group for this type of behaviour. Their research has found that a key driver behind self-harm activity has empirically been shown "to get relief from a terrible state of mind" (Quigley et al. 2016 p.12). The adult leader however with children of his own, does not engage in such activity so the anger exists in silence, turned inwardly, where it is free to attack. There is no external release from a terrible state of mind, in response to work related stress hazards.

We followed up why we didn't get the business and she attacked me again by mail. I left that night there fuming, and all day, I was fantasising about getting revenge, and because I have to internalise same, I couldn't sleep that night and was really, really wrecked the next day (**MD Supervision Session 21/03/14**).
In this quotation, the level of aggression that I received from a prospective client had a significant effect on me, resulting in numerous cycles of unhealthy experience over a number of days as I came to terms with the behaviour I had witnessed. According to O’Driscoll and Brough (2010), the consequences of workplace aggression on victims can be stark including anxiety, fear, depression, and avoidance behaviours, and organisational consequences such as reduced performance and turnover, work withdrawal behaviours (absenteeism and sick leave), poor psychological health (anxiety, depression, and victimisation) and poor physical health (sleep problems, fatigue, and colds).

Because of retroflection, the person is not able to receive or assimilate with his environment and so resorts to inward directed hostility (Tonnesvang et al. 2010; Novack et al. 2015). This behaviour is learned and reinforced in development, when feelings and thoughts are not validated in the family group, or when expressed feelings or thoughts are punished without validation (Mann 2010). A key insight gleaned from my data was that the retroflective, self-induced punishments I inflict on myself are almost a direct replica of the punishments that were inflicted on me as a child such as sleep and nourishment deprivation.

I wake so often dreading that I am back there. The beatings were horrendous – a poker, fishing rod, a table tennis bat, wooden spoon, steel spatula, her fists, her spittle. That horrible vodka drenched breath searing into my face. No matter if it was 10am in the morning, I would be put into bed for the day, with no food or drink. I remember the day _______ (relative) and his wife called unannounced and her dragging me up and out of the bed, warning me that if I told him I was being punished, I’d be dead. I’d be awake all day and night and she’d pick various times to come in and inflict another beating. Her favourite was to make you clean the whole house top to bottom. As you would be washing the dishes, she’d come to the drawer beside the sink, picking out an implement. Walking away, she’d be banging it off her hand and then you had to wait several hours, and when she was drunk, she’d come and get you. I remember wetting myself one night when I heard her coming down the hall at about 1am in the morning (MD Journal Entry 12/12/13).
Such reflections on childhood experiences of violence and abuse are profuse in the reflexive journal. A number of effects may be generated by cognitive distortions and maladaptive beliefs about the self and the interpersonal world that became part of the child's cognitive schemata when trauma occurs (Bak-Klimek et al. 2014). The pathogenic effects of negative core beliefs associated with sexual abuse have been posed as a significant component of post trauma reactions (Lipovsky and Kilpatrick 2013). Briere (2015) has noted that the cognitive effects of negative self-evaluation, guilt, helplessness, hopelessness, and profound distrust may act as contributory factor in producing the affective and interpersonal problems which plague survivors. Jehu et al. report that survivors of childhood sexual abuse often hold distorted beliefs arising from the experience which appear to contribute to disturbances such as low self-esteem, sadness, and guilt into adulthood.

In my role of leadership, in response to hazardous environmental factors such as permanent toxicity exposure (PTE) in particular, the post traumatic effects of childhood abuse are invariably aroused with negative coping as a consequence. Continuous retroflection results in interferences with muscular patterns, the creation of abdominal tensions and the production of chemical imbalances in the body. Energy is used to suppress the original held back impulses, thereby also draining energy away from the achieving my needs in the current environment. This is the energy required to participate in living (Joyce and Sills 2014). Ironically, my data is littered with references to feeling exhausted. A psychophysiological example of retroflection is a holding-in pattern such as not breathing out completely by keeping the chest inflated, disturbing the natural flow of breathing. This impedes the person's ability to use breath effectively to support physiological functioning in service of chosen goals (Clarkson and Cavicchia 2013). Retroflection manifests for me in continuous sensations of being suffocated and strangulated during contact.

I remember my therapist kept telling me that it looks like I am not breathing and to relax my jaw because I have a tendency to stick it out when I am stressed (MD Supervision Meeting 24/09/13).
I am under pressure, and I am taking away all of my nourishment. I’m taking my anger out by depriving the child. Instead of nourishing it, I really make things tougher. It’s like I am punishing myself like my mother used to do. Remember all the nights of being sent to bed with nothing to eat or drink (MD Journal Entry 19/08/12).

I’m just asking the question, is that how you live, and if it is, are you happy with that, and if it's not, but what are you going to do about it? (Supervisor 24/09/13).

5.3.3.3 **Vignette 9: “Outside In”**

The application of code SA2 on the gathered data revealed interruptions to the satisfaction stage of the gestalt cycle of experience resulting in egotism. There is an argument for considering satisfaction and withdrawal as outcomes of the cycle, but in reality, the organism must be able to feel satisfaction and achieve withdrawal, and therefore they remain as coping elements in the integrated gestalt / transactional model. Egotism may be seen as the person being more involved with themselves rather than the broader context of the contact and environment, and thus they miss the full impact of giving and receiving. We can think of this in terms of the person who, in watching the film spends most the time saying how wonderful it is, how superb the action, how exciting it is, and so on (Clarkson and Cavicchia 2013). Perls et al. (1951/1969) refer to the satisfaction stage as post-contact. This is the afterglow, the satisfaction following the full and complete experience. This is the quiet after the storm prior to separation or withdrawal. In a full and vibrant contact-cycle the individual is able to savour the completion and is ready to move on with satisfaction and readiness of the next sensation. It is within the savouring that the individual copes with the need, building the readiness for the emergence of the next gestalten.

Through the invocation of egotism, hazardous environmental work factors force me to step outside of myself, to treat myself like a means of production, as opposed to being an individual with needs. I assign myself as a resource to the next challenge, without the possibility for deep satisfaction to be experienced. Clarkson and Cavicchia (2013) relate this issue to when a person adopts a system of thought that he is exposed to and
tries to become an “ideal product” (2013, p. 65). HWO was identified as a work hazard defined by me as the physical and psychological burden I experience due to the cumulative effect of numerous individual tasks, where the execution of these demands in isolation would not normally induce a stress reaction. I am consumed by doing what I believe I should be doing, and not what I want to do.

The self-perfectionist critic intervenes here also, and fear of failure perpetuates a mindset that finds it hard to say “no”. Sills et al. (2012), talk of the egotist being continuously propelled by experiencing the voice that says “I must” (2012, p.501). They argue that the result is chronic fatigue, irritation and loss of meaning. The egotistical person loses his or her relationships, and experiences emptiness and hopelessness in the context of a self-constructed existential vacuum. Such individuals lack inner feelings of accomplishment, and they do not perform to their optimum level, nor do they value what they believe in.

Work related demands are akin to egotistical debris caught a swirling sea that continuously bombards me, taking me with it until I feel part of it. In taking myself away from my environment, I am left feeling nothing, but a vacuum. Bentley (2012) argues that shame is one of the most important factors in stifling emotional expression and good contact in the workplace, due to the fear of failure. It is, he argues, the affective experience of believing oneself to be totally useless, bad, and lacking in value. It is a habitual self-questioning of our own sense of worth brought on by ridicule, humiliation and non-recognition. Joyce and Sills (2014) discuss egotism in terms of the organism stepping outside of themselves where experience is minimised, often in the context of trying to be an ideal model of what they believe they should be. Work overload is invited through my attempts to be the ideal leader. Instead of seeking help, my survival mode shuns contact.

The self-punishments from retroflection often result from continuous attempts to be an ideal model of something. Because I never achieve the perfection I am driven to, I add further pressure on myself, driving myself forward more as a means of production, as opposed to a human being with feelings and needs. In egotism, the concentrating self feels empty, without need or interest (Perls and Stevens 1969).
It’s after hitting me like a bolt of lightning just from, talking about this, my tendency to create lists, started about 10 to 12, and I was definitely in survival mode. I would be creating lists of things to do that were vitally important, you know, to get healthy etc. but then I’d do the exact opposite, or nothing at all (MD Supervision Meeting 21/03/14).

The bad side of it is obviously that you don’t have that sense of release or homoeostasis, where the constant subliminal need arises, moves into conscious awareness and then we do something to fulfil that need. Then we should have satisfaction when that need is satisfied but in my job, one need is just followed by another need, there was no opportunity time to close off, there is no down time, but I never want to fail so I just keep doing (MD Supervision Meeting 17/05/13).

Annual leave today but what a waste! I am stressed out of my head with the up and coming visit of our CEO and it is just not coming together. We have had excellent results and I know I am doing well in the job but why do I feel like this? What a waste of a day, it was supposed to be a rest day but I am so exhausted between the job, the study, home everything, I don't ever seem to be able to feel just happy (MD Journal Entry 27/06/11).

According to Dorahy and Clearwater (2012), social functioning is likely to suffer due to the adverse effects of abuse, as interpersonal relationships become eroded or avoided. Chronic shame has a significant impact on the willingness of individuals to connect with others. Shame may inhibit help-seeking for the psychological consequences of sexual abuse. One way of dealing with the intensification of shame feelings is through dissociation (Dorahy 2010). As Talbot et al. (2004) noted, disassociation may be utilised to regulate or even to eliminate feelings of shame. Kaufman (1980) states that

Shame is the effect which is the source of many complex and disturbing inner states; depression, alienation, self-doubt, isolating loneliness, paranoid and schizoid phenomena, compulsive disorders, splitting of the self, perfectionism, and a deep sense of inferiority, inadequacy or failure.

(Kaufman 1980, p.45)
5.3.3.4 Vignette 10: “No Boundary”

Figure 18 Confluence

Consider the above picture. It depicts the merging of two rivers into a new and distinct entity. At the point beyond the intersection, the individuality of both original entities is now gone forever, as the boundary between both subsumes to the destiny that lies ahead. In geographical terms, this is known as confluence; the same term applied to the loss of individuality of the organism when the boundary between them and their environment becomes eroded. The notion of boundary is exceedingly important in gestalt. It is the point of intersection between organism and environment, representing the last frontier of demarcation, individuality and control.

In gestalt therapy, the set of experiences where a person is interacting with the environment is called the contact boundary. This expression, while appearing to be a noun, is actually a set of verbs and interactions that describes experiences. Thus our emphasis in gestalt therapy is on activity, described in verbs, whether in the therapy session or outside it (Gregory 2014). Our emphasis, too, is on the development of choice-making, which we call alienating and assimilating, as well as on awareness and the ability to describe the relationships of the elements of figure / ground.
Confluence may be seen in individuals whose self becomes as much a part of their job or past time. Clarkson and Cavicchia (2013) offer examples of the computer programmer who lives to code, to socialise only through bits and bytes; the sport enthusiast whose whole happiness seems determined by whether or not there is a win on Saturday, or by how well the sporting idol performs on the field. Confluence, the merging with another person or with a situation or to surroundings leads to loss of self, to a lack of satisfaction and to the dulling of the receptiveness to sensation (Novack and Novack 2014). In the context of the disturbance at the withdrawal stage, the individual clings to the gestalt, is unable to appreciate that letting go will allow a further new and enriching experience to come forward.

When code W2 was applied to the data, confluence emerged as a significant issue but its terminology as a coping mechanism is possibly problematic. Evidence captured in my data invariably demonstrates a blurring of boundary between the work environment and I because of my leadership role. As an autoethnographic study, this dissertation has set forth from the outset the prevailing cultural conditions in which this study conducted. The economic recession that permeated throughout this investigation meant I needed to work faster, harder, and longer than ever before. Wheeler (2013) offers a reconceptualisation of boundary disturbances that are useful in considering the gestalt drive for homeostasis or balanced equilibrium (Figure 19). He deems cycle interruptions more in terms of resistance to good contact. I find this theory particularly useful in visualising the seminal gestalt notion of polarities i.e. existence is said to occur somewhere along the continuum between poles. Gestaltists in Wheeler’s model aim to live in the safety of the mid area between each pole. From a boundary perspective, healthy living occurs around the midpoint between confluence and differentiation, where the organism is free to flux towards a polarity whilst returning to the mid-point in healthy living. The organism has an appropriate blend of environmental contact and boundary, where their individuality is maintained, but not differentiated so much as to avoid environmental contact.
As a leader, I now check mails until I go to bed in the evening, e-mail is accessible 365 days per year and even when on annual leave overseas, what is happening in work is compulsive viewing. Are the staff coping ok? Has that new deal signed? Are the students starting to email me through their assignments in line with deadlines? Indeed, the decision to lecture part time in addition to completing a PhD, was in effect, a significant moment in the removal of differential space from the work environment, pulling me toward an almost complete confluence with the environment, and the hazards I perceive it to hold.

I found that because of the lectures and things being so intense, because I had so little time, and because of the impact of doing 600 slides, I was having to work very hard to get my slides together. There was no time to enjoy the end of a lecture and begin with the excitement of the new. Because I worked hard and not smart, I had no time at all to withdraw (MD Journal Entry 17/05/13).

I don't expect to win every match, every day, so now it's about coming back out of that, letting that experience drift away from the foreground, let it go into the background a little bit, so that you can go back to a little bit more afterwards, and regain your balance (Supervisor 17/05/13).

As you are talking much earlier in the session, regarding the issue of celebration, it is very difficult for me to do, to celebrate anything. This does go back to home, and it does go back to my mother, and that is something that I struggle with. She would generally destroy events, purposely so, but you'd be made feel bad. The fact that if it was my birthday and she had to buy six-pack of crisps etc. it would be like she'd had to sell a kidney to do it (MD Supervision Session 17/05/13).
But I think the core question is, what if I don't maintain this aspect of stress in my life, and do I need that type of stress in my life and every so often, do I need this all the time, do I need crisis all the time, do I need pressure all of the time and why? (Supervisor 24/09/13).

It is quite important to me to be able to control all of those pieces (of work). I am at my worst when everything is going left, right and centre. That is when I feel overwhelmed (MD Supervision Session 29/01/14).

5.3.4 Finding 4 - Work Related Stress Outcomes

Finding 4 addresses the question asked regarding what dominant outcomes I experience in terms of a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale and life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health from work related stress. A number of negative outcomes emerged including poor decision making, ineffective use of energy, a paradoxical approach to self-actualisation attempts, significant health issues such as stomach issues, nervous system disruption, and interrupted sleep patterns. These are summarised now in Table 25.

Table 25 Finding 4 Vignettes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Finding</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>“Drowning in a Swirling Sea” (functioning in work and social living)”</td>
<td>Depicts my experiences of functioning in work and social living, and the effects of work related stress. It demonstrates the complex nature of work related stress that is both a factor of neurosis and a contributor to it. It highlights the dynamic nature of environmental interaction that incorporates interrupted ways of being, that in turn, interrupt leading and social living. My finding demonstrates an inconsistent leadership practice, impacted by the effects of unhealthy coping, where social functioning, critical to the effective execution of leadership activity is interrupted at the appraisal stage through desensitisation, deflection and introjection. In the coping phase, it is interrupted by projection, retroflection, egotism and confluence. The analogy used is “Drowning in a Swirling Sea”. This vignette demonstrates the frantic but often directionless and uncontrolled energy deployed in a toxic and dangerous environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>“A Life of Low Grade Vitality” (morale and life satisfaction)</td>
<td>Describes a type of metapattern, an overarching commentary regarding the cumulative effects of the sum of the parts from work related stress. Work hazards combined with neurotic ways of being, translate through the findings into the type of anxious automation Perls (1973) spoke of, that afflicts modern man. Unhealthy coping mechanisms such as confluence result in a manner of living and leading where satisfaction and withdrawal are not experienced. Therefore, existence means contending with multiple flows of often contemporaneous needs, where the gestalt can’t be closed, leading to “A Life of Low Grade Vitality”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>“Wear and Tear” (Somatic Health)</td>
<td>“Wear and Tear” uses the analogy of the ageing boat being continuously bombarded in the midst of environmental swirl. The vulnerable, wooden vessel is dwarfed by gigantic waves, tossing it helplessly, where its own vulnerabilities negate its ability to cope. The scars on the body-work of the boat resultant from several of these encounters depict “Wear and Tear”, or the price of adaptation in terms of trying to maintain ballast (homeostasis), whilst responding to work place hazards.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.4.1 **Vignette 11: “Drowning in a Swirling Sea”**

Yontef and Jacobs (1989) used the analogy of drowning in a swirling sea to describe the essence of the organism struggling in their environment. It is a fitting metaphor to capture my subjective interpretation of leading in a stressful environment. My first finding showed how that environmental swirl is habitually awash with toxicity and conflict. The sense of threat that emanates from the uncontrollable environment emerged as interruptions to both the sensation and awareness phases of my gestalt cycle of experience (COE). These phases of the gestalt cycle correspond with the primary appraisal phase of the transactional stress model. Therefore, the first impact on my practice of leadership is to operate under a constant state of generalised anxiety.

It’s that feeling of dread that comes on Sunday night. It may not be anything specific but just the dread of what’s to come in the morning. I don’t even get a chance to settle...
back in on a Monday morning before the mails start flying, the phone starts ringing, someone starts moaning or crying (MD Journal Entry 12/1/15).

During primary appraisal, that sense of incomplete gestalten (needs) is a trigger of secondary appraisal where unhealthy coping mechanisms (boundary disturbances) are invoked through the voice of the internal self-critic (introjection). With this type of self-castigation at play, authentic leadership is extremely difficult to achieve. According to Brown and Treviño (2006), the principal dimensions of authentic leadership are self-awareness, openness, transparency, and consistency. Avolio et al. (2004) describe authentic leaders as -

Individuals who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspective, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and high on moral character

(Avolio et al. 2004, p. 4)

A recurrent theme in the data refers to inconsistent performance in response to work related stress. Work demands are habitually assumed to be threatening and it appears that the burden my response places on me can depend on the duration of time until reappraisal takes place. Initially, most demands are perceived as threats and earlier findings demonstrate how awareness is blocked and energy is deflected. Instead of the invocation of healthy coping strategies, unhealthy boundary disturbances result at secondary appraisal stage and introjection takes place. Unhealthy environmental contact follows through projection, retroflection, egotism and confluence and the duration of these cycles is indefinite. Unless the demand has been interpreted at primary appraisal as being goal congruent or that the unhealthy cycle is relatively short lived, the deployment of healthy coping can be delayed significantly, and with a higher cost to me in terms of health and wellbeing.

I can’t even explain it myself, if I was he (the boss), I’d be jumping up and down because he has been chasing me on this (amended financial analysis) for days, but I just don’t want to go near it. I can’t face it and I know I am avoiding it, but it can’t go on.
Normally, I’d spit this out, but for some reason, I’m just allergic to this at the moment (MD Journal Entry 13/1/15).

DeRue and Ashford (2010) suggest that aspiring leaders who lack self-confidence are in an understandably disadvantageous position. They propose that leadership identity is co-constructed in organisations when individuals claim and grant leader and follower status, in their social interactions. Through this process of claiming and granting, individuals internalise an identity as leader or follower. Those identities become relationally recognised through reciprocal role adoption, and are collectively endorsed within the organisational context. My evidence identifies a tortured organism, lacking belief, continuously racked with self-doubt and self-castigation. I make continuous references in my journal to feeling not good enough and I constantly engage in negatively benchmarking myself against others. It appears that I interfere most with the process of claiming my own leadership status. Consequently, I am at a disadvantage when attempting to achieve environmental support for my leadership validation.

I hate going to meetings. Every time I open my mouth, I hate the sound of my voice, and how I look. I always feel less than everyone in the room and I get more and more nervous. Sometimes I see people looking at each other wondering what’s going on (Journal Entry 02/10/11).

Bentley (2012) argues that shame is one of the most important factors in stifling emotional expression and good contact in the workplace, due to the fear of failure. It is, he argues, the affective experience of believing oneself to be totally useless, bad, and lacking in value. It is a habitual self-questioning of our own sense of worth brought on by ridicule and humiliation and non-recognition.

Socialisation processes may further exacerbate these self-conscious emotions in men sexually abused in childhood (feeling they did not live up to their gender role by not doing enough to stop the abuse or to protect themselves). It is associated with internal attributions about causality of negative events as well as a sense of uncontrollability in making things different.
Shame elicits strong self-deprecating reactions of the entire self, with hostility initially directed towards the self. However, because shame involves a real or imagined rejecting and disproving other, hostility may be redirected towards the rejecting other in retaliation as a ‘defensive strategy’ or an attempt to turn the tables and to right the self.

(Lutwak et al. 2003, p. 910)

5.3.4.2  **Vignette 12:**  “A Life of Low-Grade Vitality”


Modern man lives in a state of low grade vitality. Though generally he does not suffer deeply, he also knows little of true creative living. Instead of it, he has become an anxious automation. His world offers him vast opportunities for enrichment and enjoyment, and yet he wanders around aimlessly, not really knowing what he wants and completely unable, therefore, to figure out how to get it. He does not approach the adventure of living with either excitement or zest. He seems to feel that the time for fun, for pleasure for growing and learning is childhood and youth, and he abdicates life itself when he reaches maturity. He goes through a lot of motions, but the expression on his face indicates his lack of any real interest in what he is doing. He is usually either poker faced, bored, aloof or irritated. He seems to have lost all spontaneity, all capacity to feel and express directly and creatively. He is very good at talking about his troubles and very bad at coping with them. He has reduced life itself to a series of verbal and intellectual exercises; he is drowning himself in a sea of words. He has substituted psychiatric and pseudo-psychiatric explanations of life for the process of living. He spends endless time trying to either recapture the past, or to mould the future. His present activities are merely bothersome chores he has to get out of the way. At times, he is not even aware of his actions (Perls 1973, p.1).
The issue regarding job demands in a boundaryless construct is, in my experience however, that the endless chores that Perls refers to are not of my own making in the main, but a factor of the holistic aggregate of demands that must be attended to. Little wonder therefore, that I as a modern man, I am condensed in existence to experiencing diluted morale and life satisfaction with embracing a poker faced and irritated look. The totality of demands in my expanded model of the external and uncontrollable environment is greatly diminishes any opportunity for fun and creative living. If one’s job entails meeting demands actively for 12 hours per day, sometimes seven days a week, then where is the time to engage with the environment in an enthusiastic and fun way? This moment’s gestalten must be attended to in an endless conveyor belt of needs that entail toxicity and threat. Time for conscious re-appraisal and the selection of healthy problem focused coping methods all too often gives way to emotion-focused unhealthy neurotic mechanisms of environmental contact.

At the core of the depletion of life satisfaction and morale in my story lies with the gestalt concept of “unfinished business”. Central to the “unfinished business,” that is, lingering negative emotions caused by childhood trauma or other interpersonal issues not yet resolved (Paivio and Greenberg 1995). One of the benefits of this study is how it digs deep into the discreet emotions that constitute my experiences of stress in the messy swamp (Ellingson 2012) of an autoethnographic study, relating to the gritty experience of being human (Kierkegaard 1978). Unfinished business from the past such as the survival of childhood sexual abuse, attaches itself to the appraisal of a situation resulting in the deflection of energy, where needs are left unmet. In the attempted

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execution of multiple contemporaneous demands, desired outcomes are unmet, leading to experiences of unfinished business. Therefore, the overall drive to self-actualisation is unmet, resulting in an overall umbrella-type feeling of a life of unfinished business.

Returning to the introductory paragraphs of this dissertation, I provided a wider cultural context for the reader of the period of economic turmoil in which this study was completed, reflecting on being a leader at this time. I told of how approximately 40,000 Irish people had left Ireland in 2011, 95% of whom were between the ages of 19 to 44 years (McWilliams 2012; Fenton 2011). In my leadership role, the prevailing macro-environmental climate continuously placed a downward gravitational pull at a time where hundreds of businesses were closing on a weekly basis. Many people were looking to me to ensure that the same consequences did not befall them. This ongoing burden contributed experiencing life in a constant state of low grade vitality.
5.3.4.3 Vignette 13: “Wear and Tear”

Figure 20 Wear and Tear

In terms of work related stress outcomes on somatic health i.e. illness and physical functioning (Lyon 2012), I once again defer to Yontef and Jacobs’ analogy of floundering in a swirling sea. I liken the impact of work related stress on somatic health to the image depicted above of the lone sailing vessel caught in the midst of a wild oceanic swell. This image captures not only the destructive power of the thrashing waves and gusting winds, it also captures the vulnerability of the vessel itself in the context of its environment. In this image, we do not see an impervious, metallic super vessel, but instead, we see an ageing and scarred entity, one that is dwarfed in this moment, in the vastness of its environment. Its vulnerability in the here and now is evident not only by what is happening all around it, but also by its own limitations. It bears the appearance of wear and tear; the physical manifestation of habitual environmental encounter.

In the “Dis-eased Leader” vignette, I quoted a recent report from the British Heart Foundation (2014) in which 21% of respondents feared that they will suffer a heart attack due to work related stress. That report also reported that over 40% of workers surveyed for the study admitted missing necessary medical appointments due to work demands (British Heart Foundation 2014). In reporting that same finding, I reported a harrowing personal event that substantiates that behaviour having visited my own GP days after
suffering a significant vitreous haemorrhage due to prevailing work demands. What I
didn’t report in that finding was that

When the first disability cheque came through, I knew I had to get back to work
immediately. There was no choice. I was in shock still, and trying to cope now with
compromised vision in one eye, but the mortgage needed to be paid. I had to return to
work days after receiving the first of many injections directly into the eye, a procedure
that would become figural in my life as a regular and ultimately dreadful experience

(MD Journal Entry 2/12/14).

I spoke about egotism, stepping outside of myself. The body is seen as a means of
production. The one thing that we know about resources is that they become depleted,
even renewable resources when they are not maintained properly. The issue then, in
answering work related demands from the evidence, is that I am not programmed to look
after my body properly as the following discussion in supervision on 28th June 2013
reveals

**Researcher:** I'm not (long pause), I'm not good at caring for myself or protecting
myself, and I just keep going on and on and on and I think that just comes
from the home situation as well.

**Supervisor:** So, just hold the question what will I do right now?

**Researcher:** To hold it or to answer?

**Supervisor:** I want you to do both. Or hold it, or use it, and I want you to give me
answer now as well.

**Researcher:** Okay. (Laughing)

**Supervisor:** Right now.

**Researcher:** For me tonight, I’d get out of work tonight.

**Supervisor:** Comeback.

**Researcher:** Which? To where I’ve left to?

**Supervisor:** Yeah, so what will I do right now?

**Researcher:** Oh now, here now, okay.

**Supervisor:** Yes.

**Researcher:** Take a deep breath first of all.
Supervisor: Yes—because you haven't breathed for about an hour so (laughing).
Researcher: (laughing) Yes, exactly. And it's funny that in any therapy…
Supervisor: You didn't do it.
Researcher: Which?
Supervisor: Take a breath.
Researcher: I know, yeah.
Supervisor: So stop.
Researcher: I have blocked nose as well.
Supervisor: Stop, you need to stop.
Researcher: (Takes a deep breath and exhales).
Supervisor: One of the things that happens to us is when we come to peak activity, is that we construe everything as needing to be active, and sometimes, in peak activities, it is the complete opposite. The activity has a life of its own as it’s going to happen, but somebody needs not to be active during that time, so that you keep awareness upfront. Go back to our system thing that we talked about. If everybody in the system is going at 100 miles an hour, the guarantee is that the system will crash. When the system is going at 100 miles an hour, you want most of your people to keep it up with it, but you want one person who is absolutely still, and not moving, because they are the only person that can spot the trouble coming. And if they spot it in time, they can help to recalibrate the system so that it can sustain itself long-term.
Researcher: Oh yes, yeah, yeah.
Supervisor: So if all around you is very very active, having two to three days off in two weeks’ time isn’t good enough. The three days off in two weeks’ time would be great in two weeks’ time. But what you need to do during your period of peak activity, is to make sure that you step out of it, and that might mean, the 10 seconds that it takes literally to lift your diaphragm and fill it and empty it, i.e. breathing. It might mean that, every so often you leave the office, and you go and you pick up a glass of water on the machine just to get that break of 30 seconds. But if you don't do that, then the system will become bigger than you, and the system will crash. And that ultimately creates more stress on you because
then all of your CIA ex-forces people would come in and say “Morgan why didn't you see this coming”, and you didn't see it coming because you were part of it. So, you need to hold the question, what will I do now? On the wall there behind me, you see the red poster, that's there for a reason, and the reason is because if I didn't see that, at least 3 or 4 times a day, I would forget.

**Researcher:** I do look at it, noticed under the royal emblem, it's “Keep Calm and Carry On”.

**Supervisor:** So in other words, in order to remain active, you actually have to keep calm, it's a paradox. To be highly productive and efficient, energetic and dynamic, you need to stay calm an awful lot, because otherwise you only have energy for the first 10 minutes of the race not the last 90.

**Researcher:** That’s very interesting, do you remember what I said to you before, about relationships and everything you know, that I would get so het-up and everything, that I couldn't sleep etc. and it's the same with everything with me that kind of way. Yes, yeah (a moment of insight, I go quite into my own head here).

**Supervisor:** What I have just done with you there on the last few minutes is, I mean, you had it set up nicely on the inside, you caught what was going on, and you just weren't in enough awareness to actually do something about it. So you asked me a question earlier, is my approach CBT, and it's not. I'm trained in CBT, but my approach primarily is psycho-dynamic, and its attachment-based dynamic. So essentially, what I'm doing through this process with you is, I want this to become a place where, you feel it's safe and fairly predictable and in that space then I don't mind giving you praise and I don't mind saying “good gosh, Morgan, get rid of that paragraph, that’s nuts”, and equally I don't mind saying to you you're not listening to my question.

**Researcher:** Yes, yes okay

**Supervisor:** And then you forced me, you put me into a place which was, no, I want you to do this now.

**Researcher:** That support and challenge safe?
Supervisor: Yes, and it's also a little bit of catching you firmly by the arm and pulling you right in beside me and saying no, no, do it now, and you resisted it a couple of times, until you took a breath, which was not really a breath, it was really a half breath, so there is an interesting bit in it which is in terms of in here, this supervisory relationship needs to be a safe place where we can construct your thesis and get you writing in a particular way, thinking in a particular way, but it's been done through an approach which is feels free to call things as they are, so I'm saying to so you do seem a bit out, what you were to do. So I’ll do…. But what will you do now Morgan, Well, when I’m home this evening. No… Pause… What… Will… You… Do…Now? You’re asking me to do it now - yes. Is that control, is that constraining you, is that making you obedient? Is that making me powerful and all of those things, the answers will be yes to all of those things and the question then for reflection is, is that okay? And that's for me to reflect on as well as for you to reflect on.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah.

Supervisor: But it emerged out of context and I want to link it to the question where in the middle of the session today, which was why are you writing? Which is a curiosity question but I think one of my concerns was your head was down, you were writing frantically but thought you’re recording this and this is daft.

Researcher: And I knew the answer, but couldn’t answer you back as to why, but I was thinking I just forgot and there was again a case of mental capacity again, so instead of going through, I tried was, that structure, and things seem to work best for me, like the layers of the onion, when I have stuff structured and I can manage it.

Supervisor: Yes, that’s true because you do work with structure but go back to our messy ethics bit, we've only been able to arrive at structure because we swam around and mucky, grey, swampy waters so, you're only half right when you say that you work with structure. You are very good with structure when it has emerged out of confusion. Take away the confusion and you just become a bit robotic. I don't mean you personally, I mean, we all do.

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Researcher: Look at the example of the course, I jump into delivering the course, you know literally, this one week, yeah you’re on it, the week it starts next week, okay, design, present your 30 page document, that is a messy with regards the lifeline exercise and some good feedback and some negative feedback and you know, in the course design, we missed the whole practical business piece, so I lack confusion, like is there a third piece to attempt within the structure that causes the confusion, then out of the confusion comes the real re-engineered structure.

Supervisor: Well, that makes sense. That makes sense and I think maturity and wisdom removes that third piece over time i.e. you go in with less and less, and you just allow it to happen.

Researcher: It's like the actual research-you try it, you reflect on it, you try to improve it, you reflect, so that works for me. So obviously, in that cycle, there is a very uncomfortable place for me, a stage of that confusion, the reflection, the trying out. I suppose I don't make things easy. Yes, that’s a lot to chew on.

Supervisor: As always.

Researcher: Yes, exactly.

Supervisor: And again-the question to reflect on is how did this particular thing happen today and what’s useful out of it. There was one other piece that I wanted to add into the writing, why you were writing, and that’s because we've established a fairly collaborative working relationship, let’s put it this way, if you came in here and recorded every session, but also wrote everything down as well, then it becomes very much like master and apprentice.

Researcher: Like if you’re dictating to me.

Supervisor: Yes- and this is not my thesis. I am a part of this thesis, but it's not mine, and that's where, that's where you could take us so I'm not saying what you've done isn’t useful, particularly in this structured way you’ve written today, but I am saying that we need to keep in awareness, what it is that makes this work.

Researcher: And again what I need to do is to, is not accept necessarily, not swallow whole…
Supervisor: Absolutely, absolutely.
Researcher: I need to get it down so I have taken down all of the suggestions.
Supervisor: And you might get rid of all of them, or some of them, or none of them.
Researcher: Exactly, exactly, exactly, okay.
Supervisor: Just before we finish, would you take a breath; would you like to?
Researcher: Okay, it will be through my mouth because the nose is blocked.
Supervisor: Yes, yes (laughing)
Researcher: Takes a deep breath.
Supervisor: Yes, that it. That breath sounded more a bit alive.
Researcher: Yes, yes.
Supervisor: Interesting that your people are coming over to think about how we can sustain the good work over the long periods. I don't understand the concept of deep diving through numbers, but the metaphor is very very nice. I like the fact that there are doing that because I think so much of what happens in systems is so immediate oriented and how can we make a profit margin come this week, this month, but you’re thinking actually, would we not be better off if you could look and see how this would be as they would into a three years’ time.
Researcher: We spoke about that probably about three sessions now, and again it stuck with me, absolutely so I do appreciate it. The problem is you do the deep dive, we do typically to the P&L (Profit and Loss) and I love P&L’s, because behind everything is a whole story, behind every line, what are our repairs and maintenance costs etc.?
Supervisor: Yep, Yes

5.4 Healthy Cycles of Experience Findings

Up until this point, this paper has largely addressed factors contributing to the interruption to my healthy leadership practice and my health. Hazardous environmental factors such the holistic experience of work overload and permanent toxicity were identified. Unhealthy primary appraisal processes identified that my dominant way of perceiving work place phenomenon is to assign a stress label to them. Instantaneously and simultaneously, my dominant primary and secondary appraisal of work place
phenomenon invokes neurotic responses where sensations are minimised and energy is deflected. Negative introjections and a damaged self-concept invoke unhealthy and self-defeating coping mechanisms, that in themselves make healthy environmental contact problematic. In process based stress models, experience is deemed to be made up of (a) environmental factors, (b) cognitive appraisal processes, (c) coping mechanisms, and (d) outcomes. In this section, I will present evidence that demonstrates (a) positive environmental factors, (b) healthy cognitive appraisal processes, (c) healthy coping behaviours, and (d) healthy outcomes. This section begins now with a graphical representation of my healthy organism / environment relationship.
Outcomes (healthy cycles leading to positive a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale or life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health.
5.4.1 Finding 5 - Healthy Aspects of Work Environment

Although my research highlights the hazardous nature of the work environment, the directed content analysis completed, also highlights that opportunities and support exist therein also. Gestaltists pay very significant attention to the organism within a relational context (Mann 2010, Clarkson and Cavicchia 2013; Starr 2014). In attempting to understand one’s own lived experience, we therefore consider this in terms of interactions with the external environment and those within it. Contemporary leadership research can also be seen in literature reviewed for this study to place primordial emphasis on relational interactions (Dulebohn et al. 2012; Graen 2006). Contemporary stress theory also recognises the substantial contribution to any transaction by that which exists outside of ourselves (Randal and Nielson 2010; Leka and Cox 2010).

In my research, various environmental hazards were identified such as holistic work overload (HWO), and permanent toxicity exposure (PTE). The generalised anxiety from operating within an uncontrollable field threat (UFT) environment was itself captured as a hazard. My research has highlighted however that the environment also offers a veritable wealth of opportunity and support. My interrupted mode of environmental interaction means however that I habitually fail to appraise those opportunities and I turn away from seeking environmental support. This finding is therefore significant in terms of identifying patterns of environmental interaction that fail to exploit the full potential from same. Table 26 now summarises those sources of largely untapped environmental opportunities and support.
Table 26  Environmental Factors Mediating Healthy Transactions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Finding</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>“Opportunity Knocks”</td>
<td>In transactional stress theory, environmental stimuli that present where the organism believes they have the resources to master, are likely to be appraised was non-threatening and a challenge. Goal congruent demands i.e. where the organism views the demand as an opportunity are likely to be positively appraised and healthy coping will ensue (Lyon 2012). “Opportunity Knocks” presents evidence found of the positive effects from proactively meeting the environment e.g. environmental scanning - searching for opportunities. My evidence suggests that this proactive approach leads with an assumption of efficacy that invokes healthy awareness cycle(s).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>“Someone to Lean On”</td>
<td>Patterns of boundary disturbance found in the data appear to show that I turn inward in the face of threat. Opportunities to invoke environmental contact from supports are diminished, as the gestalt cycle is forced through unhealthy coping mechanisms to an unhealthy outcome. When opportunities are identified however, contact with environment is good and in the context of better and more informed decision making, supports such as subordinates are used more effectively thus reducing workload and allowing for satisfaction and withdrawal, in advance of the subsequent sensation of new needs.</td>
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Chapter Five - Research Findings

5.4.1.1 Vignette 14: “Opportunity Knocks”

My findings show that where contact is good with my environment, that mobilisation is the most frequently healthy point on the cycle of experience. This is the phase of the cycle that equates to secondary appraisal and the choice of appropriate action (healthy coping). In the previous finding, the pessimistic views of Perls in terms of modern man’s inability to exploit his creative potential was, by his own admission, a sweeping statement, but one that he felt he had to make.

He was speaking about the tendency we have to linger in the depths of our emotional anxiety in what he described as a mode of living in the cloud of constant anxiety. It was the philosopher Seneca who said that luck is the point at which opportunity meets preparation. In the practice of gestalt, we describe such vibrant awareness as a form of experiencing “It is the process of being in a vigilant contact with the most important event in the individual / environment field with full sensorimotor, emotional, cognitive and energetic support” (Yontef 2012). My findings suggest that when I can appraise something as being goal congruent, or when re-appraisal results in the elimination of threat, generally, the choices I make are effective in problem solving.

I have the pleasure of working with a true visionary in Morgan, whose strategic prowess has resulted in a complete turnaround for the Irish business (Journal Entry 7/6/13 quoting section from mid-year review with my Director).

In addition to demands and threats, the work environment also provides opportunities. Indeed, in environmental scanning, leadership is concerned with actively seeking out both. This type of behaviour is fundamental to the proactive nature of entrepreneurship. According to Cox and Griffiths (2010), how we view situations is context-dependent. Coping they argue is influenced by the particular encounter or appraisal that initiates it, and by the resources available to manage it as a problem-solving process. When I am proactively scanning the environment for opportunities, energy appears to be more free-flowing. Emergent gestalten (in this case - opportunities) are allowed to move from sensation to awareness. Therefore, the very thing that would have hit me as a threat
retrospectively, can be reframed as a goal congruent opportunity when I allow sensation and awareness to flow freely.

If we didn’t achieve _______ (accreditation), we would be in serious trouble, but there is no way we could afford it now. All the big clients will seek it but I’ve put a proposal to _______ (client) and they will pay for it because it is a global corporate requirement for them, and as no other supplier has it, they have no alternative but to fund this. The benefits in real terms to them however are substantial, and outweigh the costs, so this is a real win – win situation. What a load off my mind. (MD Journal Entry 28/01/14).

In that example, if I did not allow for the specific threat to eventually reach awareness (after multiple cycles of unhealthy coping), the opportunity would not have become figure from ground either. When the opportunity became apparent, there was excitement and arousal (mobilisation and action) and vibrant contact with the environment (final contact). If however, the threat had continued to be blocked through desensitisation, then not only would the opportunity not have materialised, but the threat would have progressed to becoming a real hazard for the business, and a considerable issue to be dealt with. Along with a colleague of mine, as module leader on an entrepreneurship programme at the University of Limerick, I reinforce the opportunities that the environment presents when one takes a predominantly entrepreneurial approach to contacting the environment (Birdhistle et al. 2013; Chan et al. 2012). Entrepreneurs see threat differently, and this has significant implications as to how they both view, and cope with stress.

Entrepreneurship is an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation, showing initiative, and risk-taking, as well as having the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives.

EU Budapest Agenda (2011, p.8)
A serendipitous effect of growing up with trauma in childhood emerged in terms of patterns of reported excitement and adventure. It appears the leading within a tumultuous and uncontrollable macro-environment somewhat mirrors the uncontrollable and unpredictable home life of the child. Therefore, this provides a sort of familiarity that is strangely familiar, and therefore, one is used to dealing in that type of continuous change. If we remember that the organismic drive to completion occurs even in damaged processes; then it appears that in some ways, and at some levels, there is a part of me that revels in the uncertainty. In the literature review, the consequences of living with chronic stress lead to a mode of living in hyper-alternateness. This is linked with significant psychosocial and psychosomatic issues such as accelerated ageing etc. (Juster and McKewn 2010). On the other-hand however, that chronic over stimulation leads perversely to an undeniably more exciting and risk laden working environment that appeals to the survivor of the unsettled, chaotic, adrenaline filled environment of home. The macro-environment seems to feed the need for excitement and chaos where a routine and unchallenging role would not suffice. If we think in terms of Wheelers (1991) conceptualisation of resistance and life being organised as a serious of continuums between polarities, then the macro-environment definitely provides a pull factor away from complete withdrawal. Similarly, in the The Psychology of Optimal Experience, Csikszentmihalyi outlines his theory that people are happiest when they are in a state of flow—a state of concentration or complete absorption with the activity at hand and the situation. It is a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter (Csikszentmihalyi 2000; Ullén et al. 2014). The challenges provided by the environment and its demands does create conditions of flow, notwithstanding the fact that as my unhealthy findings show, this all too often spills over into work overload and creates a tremendous sense of threat.
5.4.1.2 **Vignette 15:** “Someone to Lean On”

My evidence points to interrupted processes of environmental contact where the presentation of threat results in the mobilisation of coping mechanisms that reside within social isolation and self-perfectionist inwardly directed hostility and criticism. It is an approach to environmental contact that effectively ignores whatever potentials exist in the external field, in terms of support. From a leadership perspective, this has substantially negative consequences because a fundamental requirement of a leader is to identify and best utilise available resources within the structure of the organisation (Boxhall and Purcell 2015).

In the literature review, a recent study by Sherman et al. (2012) was cited where the researchers examined the mediating role of a psychological sense of control. Their study links the availability of resources for leaders with stress-buffering benefits. In particular, occupying a position marked by a large number of subordinates and possessing substantial authority over one’s subordinates are two aspects of leadership that confer such benefits. They argued that the fact that these positions elevate one’s psychological experience of control is not surprising, because they are likely to be marked by prestige as well as objective power and influence. The issue in my practice however, is that the psychological experience of control is not felt. The self-critic prevents any opportunity for feelings of prestige that would allow for a consistent approach to seeking support from subordinates. Instead, the egotist assumes responsibility himself and feels that he must do it himself.

Your survival mode is a set of assumptions that isolates you from sources of support that could relieve distress (*Supervisor 17/05/13*).

My evidence shows substantial blockages in the final contact phase of my cycle of experience. The result of this is that instead of meeting the environment in a full and vibrant manner, emotions that I should be externalising are retroflected inwardly. One example of how this limits the potential from environmental support is that because I perceive many situations as threatening, I turn away from conflict with the other and retroflect the anger inwardly. This results in disturbances to subsequent phases of
satisfaction and withdrawal. Consequently, my ability to relate to people is diminished further due to lack of rumination and nourishment etc. I remember a lecturer picking up on this in my Master’s degree in strategic human resource management that I reflected upon in my journal later in terms of this study

She told me because of that way that I try to do it all myself and avoid conflict, I’m likely to miss out essential leadership requirements like networking etc. i.e. seeking out support in the environment (MD Journal Entry 23/12/13)

One of the key highlights of this study for me was the creation of a more holistic, schematic representation of the external environment in which my practice is situated. This was achieved through the amalgamation of the P.E.S.T.E.L macro-environmental model with the socio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner 1979) and was presented in my finding pertaining to the universality of the uncontrollable threat that I face as a leader. With the emergence of this expanded model, a wider appreciation of potential sources of social support has revealed itself also. Some of the defining features of entrepreneurship and leadership relate to one not only being able to have a vision, but also having the ability to amass resources to animate that vision. As a leader, it is my role to maximise the return on investments for the organisations that I work for. Having a new schema of the external environment, I am creating the type of gestalt awareness that suggests where there is a threat, there is a corresponding source of support. Table 27
Table 27: Sources of Environmental Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>System</th>
<th>Types of Members</th>
<th>Type of Support Available</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal and professional microsystem</td>
<td>Family, neighbours, school, church, peers</td>
<td>Moral, comfort, problem solving, practical etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>included social, family, friends etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and professional exosystem</td>
<td>Friends, mass media, social welfare</td>
<td>Expanded thinking, critical friend, objective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>included social, legal supports etc.</td>
<td>services, legal services etc.</td>
<td>opinion, legal guidance, psychological etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and professional macrosystem</td>
<td>Government departments, software</td>
<td>Attitudinal, ideological, technological,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>including the following supports:</td>
<td>providers etc.</td>
<td>philosophical, educational etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Political,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Technological,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Environmental,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Economic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.2 Finding 6: Mediating Factors in Healthy Appraisal

My research demonstrates that there are four substantial inherent personality characteristics that aid in my healthy appraisal of encounters, events and individuals. These are listed below in Table 28, along with the title for their respective vignettes.

Table 28 Factors Mediating Healthy Appraisal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Finding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>“You Don’t Scare Me Now”</td>
<td>One of the defining features of a process orientation to stress, is a recognition that the appraisal of threat can change over time resultant from experience in dealing with a particular hazard. My research findings indicate that in accordance with the gestalt approach to self-regulation through heightening assimilation of self-efficacy, environmental hazards that have been successfully negotiated result in an acknowledged sense of grounds for leadership efficacy. As Nietzsche decreed “that which does not kill us makes us stronger”. The reservoir of successful accomplishments provides a growing counter voice to introjection i.e. the voice that says I can’t, is challenged by the new voice that says, actually, I have already.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.2.1 Vignette 16: “You Don’t Scare Me Now”

According to Cox and Griffiths (2010), the processes involved in transactional stress in systems terms, both feedforward and feedback, and that interactions are multiple and cross-level as well as being time based. This system is complex and unstable and a long way away from the simple ‘blackbox’ linear mechanistic system that was described by the early theories. The evidence captured in this study supports the notion of experiential learning leading to self-efficacy in the development of mastery over work related stress. I liken this finding to the school child who has lived in fear of the other, until the day of his victory and henceforth, he looks at his foe and confidently says to himself ‘I’ve defeated you now, therefore I can defeat you again’. This analogy describes what emerged in my contact and action phases of coping. It demonstrates the substantial influence of time and social learning in terms of work related stress mastery.

Self-efficacy refers to "the belief in one’s capabilities to both organise and execute courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura 2006, p.8). It is the belief we have in our own ability to succeed based on past precedence (King 2014). Substantial evidence exists demonstrating that self-efficacy lessens work related stress (Hahn et al. 2011; Klassen and Chiu 2011; Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2010). Bandura (2006) suggests that high levels of self-efficacy positively impact everything including psychological states, behaviour and motivation. Self-efficacy has been associated with the most effective forms of leadership and is linked with positive outcomes for leader health and wellbeing, as well as employee performance and engagement (Anderson et al. 2008; Paglis 2010).

Leadership self-efficacy involves having confidence in one's knowledge, skills, and abilities to meet demands and overcome challenges in order to achieve situational changes (Hannah et al. 2011). Self-efficacy is closely linked with the development of resilience i.e. the ability to bounce back from failure and to survive hardship (Lepak and Shaw 2008; Miles et al. 2015). Positive relationships have been found between leadership attempts at goal achievement, and high levels of leadership self-efficacy (Paglis and Green 2002). In the healthy gestalt cycle of experience, a need emerges and the organism discriminates between potential courses of action. A leader with strong
self-efficacy will see more opportunities and various ways to resolve an issue. They will also have a stronger belief in their ability to be successful, and will approach a task with more confidence than those with lower self-efficacy.

People with strong self-efficacy view challenging problems as tasks to be mastered, develop deeper interest in the activities in which they participate, form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities, and recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments. People with a weak sense of self-efficacy on the other hand avoid challenging tasks, believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities, focus on personal failings and negative outcomes, and quickly lose confidence in personal abilities (Cherry 2013). Gestalt therapy is innately concerned with improving a client’s self-efficacy because it challenges the client to stay in the here and now, to face their issues. In doing so, the client may have confidence in believing that they can overcome obstacles in the future (Corey 2012). Gestalt intervention and reflection habitually encompass mastery, social modelling, social persuasion and psychological concepts as sources of self-efficacy. These are the four sources of self-efficacy that Bandura (2006) identified, and indeed, self-efficacious evidence emerged across all four sources from collected data (Table 18).

When work related stress trigger-findings manifested, the impact of the self-critic emerged as substantial, and it was shown to routinely interrupt my leadership practice. The shame-driven self-perfectionist element in particular constitutes a major source of work related stress. A central theme emerged however highlighting numerous examples of success in my role of leader. Where the self-critic attacks from within, postulating that I am not worthy of being a leader, evidence captured through the process of completing this research directly contravenes that assertion.

I’ve just had a mail from our global CEO and also our UK MD to advise that based on a solution I have built we have won one of the biggest contracts in the company’s history described by them as a game changer (MD Journal Entry 27th June 2014).

Having collated the scores from the feedback survey given to students at the end of the module, 94% of them said that they would recommend this course to a friend. This is a
huge improvement on last year when I didn’t give a scored questionnaire but when feedback suggested students could not see the relevance of the module. (MD Journal Entry 27/01/14).

“Your work has been accepted and we have proposed your article to be published in the Journal (Copied E-mail to Journal 01/07/2014).

I have to remember that in absolutely every role that I have been in, throughout my professional life, I have been promoted, even going back to when I was a waiter during college and this has continued throughout my professional practice (MD Journal Entry 18/04/12).

The above quotes in most cases represent positive end results but they hide several narratives behind them pointing to the fact that often, their achievement was neither linear nor straightforward. Before the large account was won for example, several unsuccessful attempts at victory bore little fruit at the time. When I started lecturing, student engagement scores were dreadful. The achievement of my first publication emerged after several redrafts, and I was so socially inept in my first paid job, that I almost got fired! It was Churchill however who said that “success is about going from failure to failure without suffering a loss of enthusiasm”.
5.4.3 Finding 7: Personal Resources Mediating Healthy Coping

Table 29 presents an overview of vignettes that describe for the reader a number of characteristics that emerged as themes, at pivotal points in the gestalt / transactional model that mediate healthy coping.

Table 29 Healthy Coping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Finding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>“The Craftsman”</td>
<td>Central to most models of stress is the recognition that a demand is stressful to the organism when insufficient resources exist to meet that demand. Transactional stress theory in particular posits that the appraisal process is defined by how the organism perceives their own efficacy in meeting demands. In “The Craftsman”, I paint an optimistic picture regarding my own skills-demand compatibility (SDC). According to Keller and Semmer (2013) a strong link exists between SDC and work place satisfaction. Extant literature suggests that key requirements for a portfolio practice include entrepreneurial and leadership characteristics (Chan et al. 2012). Codes A1 (Healthy Awareness), M1 (Healthy Mobilisation), AC1 (Healthy Action), and F1 (Final Contact), all elicited examples of SDC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>“My Humanistic GPS”</td>
<td>My study has shown how work related stress is linked with a host of issues including compromised performance, musculoskeletal problems, anxiety (Bagnall et al. 2016; Korosi and Baram 2010). It is also linked with catastrophic events such as suicide and nervous breakdowns (Bonnet-Belfais et al. 2014). A fundamental concern of this study is to examine all aspects of my relationship with my work environment thus a reasonable question is why I don’t breakdown? I have never had a certified sick day due to work related stress, no period of absence with a mental health issue. Although I link stress with the significant event with my eye, my evidence points to a resilience that appears to be grounded in the ability to reason, emanating from my humanistic ontology. I call this “My Humanistic GPS”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In presenting my entrepreneurship module at the University of Limerick, the story of Viktor Frankl, the Austrian physicist and founder of logotherapy is year on year, voted the most inspirational case study by my students. His narrative includes a tremendous contribution to Austrian society prior to WWII; survival of the holocaust during the war, and the achievement of a plethora of personal and professional accomplishments into his 80’s. His story is one of survival through finding meaning, and I entitle this narrative as “Frankl Would be Proud” through the identification of evidence of emotional intelligence fostered through the survival of suffering. This intelligence contributes to elements of my practice that are labelled by others as being astute. My emotional intelligence, as a product of survival, appears to be a competitive advantage and mediator of work related stress mitigation.
5.4.3.1 Vignette 17: “The Craftsman”

A pertinent consideration of this study was whether or not evidence of skills-demands compatibility (SDC) exists in my leadership practice. Research highlights a strong link between SDC and workplace satisfaction (Keller and Semmer 2013; Schiefele and Raabe 2011; Baumann and Scheffer 2011). Transactional stress theory explicitly recognises that a degree of individual variation will exist due to stress being a process of transaction between the person and the environment. In doing so, it explains why conditions that one person experiences as stressful may not be regarded as stressful by another (Dewe et al. 2010; Mark and Smith 2012). One explanation of this from my study appears to lie with skills-demands compatibility (SDC). The absence of SDC can constitute a principal hazard in terms of work related stress in itself (Schiefele and Raabe 2011).

According to Chan et al. (2012), critical skillsets required in a portfolio practice are leadership and entrepreneurship. Conceptualisations of leadership and entrepreneurship characteristics have been considered in this study hitherto (Avolio 2011: EU Budapest Agenda 2011). Various critical skillsets are associated with both disciplines. Regarding leadership for example, Kruse (2012) accentuates the social influence element of same by stating that leaders maximise the efforts of others, toward the achievement of a goal. Bennis (1989) highlights mobilisation skills in leadership by stating that leaders possess the power to turn vision into action. In terms of entrepreneurship, characteristics include imagination, pro-activity, planning, strategising, taking risks, and the possession of resilience (Painoli and Losarwar 2012). Indeed, in economics, entrepreneurship is considered to be one of the four mainstream economic forces along with capital, land, and labour. The first known definition of an entrepreneur is said to be:

A person who pays a certain price for a product, to resell it at an uncertain price, thereby making decisions about obtaining and using resources, while consequently assuming the risk of enterprise.

(Cantillon 1755 cited in Aspromourgos 2012)
A critical point in Cantillon’s definition is that entrepreneurs consciously make decisions, they speculate, and take risks in order to make something happen, that would not otherwise have happened. Birdhistle et al. (2013) also focus on the resource accumulation skills of entrepreneurs who assemble the means of production, to bring ideas to life. Entrepreneurship is therefore about more than having the ability to see opportunities. It requires energy and stamina to transform those opportunities into actualities, and then to sustain them. Empirical research suggests a strong homogeneity between leadership and entrepreneurship (Chan et al. 2012). According to Coglisera and Brigham (2004), three characteristics are common to both leadership and entrepreneurship (Table 30).

### Table 30 Conceptual Overlap of Leadership and Entrepreneurship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Leadership Application</th>
<th>Entrepreneurship Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision</td>
<td>Vision is the main component in inspiring followers toward exemplary performance or other goal directed behaviour as well as organisational performance.</td>
<td>Vision attributes (brevity, clarity, abstractness, challenge, future orientation, stability and desirability or ability to inspire), and content (growth imagery) are related to new venture growth. Followers need to be motivated through involvement, participation and a professionally meaningful mission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>A commonality across many of the various definitions of leadership is the ability to influence others toward the attainment of a goal. Rational persuasion is widely used for both upward, lateral and downward influence.</td>
<td>Entrepreneurs not only see opportunity (understand the ways and means), but are able to marshal resources to carry out their vision. Use of rational persuasion and inspirational appeals are likely to be effective when the request is legitimate and in line with the entrepreneurs constituencies needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading in the context of Innovation / Creativity</td>
<td>Leading creative people requires technical expertise and creativity, employing a number of direct and indirect influencing tactics.</td>
<td>Entrepreneurial leadership should involve idea generation, idea structuring, and idea promotion (where idea generation is critical in the early stages of a venture and idea structuring and promotion are more important in</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Entrepreneurs have a clear need for the mental simulation of future actions to anticipate potential biases in strategic choices.

Source: Coglisera and Brigham (2004)

With regards to skills-demands-compatibility (SDC), what is clear from the environmental hazard findings, is that my practice is continuously besieged by problematic situations that demand leadership intervention. Such interventions require a proactive approach to problem solving and the routine assignment of management tasks to ensure the retention of focus on the achievement of strategic goals (Drucker 2010). There is also a need for a permanent preoccupation with remaining competitive within the throws of a highly changeable and challenging macro-environment. Table 31 now itemises evidence of leadership and entrepreneurship attributes gleaned from the data i.e. the two characteristics deemed essential in a portfolio career by Chan et al. (2012).

### Table 31 Evidence of Leadership and Entrepreneurial Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vision</strong></td>
<td>I feel I have the ability to have clear vision when I take time out, I can really come up with various part of solutions that fit together (Supervision Meeting 14/04/2014).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence</strong></td>
<td>These times, as you described, I feel like the player at the top of his game. When I was in the presentation, I felt so comfortable, like a conductor, conducting the orchestra and bear in mind, this was a multimillion euro contract, but they believed in me, I believed in me (MD Supervision Meeting 17/05/13). Feedback from students is so positive this year. One student advised this has been the most influential module he has ever been on, particularly the entrepreneurial case studies, coping with failure etc. It is great to hear such enthusiasm (Journal Entry 14/11/2013).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Leading in the context of Creativity/Innovation

I have developed a new software application which is being piloted in (my organisation’s name). It uses gestalt principles to bring real-time profitability information to managers so they can control their factors of productivity – time, costly and experienced labour or less costly less experienced labour and charges to client. (MD Journal entry 05/02/12).

Because you are engaged and you are creative, you dig deep into your reserves, and you listen to your curiosity (Supervisor 21/03/13).

I think the gestalt training gives me a huge advantage in business because I see things from a different paradigm to other managers and directors. I think it gives me empathy; all those empty chair sessions certainly help. I always think systems and holism i.e. not just this step, but what this step does to the next step. I visualise the end and I keep the end in mind but starting out to close the gap (Journal Entry 01/04/11).

Planning

I literally had a week to designs when I was getting going, I was straight into it and designed a 12-week programme based on limited information I had at that stage (MD Supervision Meeting 17/05/13).

I have set goals for myself in the context of a three-year plan and these have included the commencement of lecturing, the expansion of the business in Limerick, increasing property portfolio and academic goals. I have reviewed recently and am on track for achievement of goals (MD Journal Entry 05/02/14).

5.4.3.2: Vignette 18: “My Humanistic GPS”

A severe economic recession was at its apex as my research commenced. To illustrate its effects, when setting out the background and context of this study for the reader, I quoted how by the end of 2012, that male suicide rates were 57% higher than if the pre-recession trend had continued (Corcoran et al. 2015). Although the media has extensively covered the plight of those who lost their jobs during this period, less attention has been paid to the effects on workers who retained their employment. In recessionary times the impact on those who retain employment can be great, particularly in terms of increased workload, increased responsibility and reduced remuneration etc.
(Kedar-Levy 2015). Those in leadership positions are typically expected to sacrifice themselves in terms of flexibility, work life balance, completing onerous travel etc. (Roche and Teague 2012; Doherty 2011). The following journal entry was written at approximately 4am in the morning, on another sleepless night during this period

I’ll find out later how many jobs are to be cut throughout all the offices, and indeed how much “medicine” Ireland will need to take. It seems so unfair that even though we are in significant profit and growing every year, there will have to be redundancies. I’m lying here not knowing how many; who; will it be me? My stomach is absolutely churning (MD Journal Entry 10/11/13)

Even in non-recessionary times, fast rates of change in the work environment mean that workers are under increased pressure to compete, adapt, and learn new skills in order to meet the demands of their work (Griffiths and Cox 1995). Schabracq and Cooper (2000) assert that the combination of technological advances, globalised economies, new organisational products and processes, have resulted in unprecedented changes and increasing stakes.

My literature review has also shown how work related stress is linked with a host of issues including compromised performance, musculoskeletal problems, and anxiety related mental disorders (Bagnall et al. 2016; Korosi and Baram 2010). The severest consequences include catastrophic events such as suicide and nervous breakdowns (Bonnet-Belfais et al. 2014). A fundamental concern of this study is to examine all aspects of my relationship with my work environment and thus, a reasonable question is - why I don’t breakdown? I have never had a certified sick day due to work related stress, no period of absence with a mental health issue. Although I link stress with the significant event with my eye, my evidence points to a resilience that appears to be grounded in the ability to reason, within reason, before it becomes catastrophic.
In continuing the gestalt tradition of analogy use, I liken my humanistic grounding to a global positioning system (GPS). A GPS is a space-based satellite navigation system that provides location and time information in all weather conditions, anywhere on, or near the earth (Schmidt 2010). In the same manner that GPS systems provide continuous navigational support from on high, a humanistic ontology appears to be providing an increasing degree of grounding across situations. It helps me to maintain a level of perspective that prevents drowning in a sea filled with uncontrollable field threat (UFT), holistic work overload (HWO) and permanent toxicity exposure (PTE). Despite the disequilibrium and unhealthy process effects of work related stress, I have developed a certain tolerance for “the thrownness of life” (Heidegger 1962, p.16). Although the effects of WRS are unhealthy and distracting from a practice and life perspective, they do not translate into a total capitulation. Although the outcomes of work related stress presented in finding 4 may demonstrate the boat may sway, it hasn’t sunk yet!

I have labelled this “My Humanistic GPS”. The existential meta-theory underpinning my leadership practice I believe has allowed me to develop a certain style of coping that allows for the retention of a rather philosophical perspective in the face of severe challenge. Although it appears at the appraisal/re-appraisal phases also, my findings show that this grounding is most powerful in the satisfaction and withdrawal phases of the cycle, where one does not submit fully to egotism and confluence, to the point of complete disintegration:

There is a definite power struggle in situ and they (other managers) don’t like that I have been chosen to lead Ireland, but all I can do is to keep my counsel, do things right and let them show their true colours. They are being petty, vindictive and childish, but are unaware that others can see this also. If anything was confirming the validity of the senior leadership team’s decision to put me in charge, it is their own behaviour. Just sit back and let them at it and ignore the behaviour, otherwise it will drag me down with them (MD Journal Entry 15/10/11).
In presenting my first healthy finding (HF1), I spoke of the self-efficacy I have gained from mastery i.e. the knowledge that I can succeed, because I have already prevailed in past situations. Gestalt is heavily predicated on the notion of experiential learning. This type of learning is part of the holistic process of immediate, ongoing awareness that includes perceiving, sensing, feeling, thinking, and wanting / intending (Hayes 2012). Thus, methods that deepen or stimulate emotional experiencing are important; so all experiences, good and bad are seen as learning opportunities. Therefore, mastery and efficacy can only be achieved through taking risks and allowing oneself to be open to new and unexpected experiences.

It seemed like the most impossible of situations and everyone from their CEO down was looking to tear strips of us over one error made by an employee of ours but there was calmness in me, going on the phone. I know this will pass and of course they will be upset. I am upset for us and for them. It was human error though and we’ll work through this with the client. I’ve seen before that it is how you respond in these situations. You actually come out better in the long term by showing them you stood with them in this, and stayed with them until you had resolved it. Anyone can make a mistake and she (the employee) made a big one, but that’s when they need us most, to make it better (MD Journal Entry 25/05/14).

5.4.3.3 Vignette 19: “Frankl would be Proud”

Damaged people are dangerous. They know they can survive.

(Hart 1996)

A recurring theme to surface from my data is that the word “astute” is used by others to describe my leadership more than any other word in my performance reviews, 360-degree feedback sessions, PhD supervisory sessions, and lecturing course evaluation sessions. The Oxford English dictionary defines astuteness as “having or showing an ability to accurately assess situations or people and to turn this to one’s advantage” (2014). Commenting on Peter Drucker for example, Maciariello described him as “an astute observer of human behaviour, always watching” (Maciariello 2010, p.45).
This emergent theme prompted me to engage with the etymology of the word ‘astute’. Analysis shows that it originated in the 17th century from an obsolete French word *astut* and from the Latin word *astutus* derived from the phrase *astus* meaning ‘craft’. Inputting that word (craft) into the thesaurus function in MS Word 2010 elicits synonyms such as skill, dexterity, expertise, ability etc. A more recent development i.e. the emergence of emotional intelligence (EI) appears to encapsulate the essence of this finding. Amongst the various definitions that were offered for EI, I prefer that of Ciarocchi and Mayer (2013) who speak of it in terms of being a specific set of abilities that include the capacity to understand, reason about, and use emotions in thinking and action.

I believe that adults who are survivors of abuse and addiction related negative behaviour witnessed in childhood learn empathy and perception from an early age. I remember a previous supervisor telling me he could tell how drunk his father was by the angle of the cap on his head as he came up the road. I could tell with my own mother by the extent of protrusion of her top lip over her bottom lip (MD Journal Entry 06/02/14).

This section commenced with a quotation from the late Irish author, playwright and publisher Josephine Hart which posits that damaged people are dangerous because they know they can survive. Nietzsche (1927) wrote that “what does not kill us can make us stronger” (1927, p.6). Despite the increased risks of long-term physical and mental health problems that have been outlined in this study, a significant amount of studies demonstrate that survivors of abuse can experience positive outcomes from experiencing their suffering. These include the development of a greater appreciation for life, increased personal resilience and the enhancement of interpersonal relationships skills through empathic living with others (Easton et al 2013; Park et al 2012).

One of the most interesting modules I have ever completed was the negotiations module on the strategic HRM Masters. That taught me to have excellent empathy with negotiation partners and opponents, to understand their position, so you could get the result you wanted, often within a win-win outcome (MD Journal Entry 17/04/13).
Severely stressful life experiences, where a person’s safety or well-being is seriously threatened, may provide an opportunity for individuals to reflect on the meaning and direction of their lives that over time, results in growth (Triplett 2013; Janoff-Bulman 2010). A large volume of research has documented that people can derive positive benefits through the process of coping with a traumatic events including the most violent forms of victimisation (Tomich and Helgeson 2012; Linley and Joseph 2011). People who experience posttraumatic growth in the aftermath of these events typically describe improvements in several areas of their lives including having a more positive sense of self.

Examples of these enhancements include having a greater sense of personal strength, greater compassion toward themselves, and the development of a life philosophy. The growth of a life philosophy can include having an increased sense of meaning and spirituality, the re-ordering of life priorities, and maintaining greater appreciation of the freedom they now have. I-thou relationships can be improved through the projection of self-compassion onto others. Survivors may interact with their environment in a more altruistic manner and when trust is affirmed in the context of authentic relationships, a heightened sense of closeness can ensue (Linley and Joseph 2011; Calhoun and Tedeschi 2014). In a leadership context, emotional intelligence (EI) fosters an ability to understand the feelings, views and motives behind the actions of others. The enhanced empathic ability contributes to a greater sense of organisational awareness and service orientation. These social skills or one’s ability to achieve desired results from others and attain one’s own personal goals, bestow significant competitive advantages on leaders. Subsets of social skills include influence, communication skills, conflict management skills, team work orientation, building bonds and achieving collaboration (Thoits 2013).

Your skill is that you have taken the most dreadful of circumstances, the most dreadful of situations and created meaning from them. You have invested so much in ensuring that you these don’t take you over in a bad way, a negative way but in instead, you’ve turned them around to your advantage because you’ve invested so much in understanding your experiences (Supervisor 21/03/13)
The first emergent environmental hazard in this study was permanent toxicity exposure (PTE). This was defined as the chronic stress I experience as a leader, resultant from constant exposure to toxic situations that negatively impact on my psychological and physical well-being. Distributive Bargaining (DB) was outlined as a permanent catalyst of PTE and it routinely involves conflict over an issue where the outcome must represent a gain for one party and a loss for the other in areas such as compensation and benefits, and the allocation of scarce resources (Fischer 2013). Given that DB is a constant; my ability to understand the motives behind my competitor’s actions I believe is one reason why the word astute is used to describe my leadership style. The compassionate approach I have with people fostered though survival based understanding means that I have an ability to influence others in a cooperative manner, without needing to be autocratic.

Various studies directly link EI with enhanced leadership skills. O’Boyle et al. (2011) for example, completed a meta-analysis of studies examining the link between EI and job performance and their results support the overall validity of EI. Further recent research highlights the importance of EI as a predictor in important domains such as academic performance, job performance, negotiation, leadership, emotional labour, trust, work, and stress (Ashkanasy and Daus 2002; Barry and Fulmer 2004). Mittal and Sindhu (2012) completed a review of business leaders to identify the most effective ones and to identify what makes them different from the average. Over a four year period, they observed and interviewed a large number of highly effective senior managers and executives in prominent Fortune 500 companies, federal agencies, non-profits and the military. In addition, they engaged in direct communication with numerous leaders in diverse organisations. Based on this research, they noted several critical aspects of emotional intelligence that are highly important to leadership effectiveness. Although, there is work to be done on my own development, my evidence does point to the possession of areas identified by Mittal and Sindhu (2012)

People who are successful are those who have an optimistic attitude, the right kind of flexibility in thoughts, a quick learning attitude and are emotionally balanced. An emotionally balanced professional has the ability to cope up with uncertainty and imperfection. They are not very judgmental and believe in a win-win situation. They
like to groom others, respect people and treat others as 'humans'. They have the ability to cope up with all kinds of situations whether it's about managing a bad boss, or an undisciplined subordinate, or a highly demanding job

(Mittal and Sindhu 2012, p.1)

5.4.4 Finding 8: Healthy Outcomes

This finding discusses outcomes from the deployment of healthy appraisal and coping cycles of experience in terms of a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale or life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health. Table 32 summarises the vignettes used to narrate these outcomes.

Table 32 Healthy Outcome Vignettes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vignette</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Finding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>“Connected”</td>
<td>Healthy Functioning in Work and Social Functioning</td>
<td>“Connected” tells of when in a full and vibrant way, I am able to take advantages of opportunities and support that lie within the environment. Quotations contained within show how the aware organism is present and able to reap the benefit of those opportunities with confidence and self efficacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>“The Élan Vital”</td>
<td>Morale and Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>The “Élan Vital” was the phrase that Perls (1969) used to describe the vital spirit, the essence of morale and life satisfaction that lies within. This vignette tells of the vibrant living that unfortunately has been intermittment, but that is possible, when in a sense of flow. This is when I am at a point of stimulation without being overwhelmed, when the senses are aroused with possibility and how the organism thus responds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Somatic Health</td>
<td>The advantage of a gestalt approach to improving outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.4.1 Vignette 20: “Connected”

According to Luthans et al. (2007), the best employers are no longer those who promise lifetime employment and a good retirement fund, but rather those who provide their employees with opportunities, resources, and flexibility for sustainable growth. Codes SA1 (Healthy Satisfaction), W1 (Withdrawal), and F1 (Contact) in particular, elicited data that highlights that I am indeed lucky enough to be employed by organisations that do provide those conditions. My research suggests that like Seneca’s decree regarding luck being where opportunity meets preparation, when I meet my environment through healthy cycles of experience, I am much better positioned to identify and exploit those opportunities and resources.

“Patrick my supervisor introduced me to Gerard Slattery who has offered me lecturing time on postgraduate teaching programme. I had asked him as head of department to put my name out there and that connection has worked” (MD Journal Entry 25/8/13).

“The deadlines are coming thick and fast and we are all really under pressure. To be fair however they (my employer) are being very sound about this, supporting me through ...
finance, time off and a good degree of understanding. ____ (my boss) is really pro education and said he’d be doing a doctorate if he hadn’t so many other commitments” (MD Journal Entry 24/04/13).

Positive psychology is an attempt to adopt a more open and appreciative perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities (Sheldon and King 2001). Positive psychology and organisational theory merge in the new approach of positive organisational behaviour (POB) defined as ‘the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace’ (Luthans 2002, p. 59). Psychological capacities and strengths to be included in this concept they have to meet certain criteria. Specifically, they must be positive and relatively unique to the field of organisational behaviour; they must be theory and research based; measurable; state-like or developmental; and related to work performance outcomes (Luthans et al. 2007; Bakker and Schaufeli 2008; Cooper and Nelson 2006; Wright 2003). In my primary full time role as a country director for a large multinational human capital management company, several competencies that encompass company values are measured twice annually. Table 33 presents a five-year average score overview regarding my performance against these values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Score 1-Not Acceptable, 2-Below Expectation, 3-Meets Expectation, 4 – High Performer, 5- Exceptional Performer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agility</td>
<td>We are flexible and innovative. We confront all challenges with enthusiasm. We encourage change in order to achieve success.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customer Focus</td>
<td>We listen to our customer with empathy and we care about them. We win when our customers win. We focus on delivering employee engagement, satisfaction and productivity for our customers. We celebrate Success as a team</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Five - Research Findings

| Diligence | Preparation and planning is vital to our success. We establish goals and standards and measure our success against them. We focus on repeatability and reliability. | 4 |
| Leadership | At times, all colleagues will be leaders. They may take leadership for delivering a service, a project or may lead a team of people. The leadership section therefore includes descriptions of the behaviours which we recognise as great leadership, at our company. | 5 |
| Optimism | Optimism is planned behaviour that leads to success. It begins with preparation. Preparation leads to knowledge, knowledge leads to confidence and confidence creates success. | 4 |
| Transparency | We are open in the way we communicate and the way we do things. Integrity and accountability drive our behaviour. | 4 |

My literature review demonstrated how work related stress impacts on performance (Bagnall et al. 2016; Palmer et al. 2001). Low self-esteem is shown to negatively affect leadership (Ashford 2010). It also showed how mastery is associated with greater levels of work place satisfaction and engagement (Bandura 2006; Hahn et al. 2011; Klassen and Chiu 2011; Skaalvik and Skaalvik 2010). Evidence also provided suggests that time is a significant factor in mediating a transition in reappraising something that was stressful, as not now being stressful through e.g. exposure, experience etc. (Lyon 2012). My comments from my end of year review in 2014 demonstrate how continuous effort and attempts at healthy environmental contact are improving performance and in my opinion, continuously depleting the number of stress inducing triggers. With each year that goes by also, one’s feeling of tenure in the role is improved, thus enhancing somewhat the prestige factor that Campbell et al. (2014) attributed to leaders:

Morgan has embraced everything I have asked him to do and his driven things through, never taking “no” for an answer with an action oriented approach……his team can see this and respond to him accordingly. Objective wise, Morgan is flying at the moment and it’s a joy to watch his drive and determination to take Ireland forward. Morgan continues to develop his emotional intelligence and I have seen a visible change in how he approaches some difficult situations. Morgan still has a tendency to think of Ireland first and foremost which is understandable given his passion to progress the Irish
business. He still needs to pull this back a touch and remember that Ireland is a part of a much bigger group and that decisions made at a senior level are generally for the good of the entire organisation even if they negatively impact. Comms days in Ireland are a joy to attend and have been a great success. There is a tremendous balance of fun, information sharing, frank and honest feedback. Morgan ensures that we have an Ireland specific section within comms day (which he delivers) and this will no doubt help to significantly increase engagement scores. The Ireland business is thriving and much of this should be attributed to Morgan. Well done Morgan and thank you for your continued support (End of Year Review Report 2014).

5.4.4.2 Vignette 21: “The Élan Vital”

To facilitate the completion of my master’s degree in humanistic and integrative psychotherapy previously, I made a career choice that I felt would create the conditions of space and time I believed were necessary. Although this meant a considerable drop in remuneration, confidently, I thought to myself that lessening my responsibilities for a period would afford me the mental space to commit to my studies. With a proverbial self-slap on the back, I declared that “This is self-regulation in action”. I would create the perfect combination to achieve all my goals with the relative juxtapositioning of a sedate work environment with a hectic study schedule. I could not have been more wrong. The role I undertook was a poorly resourced consultative role in the public sector. The organisational structure was archetypal and bureaucratic. It was an environment where nothing ever got done, and no one wanted to do it anyway! I found that anybody with a degree of ambition or drive was quickly labelled as trouble. Pressure was excreted on staff not to “rock the boat”, and to avoid at all costs, unsettling the status quo.

Initially I believed I had made the right decision in taking that role. I had left a busy leadership position where the similar types of environmental hazard existed to those in my current role. It was a business type where there were very substantial monthly financial targets to hit. The senior leadership team were aggressive toward their employees, and toxicity was rife, with staff members effectively battling competitors
and each other for their own piece of the fixed pie. In my finding on holistic work overload, I presented the drawing on Hooke’s law i.e. the point at which the ductile material will break under strain and stress. That is effectively the breaking point, but up to that point, in terms of my own story, I find that increases in stimulation often increase my morale and life satisfaction as I am challenged and exhilarated by novel situations, and opportunities for growth. The issue with the public sector role was that it provided no stimulation at all. Whilst I completed the programme of study and combined it with work, I did so with a stifled élan vital (vital core). Severely under stimulated in work, I attended to my studies in a continuous state of deadness leading my wife to comment that it has been the only time that she has seen me displaying any signs of depression. Research on repetitive and monotonous work practices and their effects on health demonstrate clearly that such practices are detrimental to workers’ health (Cox 1980; Cox et al. 1982).

I think that people have a warped sense of self-regulation and compulse over keeping everything steady, but that is not a true system. A system needs to be able to flux. If it fluxes up then it of course needs to be able to return back down, but self-regulation is not about keeping it status quo (Supervisor 25/3/15).

The gestalt view of healthy living is congruent with these sentiments. Those of us who operate from a predominantly humanistic ontology are drawn to the adventurous overtures of existentialism, where life is seen as a continuum between birth and death. Optimal living is about finding meaning in one’s existence by exercising our freedom to choose (Van Deurzen 2012; Corey 2015; Cooper 2010). Morale and life satisfaction for the gestalist is not about status quo and the absence of need, but quite the contrary. Living is consumed with the continuous emergence, and satisfaction of needs, within an organism innately driven to achieve self-actualisation.

My research findings illustrate how leadership thought has moved beyond the great man/woman trait / behavioural theories of the past. Contemporary discourse is now concerned with organism / environmental contact processes where leadership is seen as an authentic relational process where leadership status is thought of in terms of a process, in which the leader themselves is in a continuous flow of the mastery of demands. An
issue exists where holistic work overload (HWO) for example pushes me beyond the breaking point. HWO prevents full and free-flowing cycles of experience from occurring by blocking withdrawal and satisfaction. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) argues that satisfaction does not depend on outside events, but rather on how we interpret them. Happiness he argues is in fact a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person. Those who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives “which is as close as any of us can come to being happy” (Csikszentmihalyi 2014, p.2). Therefore, happiness depends on inner harmony. Perls (1973) describes this state as the èlan vital or vital core where one finds their vibrant sense. From a leadership experience, it appears that this point is at a place of stimulation but not overwhelmment, in the absence of significant toxicity, and where the environment is met proactively instead of reactively.

5.4.4.3 **Vignette 22: “Body and Mind”**

Chermis (2014) describes modern times as a cyber era, where “more quick and immediate action is the style of the global world and western culture in particular (2014, p. 12). Partly because of this immediacy, there is a tendency he argues to treat the body like a separate machine, or a source of inconvenience. Individuals in western culture as environment / self-organisers frequently distinguish or further, disconnect mind and body (Chermis 2014). Uninterrupted / unified mind body experiences are rare and experiencing me as a unified mind / body entity can often feel unsafe or without adequate supports for authentic contact.

Contained within the appraisal process is the concept of the individual’s ability to meet demands made of them and the recognition that this ability might change (naturally) with tiredness, illness, or age. Work situations may become ‘stressful’ because the person is tired due to long working hours or due to the home situation. They may become stressful because the person is ill and their capacity is reduced or because they are becoming older and the profile of their skills is changing. Making explicit the role played by ‘individual ability’ in the appraisal process opens up the possibility of linking
stress concerns to organisational functions such as selection, training, and employee support. Furthermore, the concern for issues of ‘individual ability’ has acted as a Trojan horse for introducing related concepts such as emotional intelligence, stress resistance, and resilience into our consideration of work-related stress.

According to Bakker and Shaufelli (2008), instead of traditional organisational structures that heavily rely on management control and economic principles of cost reduction, efficiency, and cash flow, the focus in modern organisations is on the management of human capital. Currently, organisations expect their employees to be proactive and show initiative, collaborate smoothly with others, take responsibility for their own professional development, and to be committed to high quality performance standards. Thus, employees are needed who feel energetic and dedicated, and who are absorbed by their work. In other words, organisations need engaged workers.

Now the other side of it this week is that I was so so happy with my performance (contented sigh). There are times when you feel like you are the player at the top of his game. Inside the presentation, I couldn’t believe my confidence and I was so focussed I wasn’t even thinking about myself (MD Supervision Meeting 25/03/13).

The circumstances surrounding that sentiment following that week in the quotation related to a busy week, but a week where there appeared to be quite a degree of control. Needs emerged but because there was a central focus which I had to prioritise with the company’s backing, many needs were deferred and therefore, a continuous stream of priority needs were afforded time and resource. The value to the business of the potential from week was massive and therefore, needs had to be allowed to reach awareness due to the visibility on same throughout the organisation. Basically, whatever I asked for that week I got. The distinct feelings of satisfaction and withdrawal could be felt, over and over again. As the week wore on, my sense of engagement on the project grew and grew and therefore, subsequent needs relating to this particular venture were almost automatically appraised as a challenge as opposed to being a threat. This resulted in the deployment of healthy coping cycles.
I really felt on top of things this week. I was engaged, excited, really in balance. I slept well, I ate well, I minded myself, and that is so different. I feel energetic and I don’t have that same dread coming into Sunday evening as I normally do. I’d love to be able to bottle this feeling and just take it out when I want to. I feel at peace (MD Journal Entry 24/03/13).

That period of satisfaction and equilibrium was denoted by having a sense of mastery over the constitutes of transactional stress. To allow for a focus on a key priority, the organisation facilitated a heightened filtering of the emergent needs from the macro-environment. Instead of the usual uncensored flow of contemporaneous demands, all needs not associated with the main priority were either deployed elsewhere, rejected or deferred, before they even got to me. Given the significance of the potential deal, people were actually checking in with me to see if I was coping, thus in turn, I was mindful of my body, how I was feeling. The whole physical tenure of that period felt different. As an environment / self-organiser during that time, the disconnect between mind and body (Chermis 2014) was not present. There was an awareness that I needed both to be integrated to facilitate an appropriate amount of demand, that was ultimately appraised as being challenge versus threat. The outcome in terms of somatic health was a stable, harmonious period of time where everything from digestive system, energy levels, sleep patterns all seemed to be in a state of homeostatic flow. Perhaps, this is the type of leadership buffer that Shearman (2014) speaks of, one that bestows protection and prestige on the leader. Perhaps, as my seniority grows, the same type of body / mind integration will flourish as my efficacy grows.

The advantage of a gestalt approach to improving outcomes in terms of work related stress is the focus it brings to body and mind re-integration. At the outset of this vignette entitled, I quoted Chermis (2014) who describes modern times as a cyber-era, where more quick and immediate action in western culture in particular encourages to treat the body like a separate machine, or a source of inconvenience, resulting in a disconnect of mind and body. Uninterrupted / unified mind body experiences are rare and experiencing me as a unified mind / body entity can often feel unsafe or without adequate supports for authentic contact. This vignette also reported how recognition that ability of an organism to appropriately appraise a demand might change (naturally) with
tiredness, illness, or age (Cox and Griffiths 2010). Work situations may become ‘stressful’ because the person is tired due to long working hours or due to the home situation. According to Bakker and Shaufelli (2008), instead of traditional organisational structures that heavily rely on management control and economic principles of cost reduction, efficiency, and cash flow, the focus in modern organisations is on the management of human capital. Currently, organisations expect their employees to be proactive and show initiative, collaborate smoothly with others, take responsibility for their own professional development, and to be committed to high quality performance standards. Thus employees are needed who feel energetic and dedicated, and who are absorbed by their work. In other words, organisations need engaged workers. In that vignette, I quoted a period whereby appropriate environmental controls led to increased engagement over a period. Successful environmental interaction resulted in my being able to maintain appropriate space to meet demands. In that context, even though there was significant challenge, it resulted from a proactive engagement with the environment. Because demands were deemed to achievable, a sustained period of healthy cycles of experience followed resulting in a period of sustained healthy coping and good somatic health. The implication here is that my evidence shows that when primary appraisal is attended to predominantly through a more proactive approach to environmental contact, then somatic health will autonomously feel the benefit. This is in keeping with gestalt theory of organic growth following authentic awareness (Novack and Novack 2015).
5.5 Chapter Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter was to effectively lay out all of the layers of the onion by way of individual vignettes for the reader to achieve a holistic appreciation of (i) antecedent factors, (ii) cognitive perceptual processes that give rise to the emotional experience of stress, and (iii) outcomes of that experience e.g. somatic health outcomes (iv) positive workplace characteristics (v) healthy appraisal processes (vi) healthy coping mechanisms / cycles and (vii) healthy outcomes in terms of work related stress mastery examples.

This chapter showed how workplace hazards such as permanent exposure to toxicity, ubiquitous macro-environmental uncontrollable threat and holistic work overload are realities of my practice. My findings showed that regardless of the demand, my introjections tend to lead to the habitual appraisal of threat. This in turn leads to autonomous defaulting to learned neurotic coping patterns of projection, retroreflection, egotism and confluence. Outcomes include the delivery of an inconsistent leadership practice dogged by interrupted social interaction, a generalised and pervasive reduction of life satisfaction and morale, and poor somatic health.

My findings also however identified that the maintenance of a proactive approach to the environment can elicit a significant degree of opportunity and support where most demands are reframed into challenge versus threat. Healthy coping tends to ensue in this type of approach where demands elicit healthy action, final contact, satisfaction and withdrawal. My research has shown that evidence exists of healthy outcomes in terms of a substantial “back catalogue” of success as a mediator of perceived efficacy. There is evidence of skills demand compatibility, itself a major mitigator of work related stress. My findings also show that when demands are controlled, appraisal and coping responses can lead to homeostasis and positive somatic health. The main conclusion from the findings is that both the dark and bright sides of the moon have been illuminated now, leading to a holistic understanding of my interaction with work related stress.
CHAPTER SIX - DISCUSSION

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of my research through the application of the gestalt cycle of experience model in order to illuminate my transactional stress patterns. The findings presented addressed the research questions asked in this research and illuminated work place psychosocial stress hazards, unhealthy appraisal, coping and outcomes in terms of work related stress. The findings also identified healthy work environment opportunities and support. In addition, they pointed to healthy appraisal and coping examples and presented the healthy outcome examples as a potential map for re-integration and work related stress mastery.

The chapter begins with an aide memoire for the reader, involving a summation of the research hitherto from the identification of the research problem, through to the description of findings (Table 34). Those same findings are then treated to layers of analysis to reveal five key patterns emergent from this research including a much greater part played by the organism in terms of environmental hazard. Strengths and limitations of this study are heavily debated in this chapter, before implications for the researcher and wider implications from this study are outlined. In accordance with the principal objective of this research, key recommendations for the participant researcher are described in detail, by way of actionable items linked to the findings and patterns that emerged. In addition, and based on the outcomes of this study, I offer some recommendations for consideration in the hope of helping to generate further research and discourse in the areas of theory, practice and policy.
### Table 34  Summary of Research and Findings

| Research Problem | - research indicates that work related stress remains a significant issue for individuals, organisations, and society. Despite the evolution of stress theory to a process oriented conceptualisation, few processes studies relating to work related stress exist. In terms of helping me to improve my own coping mechanisms pertaining to work-related stress, a dearth of empirical research exists. |
| Research Purpose | - To use gestalt theory as a conceptual analytical framework to examine the transactional processes of work related stress in my practice of leadership. In doing so, the study is concerned with creating heightened self-awareness that will assist in my achieving practice and wellbeing improvements. The study will also add value to the considerable body of existing knowledge on stress, and specifically on work related stress, to inform theory, practice, and policy in several areas. |
| Prima Research Question | How can the use of a gestalt analytical approach to interpreting my transactional relationship with my work environment in my practice of leadership mitigate effects of work related stress whilst improving my practice of leadership? |
| Subordinate Questions | 1) What hazardous work (environmental) factors permeate my practice of leadership?  
2) What are the dominant primary and secondary appraisal patterns used to assess the significance of an event, an encounter, or a situation?  
3) What are the habitual coping mechanisms employed in response to the appraisal of an event, an encounter, or a situation?  
4) What are dominant outcomes in terms of a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale or life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health?  
5) What factors mediate healthy appraisal, coping, and outcomes, and how does a healthy cycle unfold? |
| Finding 1: | What hazardous work (environmental) factors permeate my practice of leadership? |
| Finding 1: | 3 x environmental work hazards emerged from the data: (a) permanent exposure to toxicity (PTE), (b) holistic work-overload (HWO), and (c) uncontrollable field threat (UFT). |
| Vignettes: | (1) “Fighting for Pie” (PTE). (2) “Attacks from Space (UFT)”. (3) “The Coiled Spring” (HWO) |
| Finding 2: | What are the dominant primary and secondary appraisal patterns used to assess the significance of an event, an encounter, or a situation? |
| Finding 3: | What are the habitual coping mechanisms employed in response to the appraisal of an event, an encounter, or a situation? |
| Finding 4: | What are dominant outcomes in terms of a) functioning in work and social living, (b) morale or life satisfaction, and (c) somatic health? |
| Finding 4: | A number of negative outcomes include poor decision-making, ineffective use of energy, paradoxical approach to self-actualisation, significant health issues such as stomach, nervous system, sleep patterns |
| Vignettes: | (11) “Drowning in a Swirling Sea” (functioning in work and social living), (12) “A Life of Low Grade Vitality” (morale and life satisfaction), (13) “Wear and Tear” (Somatic Health) |
| Finding 5: | What factors mediate healthy appraisal, coping and outcomes and how does a healthy cycle unfold? |
| Finding 5: | Goal congruent demands, mastery based self-efficacy and sensing the possession of necessary intrinsic (e.g. skill) and extrinsic (e.g. time, subordinates) resources can lead to aware appraisal and the conscious choosing of effective problem solving based coping strategies that fulfill my need in a healthy cycle of awareness. |
| Vignettes: | (14) “Opportunity Knocks” & (15) “Someone to Lean On” (Environmental Opportunities and Support), (16) “You Don’t Scare Me Know” (Appraisal), (17) “The Craftsman” (Coping), (18) “My Humanistic GPS” (Coping), (19) “Frankl Would Be Proud” (Coping), (20) “Connected” (Healthy Functioning in Work and Social Functioning), (21) “The Élan Vital” (Morale and Life Satisfaction), |
6.2 Overview of Procedure for Analysing Findings

Data analysis in qualitative research remains somewhat mysterious (Marshall and Rossman 2015; Merriman 1998). According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), the problem lies in the fact that there is a divergence within the qualitative community regarding analytical approaches. There are no formulas for determining the significance of findings or for interpreting the data, and there are no ways of perfectly replicating a research project. Applying guidelines requires judgement, sensitivity, and creativity. Because a study is unique, each analytic approach is unique as well. As Patton (2015) asserts that:

> It is a multifaceted, analytical integration of disciplined science, creative artistry, skills, crafting, rigorous sense making, and personal reflexivity. In short, no absolute rule exists except perhaps this: do your very best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data, and communicate what the data reveals given the purpose of the study.

(Patton 2015, p.521-522)

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), analysing and interpreting findings is a highly intuitive process; it is certainly not mechanical or technical. The process of qualitative data analysis and synthesis is an ongoing one, involving continual reflection about the findings and asking analytical questions (Elo et al. 2012). Qualitative researchers often, out of necessity, learn by doing. As such, there is no clear and accepted single set of conventions for the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. Indeed, many qualitative researchers would resist this goal, viewing the enterprise as more an art than a science. Analysis, synthesis and interpretation of qualitative data, is a far more nebulous endeavour, hence the clear paucity of published literature on how to do it.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) advise that exemplary dissertations typically provide sufficient information that enables the reader to envision the steps that the researcher undertook in preparing, organising and analysing the data. By providing a window into procedures used for analysing the data, the reader is able to see the attempts made to
complete a thorough analysis. Moreover, it allows others who might want to replicate the same procedure to follow an audit trail, contributing to the overall voracity of a study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2015) have developed an interpretative-outline-tool enabling the researcher to consider their findings in greater depth (Figure 22). The appropriateness of a gestaltist using their approach is reflected in the specific words used by the authors themselves to describe the tool:

This tool allows the researcher to “peel back” all the possible reasons regarding how else a finding can be explained, thereby fleshing out the meanings that underlie each finding. Findings should not be taken at face value.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2015, p.236)

Figure 22 Bloomberg and Volpe’s Data Analysis Tool

STEP 1:

State Analytic Category 1: This category directly relates to your research questions.
Describe the corresponding findings.
• Describe the corresponding findings.
• Ask “Why?” and “Why not?”
• Think critically. Brainstorm all possible reasons. Continue to probe “Why?” and “Why not?”
• Ask: What is happening, and why it is happening? How else can this be explained?
• What assumptions am I making? What blind spots might I have overlooked? What alternative interpretations or explanations might exist for what I see in the data?
• Look (a) within findings, (b) across findings, and (c) across cases/individuals.
• State all linkages that can be made to the relevant literature.
• Ask also: How does my positionality and my identity (social, cultural, political, psychological, institutional) influence the research process? How can I address this? What trustworthiness issues are emerging? How can I address challenges to credibility and validity?
STEP 2:

State Analytic Category 2: This category directly relates to your research questions.
- Describe the corresponding findings.
- Ask “Why?” and “Why not?”
- Think critically. Brainstorm all possible reasons. Continue to probe “Why?” and “Why not?”
- Ask: What is happening, and why it is happening? How else can this be explained?
- What assumptions am I making? What blind spots might I have overlooked? What alternative interpretations or explanations might exist for what I see in the data?
- Look (a) within findings, (b) across findings, and (c) across cases/individuals.
- State all linkages that can be made to the relevant literature.
- Ask also: How does my positionality and my identity (social, cultural, political, psychological, institutional) influence the research process? How can I address this? What trustworthiness issues are emerging? How can I address challenges to credibility and validity?

6.3 Patterns and Emergent Themes

When researchers write autoethnographic papers, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience (Ellis 2010; Goodall 2001). Thus, the autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, they may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards. It is a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people (Bochner 1997; Ellis 1995). Therefore, in addition to uncovering findings in autoethnographic research, it is particularly important to effectively analyse those findings, layer by layer, to derive a deep sense of meaning from them.

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2015), analysis is essentially about searching for patterns and themes; that is, the trends that you see emerging from amongst your findings. Having spent many hours interviewing and/or observing people and context, the researcher is likely they argue to come away with some possible explanations of how and why people are saying what they're saying. Because the researcher has immersed
themselves in their data, and lived it for an extended period of time, they are best placed to reflect on emergent patterns and themes that run through the findings. Conjectures will have to be made that can offer hypotheses about the significance of certain outcomes, consequences, interconnections, and interrelationships that one sees appearing. In qualitative research, we do not use statistical significance that characterises quantitative research. In qualitative research, significance constitutes something that is important, meaningful, or potentially useful given what we are trying to find out (Patton 2015). Qualitative findings are therefore judged by their substantive significance. Patton (2015) explains that in determining substantive significance, the qualitative analyst must address certain issues, including the following:

1. How solid and consistent are your findings?
2. To what extent, and in what ways, do your findings increase an understanding of the phenomena under study?
3. To what extent are your findings consistent with the existing body of knowledge? That is, do they support or confirm what is already known about the phenomena? Do they refute what is already known? Do they break new ground in discovering or illuminating something?
4. To what extent are the findings useful in terms of contributing to building theory, informing policy, or informing practice?

Readers need to understand different degrees of significance in terms of each of one’s various findings. In this regard, there is a need for specific patterns to be clear and strongly supported by the data. This is in contrast to weak and unclear patterns which may be merely suggestive of potential significance. Ultimately, readers draw their own conclusions based on the evidence that the reader provides. Unsure opinions and speculations are of little interest to the reader because it is clear that the researcher is no more intimately familiar with the data than anyone else.
Specific research questions were asked in this study based on processes inherent in the transactional stress model. My research therefore sought to identify (a) antecedent factors, (b) cognitive appraisal processes, (c) coping processes, and (d) work related stress outcomes. Because my data was analysed deductively using the gestalt healthy and unhealthy cycle of awareness / experience, it was possible to identify specific emergent themes such as the types of neurotic interruptions used as unhealthy coping mechanisms. Through the application of gestalt cycle of experience codes to the data, themes emerged and effectively knitted together, to form the narrative for my vignettes. Lazarus (1966) advocated this type of committed effort to understanding stress, because he advised that we should look at the patterns of environmental contact that a person employs over an extended period of time and circumstances (Lyon 2012; Mazetti 2011).

If research findings were accepted at face value, this study would fall into the same trap as the blind men and the elephant (Arthur 2004). By compartmentalising without allowing for an examination of the whole, the gestalt of the elephant to would not be allowed to appear! A lack of further consideration of my findings could have been sufficient in a more structural or engineering stress model investigation. In such studies, the identification of toxicity and overload for example would be interpreted as being objective evidence of the extent to which a stressor is present in my work. However, I already know from my findings that individual factors are in play such as the roles of desensitisation, deflection and introjection in the appraisal processes. Therefore, situations that others may not deem to be necessarily stressful are interpreted by me as being so. In fact, as the following discussion on the analysis of findings highlights, it is possible to appreciate the complexity of discreet emotions at play, and a lack of rationale substantially and dogmatically interrupts healthy appraisal and coping in terms of my own narrative.
6.3.1 The Self as a Major Environmental Hazard

My first research finding indicated that a number of largely uncontrollable factors such as permanent exposure to toxicity (PTE), holistic work overload (HWO) and anxiety perpetrated by leading in an uncontrollable macro-environment (UFT0, constitute the primordial environmental hazards in my leadership practice. My finding is supported by recent research on (a) toxicity, and in particular, toxicity related to working within the prevailing economic circumstances during the tenure of this study (Durrè 2010; Kusy and Holloway 2009); (b) work burdens specific to those holding leadership roles such as excessive travel and multiple contemporaneous demands (Campbell et al. 2010; Lovelace et al. 2007); and (c), the impact of working in a macro-environment that is largely uncontrollable (Wallis and Dollard 2008). A multi-layered analysis of my own finding pertaining to hazardous work environmental factors problematises the label – environmental hazard however. When I started peeling back the layers of the finding using Bloomberg and Volpe’s analytical model, the part played by the self in what I initially deduced to be mostly external, lead to an almost Cartesian realignment of thought. The part played by self it transpires, as a catylist for PTE, UFT and HWO, is much more significant than the initial finding suggested (Appendix 8).

What became clear from the evidence is that I don’t see myself as a leader despite holding the position. Therefore, there is lack of appreciation for the power-dynamic in the organisation. In line with leader member exchange theory (LMX), I can see from the analysis of the finding that I have very differing relationships with various managers and employees. Each and every transaction that I am involved in is flavoured by a myriad of emotions, past memories, historical interactions with the group or the individual (Figure 23). It appears that in my processes of journal entry and reflection in dialogue with supervisor, I have a tendency to externalise or project, disowning elements that I don’t want to own, to a far greater extent than first imagined. This does align with avoidance in gestalt. Although we are all believed to have the capacity to self-regulate we avoid.
One of the factors that contributes to a relative paucity of transactional stress empirical contributions to current discourse relates to the complexity of that approach in studying stress as a process (Cox and Griffiths 2010; Houdmont 2009). Building on Dewey’s theory, Schon (1983) described a theory of knowledge acquisition known as reflective practice: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Jones and Jones 2013). Schon (1991) challenged the notion of science and technical knowledge as the prevailing hegemony, suggesting that such knowledge might be effective where there is ‘high, hard ground’ but pointed out that professionals work in “messy swamps filled with uncertainty, where artistic and intuitive practices are essential” (1991 p. 34). Schon (1991) suggested that much of what professionals know is learned by doing in practice, through a process of shifting back and forth between reflecting-in-and-on-action.

It points to what Kierkegaard (1978, p.28) was referring to in terms of the “gritty” nature of human existence. Cooper et al. (2001) and Cox and Ferguson (1991) have stated that despite the widespread use of the term “coping” there are difficulties surrounding its definition, as it can be seen as a process, a behaviour, as a stable trait, or as situation specific, and Daniels et al. (2004) have suggested that the conception of appraisal is too simplistic and doesn’t include individuals’ histories, and anticipated futures. Cox (1987) also states that the processes discussed may not be as rational as presented in transactional theories. This study aims to shed some clarity for me in my practice that transactional theory has struggled to achieve.
6.3.2 Primary Appraisal to Re-appraisal: Wear and Tear

My findings indicate that re-appraisal occurs after the completion of potentially several unhealthy cycles of coping (Figure 24). It has been empirically demonstrated that coping with adversity is a critical component of health (Danese and McKewn 2010; Ellis 2010). Of the many forms of coping outlined by Lazarus and Folkman (1984), in the transactional theory of stress, the construct of positive re-appraisal is especially salient. Positive reappraisal, a form of meaning-based coping, is the adaptive process by which stressful events are re-construed as being benign, valuable, or beneficial. Research has demonstrated that the ability to find benefit from adversity is associated with improved health outcomes (Bochner 1982; Bochner and Ellis 2002).

Positive re-appraisal has been found to reduce distress in the face of a number of medical conditions, including breast cancer (Caulley 2008), amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (Charmaz 1993), traumatic brain injury (Conquergood 1981), and myocardial infarction (Corey 1996), among others. This finding is particularly evident in a seminal
investigation that used mixed quantitative and qualitative methods to discern the relationship between coping and stress in caregivers for partners who were terminally ill with AIDS (Couser 1997; Crawley 2002). That research found that many caregivers participating in the study coped with chronic stress by actively striving to construe events as positive and imbue events with positive meaning. After statistically controlling for the influence of other types of coping, caregivers’ use of positive reappraisal was significantly correlated with the experience of positive affect in the time leading up to and following the death of their partners. Despite the inevitable illness and death of their loved ones, caregivers used reappraisal to feel positive emotions in the face of situations that could have no benign resolution.

Positive reappraisal is an active coping strategy (Couser 1991), rather than a defence mechanism used to repress or deny. The type of habitual response however my findings indicate is based on a suppression of negative emotions (desensitisation and deflection) and this is linked with increased sympathetic nervous system activation (Davis 2009). It is also linked with the prevention of making healthy changes to one’s lifestyle through the maintenance of damaging behaviours (Nakao et al. 2010). In contrast to the active nature of positive reappraisal as a coping strategy, my default response is a passive failure to adequately cope. My evidence of efficacy, and skills-demands compatibility demonstrates that in more cases than not, I do achieve in the completion of a demand, but the central issue appears to be the length of time it takes to do this, and more importantly, the cost in terms of allostatic loading or wear and tear during the cycles of unhealthy experience (coping), preceeding achievement. It is important to remember that management is not the same as mastery, and the organism will seek to close a need, often where the means deployed are unhealthy for the organism (Lyon 2012).

Positive reappraisal does not lead to physiological or psychosocial complications (de Certeau 1984; Delamont 2009). In addition, positive reappraisal is often the first step towards a re-engagement with the stressor event. For instance, a person stricken with a non-fatal heart attack might positively re-appraise the event as an opportunity to change their lifestyle and subsequently begin to make changes in diet and exercise behaviours. Alternatively, a person who has recovered from cancer might view their survival of the
disease as evidence of their strength and resilience, and they might decide to dedicate their life to helping others make similar recoveries. Hence, positive re-appraisal is an adaptive rather than an avoidant strategy - one that can be leveraged to optimise the well-being.

Figure 24  The Wear and Tear Journey to Healthy Cycles

6.3.3 Egotistical Issues with concept of “Self-Regulation” in Coping

It must be remembered that a neurotic way of being is likely to be predicated on a pattern of employing historically necessary survival coping mechanisms (Clarkson and Cavicchia 2013; Corey 2015). The findings from this study identify an organism who is very self-dependant, to the point of self-exclusion from his external environment including all of the supports and opportunities that were identified therein.

Your survival mode is a set of assumptions that isolates you from sources of support that could relieve distress (Supervisor 17/05/13).

My way of being in the world, or my dominant patterns of environmental contact appear to be formulated on a damaged concept of self-regulation. The benefit of the integrated gestalt and transactional model developed in this study (Figure 10), is that a picture of my habitual approach to meeting demands emerged based on fixed beliefs around needing to do everything myself. The aforementioned model is a type of here-and-now developmental model that shows the immediate processes of discreet emotional response employed in respect of an emerging need. Wheeler (2013) bemoans the lack of an established gestalt development model, and several other authors agree with him (Spagmuoulo Lobb 2013; Starr 2011). As a social constructivist, this is an area of gestalt
that I believe is lacking, and historically, I have tended to revert to Ericksson’s (1959) psychosocial model of development to apply an appropriate timelined developmental model to gain awareness of the likely evolution of patterns of environmentl contact.

Using Ericksson’s (1959) model, several references throughout my data point to two significant periods where I believe that my damaged interpretation of self-regulation began. Firstly, in the school age stage (6 to 11 years), where basic conflicts are industry versus inferiority, children need to cope with new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of competence, whilst failure results in feelings of inferiority. For me, this was the period in which I was routinely sexually abused by two adults. It was also a period of significant environmental change, as my siblings and I started in a country school having relocated as a family from the city. In this new setting, I would suffer extensive bullying due to being darker in skin tone than the other children:

Obviously, my whole interest in this area is based on the fact that I was 13 years in therapy at the rape crisis centre. One of the very first big, I suppose, big impacts, was as a child, having the sense of being, I suppose, less than everyone else from kind of when our family moved out to the country when we were young. With my skin colouring or whatever, this was back at the time of the Trocaire boxes (collection boxes for charity), so straightaway I remember a feeling of dread on the first day of school with all the other kids gathering around me and calling me “the Cambodian” (MD Supervision Meeting 29/11/14)

A second key period from Ericksson’s (1959) model is adolescence (12 to 18 years) where the main developmental conflict lies between having a sense of identity versus role confusion. Social relationships are a fundamental concern in this period. Teens need to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Success leads to an ability to stay true to oneself, whilst failure leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self. This was an extremely difficult period in my life that commenced with the illness and death of one of my abusers. Significant parental discord dominated the family home during this period also and consequently, the type of developmental support needed during this period was absent.
If you think about it now, I started working at the age of 14 on 5punts per night. My job was in a pub about 20 miles away from where I lived. I hitched there and stayed with following work (most nights). I was going out with a 17 year-old girl at the time. My favourite thing after work was a few pints and some cigars which we were allowed help ourselves to. What mad times they were, and dangerous too. One night at work, I was bundled into a cubicle whilst cleaning the toilet in the pub and groped, and I was also molested whilst I hitched a lift home after a day shift in the bar. There was no one to talk about such incidents, no one to tell (MD Journal Entry 27/11/13).

The identification of the place of self in holistic work overload and the egotistical need for self perfectionism in the findings, link to form a montage of how the damaged concept of self regulation routinely interrupts my practice of leadership, my life satisfaction and my somatic health. By maintaining a façade of ideal professionalism; anger and self-castigation are retroflected inwardly. Self-perpetuated destructive behaviours inflict wear and tear from ‘trying to hold it together’, as my behaviours propel me further and further towards disintegration. I have become a veritable poster boy for the paradoxical theory of change. The self-perfectionist egotistical professional wants to be an ideal prototype of success. The need to say yes to all environmental demands creates holistic work overload (HWO). This self-induced torture removes opportunities for withdrawal and satisfaction to take place. Shakespeare wrote “sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care” (Shakespeare 1606 cited in Braunmuller 1997), but my work related stress thwarts any opportunity for real rumination and recovery.

Poor decision making is symptomatic of this type of inherently skewed self regulatory patterns. Gestalt theory holds that the more we attempt to force change, the more we stay the same i.e. “Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose” (Fischer 2013, p.124). A more authentic mode of leading is to increase our awareness in the here-and-now of all potential courses of action open to us, thus allowing for sustainable and organic change to take place. When people identify with their current experience, the conditions of wholeness, growth and positive change occur. Put another way, meaningful change (growth and development) comes about, not so much by striving to be different, but as a result of ‘choiceful’ awareness (Joyce and Sills, 2014 p. 16). By turning away from
environmental support, it appears that the damaged conceptualisation of self-regulation is significant in terms of the self perpetuation of work related stress.

6.3.4 A Paradoxical Mode of Leading

In the tradition of gestalt analogy, Figure 25 depicts a fictional game in which the objective is to turn the red dot green, by passing through a number of different stages. To progress, the red dot must pass through three levels of the game and the corresponding doors in that level by collecting the key to unlock that door. Failure to move successfully through any of the doors ultimately prevents the red dot turning green thus thwarting a successful conclusion to the game.

Figure 25 The Gesalt Game

Level 1 – Primary Appraisal
Level 2 – Secondary Appraisal
Level 3 – Coping

Door 1 = Sensation, Door 2 = Awareness, Door 3 = Mobilisation, Door 4 = Action, Door 5 = Final Contact, Door 6 = Satisfaction, Door 7 = Withdrawal.
This scenario represents the stages that a need must go through until it can be satisfied. In healthy functioning, homeostasis is unsettled by the sensing of a need which moves on to become an awareness in the organism at the primary appraisal stage in the environmental transaction. Energy is mobilised in the secondary stage of transaction where healthy coping strategies are selected. They are then moved upon with appropriate action in the context of full environmental contact. When the need is fulfilled the organism experiences satisfaction before withdrawing again to a state of homeostasis or balanced equilibrium.

My findings however show that the majority of blockages (28%) that I experience occur right at the beginning of cycle of experience. This is at the primary appraisal stage of the transactional stress model. Emergent needs are habitually sensed as being a threat. Energy necessary to invoke the positive deployment of mobilisation and the choosing of healthy coping mechanisms is deflected away. Secondary appraisal occurs simultaneously and is dominated by introjection and the self-critic that informs me that I do not have adequate resources to meet that need. Coping thus becomes a factor of unhealthy need fulfilment and interrupted environmental contact. Healthy action is punctuated by projection where others are placed on pedestals and where I negatively benchmark myself against them. With the drive to complete being germane to both healthy and unhealthy cycles, energy now becomes retaliatory and anger is turned inwards, as there is no externalisation opportunities. The self-perfectionist critic egotistically castigates and postulates that I must succeed and therefore, in a compromised state, the boundary between myself and the environment is eradicated and where further gestalten bombard in a confluent environmental relationship. Instead of achieving a healthy outcome in terms of job performance, social functioning, self-actualisation, morale and somatic health, I experience erratic and directionless performance, poor social interaction, negative self-esteem and poor physical health. Figure 26 depicts how progress through the stages is routinely blocked at the outset.
6.3.5 Possessing the Tools for Mastery but not Recognising Same

In my vignettes “The Diseased Leader”, “The Great Deflector” and “Saboteur”, the processes of damaged primary and secondary appraisal were outlined. These vignettes identified interrupted patterns of environmental contact where demands are routinely appraised as being threatening, and autonomous processes of unhealthy gestalt cycles ensue. From the previous discussion regarding the paradoxical mode of leading, it is clear that the fulfilment of needs is routinely blocked due to deployment of a forced and unproductive means environmental interaction. In leadership theory, inconsistent leadership styles are associated with a negation of efforts at progressive leadership such as a transformational style (Mullen et al. 2011; Yukl 2010). Aspiring leaders cannot expect to thrive when performance is inconsistent and subordinates do not know how a leader will respond in a given situation. My literature review suggests that aspiring leaders who lack self-confidence are in an understandably disadvantageous position because leadership identity is co-constructed in organisations when individuals claim and grant leader and follower status, in their social interactions (DeRue and Ashford (2010). If my dominant mode of environmental interaction is where the self-critic (based on introjections from old) tells me I can’t, it then appears that a new fact based voice in the present is needed as a suitable counterweight.
Chapter Six - Discussion

The cultural context and background for this study has been explained from the outset as being set within a time of recession where distributive bargaining and toxicity were rife in the workplace. Social identity theory (Knippenberg 2011) suggests that the more prototypical a leader is perceived to be, the more trust he or she has in representing the interests of the group. From a postmodern perspective, the leadership identity is “a process of infinite interpretation, reinterpretation of experiences, circumstances and conditions emphasising the interconnectedness of past and present, lived and living” (Starr 2014, p. 4). The completion of this research using an autoethnographical approach has facilitated that an appreciation of the interconnectedness of past and present. It demonstrates how the development of neurotic coping and appraisal processes are based on negative introjections that had their place and time as valid defence mechanisms, that have now morphed into dis-eased ways of being in world. This study however factually answers the introject and within my healthy findings, several catalysts for positive change emerged.

Although the environment does pose threat and toxicity, it also provides opportunities and support as narrated in “Opportunity Knocks” and “Someone to Lean On”. A substantial suite of leadership successes emerged in the findings as grounds for leadership efficacy as depicted in “You Don’t Scare Me Now”. There is something in this study also about finding my identity from an employment perspective. I work in a portfolio career where I lead at different levels in different organisations. My study identified that two critical characteristics required for working in a portfolio career are those of leadership and entrepreneurship (Chan et al. 2012). Research also suggests a strong homogeneity between leadership and entrepreneurship (Chan et al. 2012). Coglisera and Brigham (2004) provided three characteristics are common to both leadership and entrepreneurship – vision, influence and leading in the context of innovation / creativity. In vignettes presented relating to characteristics mediating healthy coping i.e. “The Craftsman”, “My Humanistic GPS” and “Frankl Would Be Proud”, an array of supporting data provides a basis for greater self-efficacy.
6.4 Strengths of this Study

This study possesses several strengths that I will later translate into implications and recommendations across a range of areas.

6.4.1 Uncovering Empirical and Treatment Paradoxes

A key strength of this study rests in the extensive literature review that was completed in the execution of same. This achievement was facilitated through deciding on the use of an autoethnographic study, because my research interest lay not with stress, leadership or gestalt, but with the interplay of all three distinct concepts. Although gestalt is light on contemporary empirical contributions, ample historical references were available along with a large degree of reference books on the subject. Ample empirical evidence was available in terms of stress, work related stress and leadership. The meta-synthesis approach taken resulted in the tracing out of the development of gestalt, leadership and stress theory. Contemporary theory across all three areas led to a convergence around the importance of process, relationship and self-regulation in each of those arenas.

A central strength of that convergence is that it highlights a significant issue with contemporary praxis in terms of work related stress research and treatment. Due to the complexity and labour intensive nature of process studies, research informed by transactional stress models is lagging behind literature grounded in structural models. This is problematic however as the JD-C model has been criticised on many grounds including ambiguity that remains around the nature of the interaction between demand and control (Beehr et al. 2001; Peter and Siegrist 1997; De Lange et al 2004; Tucker et al. 2008). The JD-R model has had concerns raised regarding its restrictive nature and sole concentration on the impact of work characteristics on wellbeing (Brouze 2014; Herbert 2011; Karatepe and Olugbade 2009; Schaufeli and Taris 2014).
In terms of work related stress treatment, from a psychotherapeutic perspective, my literature review demonstrated that as a directed form of intervention - cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) holds precedence over other forms of talk therapy (McLeod 2011; Joyce and Sills 2014). The medical profession appears to favour CBT due to it being an evidence-based treatment where specific interventions for symptom-based diagnoses are used (Hoifodt et al. 2011). My review of extant literature however showed that many questions remain regarding the overall effectiveness of CBT, including the extent to which its effects persist following the cessation of treatment given that it is a predominantly short term issue specific form of treatment (Butler et al. 2006). Concern was also evidenced in the literature around the overstatement of beneficial outcomes of CBT. A review of meta-analytical on CBT primary studies for depression for example concluded that the effectiveness of CBT has been overstated in the literature (Parker 2014; Carroll and Rounsaville 2007).

How outcome is defined also appeared in the literature review to impact findings of treatment specificity. In a review of the meta-analysis completed by Parker (2014) for instance, CBT was demonstrably superior to other therapies when outcome was defined as reduction in symptoms of the primary illness or global symptoms, or as improvements in general functioning. When outcome was defined in terms of improvements in self-concept or social adjustment however, CBT no longer appeared superior. McLeod (2011) also suggests limitations of CBT include a lack of a precise role of cognitive processes that is yet to be determined. CBT as a directive therapy aims to change cognitions sometimes quite forcefully. For some, this may be considered an unethical approach (McLeod 2011). Therefore, in terms of both empirical research and dominant treatments for work related stress, a key strength of my study is in highlighting the need to question how we study and treat work related stress.
6.4.2 A Dynamic and Longitudinal Approach

A criticism of various historical stress models is that they generated neat findings that were not supported by subsequent randomised control tests (Cox and Griffiths 2010). For example, despite the elegance and potential power of this formulation, the close association between developmental stage, the content of impulses, and cognitive characteristics does not show up clearly enough in observation to provide adequate support for it. The link between forms of psychopathology and specific defences is also a bit too neat to be generally applicable. It is more a conceptual, ideal rather than a clinical reality (Lyon 2012).

Hierarchical, developmental approaches tend to spawn trait measures of coping, such as the contrast between repression (avoidance or denial in some versions)—sensitisation (vigilance, isolation, or intellectualisation in some versions). In a review of coping theory and assessment, Cohen (2010) refers to a number of questionnaire measures of this contrast, treated either as a single dichotomy or a continuous dimension. According to Babatunde (2013) however, a limitation of the transactional model is that although it embraces variables such as subjective perceptions and the potential influence of individual differences in assessing stress responses, the complexities inherent in this personality and behavioural variations make it hard to empirically evaluate the vast nature of how people react and cope under stressful conditions, requiring a more dynamic approach by researchers to address this complexity.

Often used quantitative methodology in occupational stress research has been criticised as obtaining data that captures only a static moment in time (Mazzetti and Blenkinsopp 2012). In addition, surveys and questionnaire designs approaches have been criticised for their failure to harness the full extent of evolving complexities in timelines, antecedents and fluctuating subjective interpretations of peoples’ stress experiences. Consequently, this limitation already inherent in such methodologies is often exacerbated if a transactional perspective is utilised.
This study is a divergence from traditional survey and questionnaire type studies because it harnesses the complexity of timelines, antecedents and my own fluctuating interpretations over an extended time period. Although the data was gathered over a two-year period, the emeshment with same, including changing perceptions etc. is evidence of how this study differs from the prevailing approach to understanding the stress transaction. In addition, this study addresses the need for more research into the discreet emotional responses to work related stress in non working times. This was specifically achieved by collecting journal data on non working days that allowed for the identification of how work related stress habitually interrupts morale and life satisfaction.

6.4.3 A Cultural and Contextual Study

Central to the homogeneity between leadership, stress and gestalt theory is the emphasis they place on relationship between organism and environment (Alvolio 2006; Corey 2015; Starr 2014). Contemporary stress theory posits that stress does not reside exclusively within the individual or the environment, but in the relationship between both. Contemporary transactional stress theory also recognises that stress appraisal can change over time and circumstances (Cox and Griffiths 2010). Individuals may well reappraise something as being benign or even a challenge, at a different point in time. Transactional stress theory also appreciates the wider macroenvironment as a central hazard on an individual ion terms of work stress. Cox and Griffiths (1995) for example spoke of working life changing in Britain and across the world, and how these changes had led to new challenges and problems for organisations and employees. At that time, this was characterised by the decline of manufacturing and many forms of industry in the UK, the advance of IT and the service sector, more short-term contracts, outsourcing, mergers, automisation, trade union declines, globalisation and more international competition (Schabracq and Cooper 2000).

Similarly, this study tells a story that is cloaked within some of the most dramatic macro-environmental instability ever seen, and indeed could not have been foreseen when Cox and Griffiths wrote of the changes back in 1995. The global economic downturn that
led to the socialisation of banking debt and the surrender of economic sovereignty to the International Monetary Fund, European Union (EU) and European Central Bank (Kirby 2010). It was a period of deep austerity where unemployment rose to 14.8% and in aggregate terms, GDP fell by 3% and GNP by 2.8% in 2008 (Power 2009). Revenues generated through property taxes effectively collapsed (Lewis 2011). Approximately 40,000 Irish people left Ireland in 2011, 95% of whom were between the ages of 19 to 44 years and 69% of this ‘generation skype’ (McWilliams 2012, p.5) have at least a primary degree which makes them Ireland’s most educated emigrants ever (Fenton 2011). By the end of 2012, the male suicide rates were 57% higher than if the pre-recession trend continued. In absolute terms, there were 476 and 85 more male and female suicide deaths and 5,029 and 3,833 more male and female self-harm presentations to hospital in the 5-year period from 2008 to 2012 respectively than if pre-recession trends had continued. This is approximately equivalent to an excess of one complete year of suicide and self-harm. The benefit of the autoethnographic study over self-study or narrative study is that there is a very significant cultural / environmental focus in keeping with both the gestalt and transactional models. In doing so, this study does not compartmentalise, but does indeed endeavour to reveal the whole gestalt of the elephant.

6.4.4 Answering if Gestalt Theory is Holding Practice Back

The empowering nature of gestalt that I refer to in this study is evidenced across a diverse array of disciplines. Examples of its multi disciplinary applicability were cited in this paper, and include contributions to social work, organisational consulting and design, and several other areas (Barber 2013; Brownell 2008). My research adds to a number of studies demonstrating gestalt to be as efficacious as other forms of therapy including CBT, in treating a range of issues (Hager 2010; Cuijpers et al. 2010). A review of leadership literature also found gestalt to afford substantial creative potential to leadership development studies because it offers:
Chapter Six - Discussion

A medium that can capture and communicate the felt experience, the affect, and something of the tacit knowledge of the day-to-day, moment-to-moment reality of organisations.

Biehl-Missal and Fitzek (2014, p.251)

I believe my research to be significant in defending gestalt theory and praxis because my study explicates its proven widespread efficacy despite it remaining devoid of providence in work related stress treatment and analysis. It appears that gestalt has been discounted by the medical profession in particular, due to its lack of focus on outcome and measurement (McLeod 2011). Consigned to the peripheries in terms of medically sanctioned interventions, a dearth of gestalt literature pertaining to work related stress consequently exists. This space is largely occupied by positivist writers with many contributions from that paradigm informing government publications. This is perhaps reflective of a society consumed with statistics, and a culture obsessed with immediate results; the type of ‘quicker fix’, that medication for example is perceived to afford.

The significance of my study for gestalt theory and praxis is predicated on a belief that my research answers many of its detractors. From a theoretical perspective, the depth of insight it has afforded me as a qualitative researcher is in contrast to the rather superficial understanding that quantitative studies achieve. Whilst gestalt therapeutic practice is open, creative and experimental, gestalt theory is highly organised, scientific and systematic. In fact, Short and Thomas (2014) suggest that the humanistic approach from within which gestalt resides, forms the foundations for all types of psychotherapy.

Other authors such as Joyce and Sills (2014, p.36) promote the cycle of experience (COE) for example, as being a powerful systemic tool in tracking the formation, interruption or completion of emerging figures. In the context of my own study, the COE provided an optimal model that allowed for themes (figure) to be extracted from my data sets (ground). It allowed for the creation of a schematic representation that helped me to comprehensively understand my subjective experiences of work related stress with a level of insight that had hitherto proved elusive.
From a praxis perspective, the significance of this study is that in identifying limitations of dominant treatment methods today, my research suggests that gestalt can provide a fitting alternative, or supplementary approach. When individuals present for CBT, they are often treated in a directed manner for episodic occurrences related to specific work related stress incidents. Whilst CBT maybe effective in altering thought patterns toward moving beyond the current malaise, a lack of focus on the origins of the internal reaction to the WRS trigger, may lead to limited insight being achieved.

Indeed, Ryle (2012, p14) suggests that the individual may need to return for subsequent courses of treatment to deal with new episodes of work related stress linked to other triggers. In contrast, the essence of the gestalt approach to treatment is based on a Taoist saying “that if you give a man a fish you can feed him for one day, but if you teach him how to fish you can feed him for a lifetime” (Ellis 1994, p.217). With its focus on the achievement of self-efficacy in all situations, gestalt can empower an individual to self-regulate through heightening awareness around triggers and responses to work related stress.

As an integrative approach such as in schema-focused therapy (SFT), CBT can be useful to dealing with the immediacy of the problem. When the individual is in a position to move from directed intervention to self-regulation, then I suggest that gestalt offers an appropriate ongoing mode of self-regulation and the achievement of life and work improvements. Gestaltists believe that an aware person knows what they do, how and why they do it, and most importantly, that they have alternatives (Liotas 2014).

More studies such as my own will be needed however to begin to turn the tide of thought pertaining to what constitutes effective theory and praxis in terms of WRS. I do however suggest that gestalt oriented researchers and practitioners can use this study as validation that their paradigm is indeed efficacious in this domain. Indeed, with its existential meta-theory, gestalt psychological underpin, and phenomenological method; little doubt should exist pertaining to gestalt’s potential to foster meaning in all situations (Ellegard and Pederson 2012, p.2). Based on the outcomes of my own study, we can argue with
conviction that gestalt can significantly contribute to work related analysis and treatment.

6.5 Limitations of this Study

A number of limitations are acknowledged as being present in, and resulting from this study.

6.5.1 Methodological Limitations

The findings and themes presented provide a comprehensive overview of my perspective on work related stress in the context of a qualitative study. It is important to note that the analysis does not declare to make sweeping claims about the area as it would not be appropriate to generalise qualitative research findings beyond the immediate research context (Houdmont 2009; Burns et al. 2000; Leka 2003). Rather, the goal was to investigate areas of interest in my own practice of leadership toward the betterment of same, and to make what I hope would be a significant empirical contribution to contemporary work related stress discourse. In qualitative research, we do not use statistical significance that characterises quantitative research. In qualitative research, significance constitutes something that is important, meaningful, or potentially useful given what we are trying to find out (Patton 2015). Qualitative findings are therefore judged by their substantive significance.

In terms of claiming significance from an autoethnographic study in particular, Ellingson (2012) argues that the value of an autoethnographic study is limited to the meaning it creates in each individual reader. The study therefore cannot assume anything by way of impact, because this will be down to the subjective interpretation of anyone who reads this work. That provides some discomfort for the researcher. In contrast that a quantitative study, many elements of the qualitative approach such as analysing the data have very little governed structure in order to guide researchers (Bloomberg and Volpe 2015). This creates a two tier issue in that firstly, this lack of governance opens such research up to criticism in terms of structure and rigour and
secondly, it complicates the construction of such as study as I found substantial variances in the approaches taken by autoethnographers in the completion of their own theses.

Proponents of autoethnography such as Ellingson (2009) condone methods used in autoethnography that are “a messy, multigenre, paradigm-spanning approach to resisting the art / science dichotomy” (Ellingson 2009, p.8). Other commentators however from outside the paradigm take a different view labelling autoethnographers as “navel-gazers, self-absorbed narcissists who don't fulfil scholarly obligations of hypothesising, analysing, and theorising” (Soyini-Madison 2006, p.57). It is often labelled as an avant-garde (experimental) method of research and some authors question its status as “proper research” (Sparkes 2000, p. 22).

Any researcher contemplating the use of an autoethnographic methodology should be warned that despite the influence of postmodern thought, academic conventions are powerful, and there remains resistance to the intrusion of autobiographical approaches to knowledge production and sharing (Larson 2011). The focus on biography in particular, rather than formality, is a concern for some (Atkinson 1997). Doloriert and Sambrook (2011) reported substantial acceptance issues when completing an autoethnographic PhD in a traditional business school in terms of thesis construction and completing the viva. Dauphinee (2010) was cited in this thesis as questioning the approach but from a different angle. In particular, she questions the personal input into autoethnographic studies and how the “the academic gaze is an all-encompassing one. It seeks to make sense of everything it encounters, and more significantly, to master what it encounters” (Dauphinee 2010, p.8). The life story or biography of the researcher thus becomes according to Dauphinee, the property, the material for academia to deconstruct, to challenge, and to master. Therefore, autoethnographers should be aware of potential implications in terms of levels of disclosure, and the dissecting of personal narratives that they will be subjected to.
6.5.2 The Complexity of the Subject Matter

In the previous section, limitations of the autoethnographic methodology were discussed from a rather general perspective. In terms of applying an autoethnographic approach to the phenomena of transactional stress i.e. discreet emotions, the complexity of the task for this researcher became very evident, very quickly. The autoethnographic approach is multi-layered and attempts to achieve thick descriptions of lived experience. The transactional model asserts that the subjective experience of stress is unique to the individual, but more than that, it is unique to the particular organism / environmental exchange.

Appraisal for instance in transactional stress, is the conduit between the environmental demand, coping mechanisms, and outcomes that ensue for the organism. The appraisal phase is layered also with primary, secondary and re-appraisal phases. Therefore, attempting to study transactional stress is like taking a slow release frame shot to try to capture a 360-degree image of something over an extended period of time that is in a constant state of flux and change.

According to Mark and Smith (2012), the number of stress models in existence with different viewpoints on work related stress shows how complex these processes may be. In terms of this study, I identified healthy and unhealthy characteristics of my leadership practice to help me in mastering work related stress. The very issue of coping in transactional theory is problematic however. Cooper et al. (2001) and Cox and Ferguson (1991) have stated that despite the widespread use of the term “coping” there are difficulties surrounding its definition, as it can be seen as a process, a behaviour, as a stable trait, or as situation specific. My study also addressed various processes that underlie my patterns of appraisal. Daniels et al. (2004) have suggested that the conception of appraisal in transactional stress is too simplistic and doesn’t include individuals’ histories and anticipated futures. This was an additional layer of complexity that I built into my research as a gestaltist, but because of a lack of a gestalt development model, the task of translating that for the reader in a meaningful way was challenging.
i.e. there is no development model germane to gestalt in the same manner that I could translate current experience in terms of the cycle of experience.

Cox (1987) also states that the processes discussed may not be as rational as presented in transactional theories. My research highlighted this fact and although the basis for my appraisal and coping mechanisms served useful purposes in the past, how they have evolved into unhealthy and irrational ways of being is one of main motives for completing this research. One of the themes that emerged from the findings is that eventually, I tend to succeed in terms of meeting a need, but it is the intervening, damaged processes of appraisal and coping that result in undue wear and tear. Attempting to explain and justify cycle after cycle of irrational behaviour is both complex and emotionally draining.

In addition to the complexity of the transactional approach, I am placing a very specific model into the equation in terms of the gestalt cycle of experience. Each phase of the healthy cycle has substantive theory behind it i.e. sensation – based on gestalt psychological meta-theory of perceptual organisation and discrimination. In addition, for every point on the healthy cycle there is a related interruption i.e. in the case of sensation – desensitisation with a substantive amount to theory behind the processes involved in each of those boundary disturbances. Therefore, a recognised limitation of this study is its ability to resonate with readers, particularly those without an awareness of interactional stress models and humanistic psychotherapy.
6.5.3 A Labour Intensive Process

The labour intensive nature of this research renders it difficult to replicate. From the outset, the study attempted to gain intimate awareness of stress (including work related stress), gestalt psychotherapy and leadership. An unfiltered google scholar engine search of the term leadership for example will generate in excess of a million hits. My literature review also focused on the development of each of those subject areas from inception to contemporary manifestation. For example, the origins of stress theory were traced back to the 1930’s and have developed through a number of phases i.e. engineering models through stimulus and response models, through interactional models to contemporary transactional theory. Gestalt theory was examined from inception around the same time as the early origins of stress theory through to today. To understand the development of gestalt however, it was necessary to complete a thorough investigation into the development of other schools of psychotherapy such as psychodynamic and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT).

From a methodological perspective, the autoethnographic approach requires the investment of resources such as time, but in addition, emotional and reflexive energy. Journaling was completed on a daily basis during the study. In line with contemporary thinking into spillover and crossover effects of work related stress, and in order to fully trace out work related stress experiences, journal data was also captured on non work days placing additional demands on an already challenged home life, due to holistic work overload (HWO). Also, the process of transcribing one supervision meeting could take up to the equivalent of one full working day to complete. This data was then analysed through a number of iterances of coding, including the use of inter coder reliability resources. Data was analysed without the use of analytical software to affect the type of full engagement required to achieve intimacy as participant researcher.

Once findings were generated, layers and layers of descriptive questioning took place to identify dominant patterns and themes from the data. This analysis required the continuous question of why? Why not? What is really happening here? Such forensic questioning uncovered substantial meaning that did not appear at face value in the
findings. A number of key assumptions for example regarding external work hazards were problematized and found to be at least in some instance a product of organism / environmental transaction. An unintended consequence of this study is the demonstrable level of labour investment may act as deterrent to researchers who may be tempted to revert to structural approaches that offer a neater route to achieving publishable research based on the current disparity between transactional and structural works.

6.5.4 The Empirical Unpopularity of Gestalt

In addition to the complexity and labour intensive nature of this research, writing under a gestalt banner, may itself be perceived as limiting the voracity of this research. My literature review demonstrated that gestalt has offered a relative paucity in terms of empirical research (McLeod 2011; Hager 2010; Wagner Moore 2004). In contrast to CBT for example, gestalt’s lack of focus on measurement and outcome has seen it loose its providence, in terms of published studies being consigned to the peripheries. In attempting to claim new contributions to knowledge, today’s gestalt researcher undoubtedly sets out from a disadvantaged position.

According to Wagner Moore (2004), orthodox gestalt therapy has suffered a rather unfortunate fate stating that it has been poorly articulated, and gestalt techniques have received minimal empirical validation. My hypothesis is that the experiential and open nature of gestalt therapy in particular provokes substantial critique. Wedding and Corsini (2013) argue that it is a bohemian approach to therapy that “uses any technique that works” (p.24). The open nature of gestalt psychotherapeutic practice involves a lack of focus on outcomes and measurement that provokes negative benchmarks against other treatments such as CBT (McLeod 2011). It is I argue, wholly regrettable that, particularly in light of this current study that gestalt theory has not developed further through empirical contributions in recent years. I posit that through my research, gestalt has now effectively stepped forward to offer a process oriented, longitudinal approach to helping to understand the discreet emotions required for a transactional stress study in a way that CBT could not because of Lazarus’s (1991) call for a longitudinal and
process oriented approach to understanding organism / environmental interaction. Empirical evidence provided in this study demonstrated no significantly greater efficacy of CBT when compared to humanistic treatments across a range of issues (Tolin 2010; Hager 2010). The issue is however that CBT researchers can point to a plethora of empirical contributions, and thus, from an academic perspective, they come from a far more perceived efficacious position than I as a gestaltist.

### 6.5.5 Using a Specialised Approach to Validity

A substantial amount of thought went into choosing an appropriate method of validation in this study but a possible limitation of this research is a lack of awareness of the approach by those outside of the ethnographic / auto-ethnographic community (Ellis 2011). Autoethnographic theorists posit that triangulation is too limited due to its positivistic nature given autoethnography’s alignment to social constructivism (Struthers 2012). While triangulation by definition, calls for a triangle of methods that are compared against each other, crystallisation refers to a myriad of crystals that all reflect different views, dimensions, shapes, colours, patterns and arrays of the phenomenon that we study. Therefore, crystallisation does not validate the data as triangulation does, but it provides room for multiple voices to be heard, and it acknowledges the voices that we are unable to hear and see.

The purpose of crystallisation is to identify deeper and most likely more complex findings that still only reflect a partial, situated, constructed, multiple, embodied reality. Rather than calling attention to the researcher’s knowledge, crystallisation proposes an emphasis on how much we value the opportunity to learn about our world. We are advised therefore to blur the dividing line between the knower and the known (Liu et al. 2014). It also involves respecting those who are studied, thereby providing room for their voices. Consequently, more complex findings are generated, and dualism is diminished. The issue in terms of this study from employing crystallisation is that we are already aware of the bias toward evidenced based outcome studies. The paradigm war between CBT and humanistic therapies in terms of wider acceptance accentuates
the risk in using a method of claiming validity that is itself relatively new, but also, very specific to the field of ethnography/autoethnography.

Those who read this dissertation that look for a neat set of outcomes will be disappointed and therefore, this study is sure to alienate some, due in no small part to the deployment of what the evidence told me was the most appropriate mode of validation. Crystallisation links in with action research in terms of never believing that we have reached an answer, because as McNiff (2013) states, that concept is nebulous as with the passing of each moment, previous knowledge becomes obsolete. In the case of a process oriented phenomena, I felt compelled to choose crystallisation, because I accept the arguments that support it’s use. However, it is likely that those who seek what Schon ascribed as “high ground evidence” (1983, p.28), that crystallisation will feed further into the perception of an avant garde study.

The assertion by Ellingson (2009) that crystallisation is a postmodern re-imagining of traditional triangulation is congruent with Kierkegaard’s “gritty” conceptualisation of human existence because it is “a messy, multigenre, paradigm-spanning approach to resisting the art/science dichotomy” (Ellingson 2009, p.8). Whilst triangulation uses a number of different methods to validate findings, crystallisation goes beyond triangulation. Richardson (2008) advocates the construction of evocative mixed-genre texts such as narratives of self, ethnographic, fictional representations, poetry and drama that crystallise findings reflecting externalities, but also reflecting the researchers themselves.

Whilst triangulation employs a rigid comparison of methods, crystallisation prefers the use of multiple crystals embracing difference in views, dimensions, shapes, colours, patterns and arrays of a phenomenon (Polka 2013). Gestalt also seeks to understand the shape, pattern and holistic reality of the organism (Yontef 2012). Crystallisation provides room for multiple voices to be heard, replicating the relational and dialogues tenure of gestalt. It embraces “the dynamics of fragmentation, plurality, fluidity, and intermingling” (Arnould and Thompson 2005, p. 869). Gestalt embraces integration,
pluralism, flow and the relationship between organism and environment (Mann 2010; Stevenson 2010; Angus et al. 2014).

Richardson (2000) promotes an evocative blending of narratives of self, ethnographic fictional representations, poetry, and drama to crystallise research findings. This type of latitude is commensurate with the experiential and experimental thrust of gestalt in utilising multiple heterogeneous approaches to heightening awareness (Wedding and Corsini 2013; Wheeler 2013). In researching any phenomenon, crystallisation promotes the use of multiple lenses to offer alternative theoretical explanations. As a humanistic methodology, gestalt also employs an approach achieving a type of awareness that Silverman (2011) likens to the kaleidoscope i.e. looking at a phenomenon through as many lenses as possible to view the different colours and shapes that emerge.

In autoethnographic work, I look at validity in terms of what happens to readers as well as to research participants and researchers. To me, validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible. You also can judge validity by whether it helps readers communicate with others different from themselves, or offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers, or even your own.

Ellis (2011, p. 124)

The burden of proof on autoethnographers is, and should be, different to other forms of social scientific enquiry according to Bochner (2002). It is not so important that narratives represent lives accurately, only “that narrators believe they are doing so” (Bochner and Ellis 2002, p. 86). We can judge one narrative interpretation of events against another, but we cannot measure a narrative against the events themselves, because the meaning of the events becomes clear only in their narrative expression (Bochner and Ellis 2002). Ellis (2011) emphasises the ‘narrative truth’ for autoethnographic writings versus traditional forms of validity. She proposes trying to construct the narrative as close to the experience as one can remember it, especially in the initial version. In completing same, crystallisation offers a more comprehensive and authentic meaning of the story than traditional forms of triangulation could achieve. The

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question remains however regarding the domination of outcome and quantitative research in terms of achieving publication and funding.

6.6 Personal and Practice Implications for the Researcher

A number of key implications arise from this study. As researcher / participant, I firstly examine the implications for me in terms of (a) functioning in work and social contact (b) life satisfaction & morale and (c) somatic health. There are wider implications from this study however in terms of how we consider and treat work related stress. There are theoretical, empirical and practice implications for psychotherapy and gestalt. There are substantial organisational implications around employee supports and leadership training. Table 35 now firstly addresses personal and practice implications.
Table 35  
Summary of Findings, Interpretations and Implications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding #</th>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Interpretations</th>
<th>Implication(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>3 x environmental work hazards emerged from the data: (a) permanent exposure to toxicity (PTE), (b) holistic work-overload (HWO), and (c) uncontrollable field threat (UFT).</td>
<td>Although I have identified environmental hazards, they are not wholly objective or uncontrollable. The part that self plays in appraisal and coping with same impacts outcomes.</td>
<td>Although at a macro level, certain hazards by their nature are uncontrollable, the boundary between controllable and uncontrollable is less fixed than I assumed. Also, my own part played in contributing to environmental hazard is a new realisation but one that affords more control potential than was previously thought.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Primary appraisal is dominated by de-sensitisation and deflection and secondary appraisal dominated by introjection.</td>
<td>Re-appraisal leading to positive problem based coping tends to occur after cycle(s) of unhealthy coping causing wear and tear or allostatic loading.</td>
<td>The successful completion of a need is forced through damaging unhealthy cycles of experience until the situation is re-appraised and a healthy cycle(s) are instigated. More rationale primary and secondary appraisal are required to ensure healthy flow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Habitual coping mechanisms are damaging; self-defeating; and are grounded in neurosis. They are invoked in even the mildest of environmental encounter when the slightest of threat is sensed.</td>
<td>My way of coping could be described as self-exclusionary based on a damaged interpretation of self-regulation. Instead of achieving healthy contact and environmental support, I turn inwards shutting off from healthy contact.</td>
<td>My dominant unhealthy appraisal processes result in me turning inwards. In this mode of living and leading, the ability to identify opportunities and support is removed, unhealthy coping cycles continue as the urge to complete is maintained. Energy that could be deployed healthily to the environment is negatively turned inwards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Negative outcomes include poor decision making, ineffective use of energy, a paradoxical approach to self-actualisation, health issues to stomach, nervous system, and sleep.</td>
<td>A systemically interrupted pattern of living and leading where a paradoxical and damaged urge to complete impacts negatively on work performance; social functioning; morale and life satisfaction, and somatic health.</td>
<td>After secondary appraisal and before problem based / healthy coping cycles are instigated, initial coping strategies achieve negative outcomes in terms of inconsistent leadership practice, health and well-being, self-actualisation and relationships. Damaging outcomes based on frantic coping, replace healthy outcomes delivered by appropriate responses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Goal congruent demands, mastery based self-efficacy and sensing the possession of necessary intrinsic (e.g. skill) and extrinsic (e.g. time, subordinates) resources can lead to aware appraisal and the conscious choosing of effective problem solving based coping strategies that fulfil my need in a healthy cycle of awareness.</td>
<td>I am equipped with attributes that can assist in achieving a degree of mastery over work related stress. The possession of skills - demand compatibility (SDC), emotional intelligence from survival abuse (EISCA), and a humanistic grounding (HG). Findings demonstrated a number of successes in leadership that constitute substantial grounds for the development of efficacy (GLE).</td>
<td>Each organism / environmental transaction is different, and therefore, one cannot say that one is resourced to master all events/encounters/individuals. However, my research has identified a substantial cache of personal resources, that if called upon, could replace anxious automation with autonomous and measured action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.6.1 Implications for Functioning at Work and Social Functioning

A major implication in terms of functioning at work and social functioning is that the findings of this study places much more significance of the organism over environment in terms of work related stress. Although three specific environmental factors emerged as patterns of environmental hazard (permanent toxicity exposure (PTE), uncontrollable field threat (UFT), and holistic work overload (HWO), a closer analysis of the environmental hazard findings contradicts original assumptions regarding the degree to which they are uncontrollable, or fully attributable as an external hazard. For example, when code AC-2 (Projection) was applied to the research data, at face value, it appeared to block healthy action in the gestalt cycle of experience. However, when I completed a review of the data from an analytical perspective, almost all toxic encounters involved a substantive input from the organism. Therefore, the degree to which I disown elements of my personality is far greater than the findings initially portrayed. Therefore, although my finding suggests that it is because of my position as a leader that I am permanently exposed to toxicity, the implication for functioning at work and social functioning is that I have a much greater contributory part to toxicity itself by how I predominantly interact with my environment.

A second key implication in terms of functioning at work and social functioning is that by collecting both unhealthy as well as healthy findings, a holistic narrative emerged that shows that in terms of meeting demands, I tend to be successful, but the route to success is typically dogged by successive unhealthy cycles of experience until the demand is reappraised and healthy cycles ensue. The overall implication of this is an inefficient leadership practice where energy is deflected in too many directions, resulting in significant interruptions to social functioning. Although success is achieved, it comes at price. In terms of the environmental hazard of holistic work overload for example, I myself am a significant contributor to this because I habitually interpret a demand to be a threat, my process is to desensitise (S2), thus preventing awareness (A1) from taking place resulting in deflection (A2). Instead of mobilising (M1) effective goal directed activity, energy instead is dispersed in cycles of unhealthy coping and directionless activity.
6.6.2 Implications for Morale and Life Satisfaction

The benefit of the gestalt approach to this analysis is that as a therapeutic approach, in contrast to other paradigms, it seeks to understand the process of environmental interaction in the here-and-now, through understanding how the organism has come to habitually interact with their environment in the manner in which they do. In stating the main implications for work and social functioning, I have demonstrated how my own part to play in boundary disturbances is much more significant that I believed prior to this study, or as the findings first emerged. In peeling back layers of the onion, an implication from this study is that there appears to be much unfinished business from childhood despite years of counselling. This manifested in the emergence of Introjection (M2) as a persistent blocker of healthy mobilisation, leading to patterns of interrupted appraisal. A recurrent issue arises is that when an environmental demand emerges, I will invariably deem myself incapable of successfully fulfilling that demand. Thus, autonomous and unhealthy cycles of experience (coping) will ensue, leading to unhealthy outcomes and the eventual need for reappraisal.

The impact of this pattern of environmental contact is akin to wearing a thick heavy raincoat every moment of every day, even when it is 40°C. Because of the aggregative / holistic contemporaneous flow of demands (HWO), there is a veritable conveyor belt of opportunity for threat appraisal. Life is therefore lived within the type of anxious automation (Perls 1979) spoke of, and with the self-castigation that Clarkson (2008) articulated. The type of inefficient approach to problem solving outlined in the previous implication interrupts morale as well as self-actualisation as needs remain perpetually unfulfilled. Even when needs are met, as outlined earlier, this comes at a cost and in the context of a multitude of new needs, satisfaction (SA1) and withdrawal (W1) are interrupted continuously by egotism (SA2) and confluence (W2). Evidence gleaned from data captured on non work days in particular highlighted how work related stress habitually results in a spillover into non work days. Cross over occurs as my wife and I both experience excessive work demands and stress and I presented evidence of where daily discourse is dominated by work matters leading a collective diminution of morale and life satisfaction.
6.6.3 Implications for Somatic Health

The findings from this study provide stark implications for somatic health due to my relationship with work related stress. The outline of implications for morale and life satisfaction depicted an organism in a continuous flow of interrupted gestalt cycles of experience. Even the most neutral of environmental demand is habitually appraised as a threat, resulting in unhealthy coping and damaged outcomes in terms of interrupted work performance and life satisfaction. The application of code F2- retroflection in particular, uncovered patterns of self-neglect and self-abuse. In terms of implications for morale and life satisfaction, I described how evidence of unfinished business appears to reside at the base of all cognitive appraisal. Demands are interpreted by M2- introjection (the self-critic) as being beyond my capabilities. Thus, the type of sanction imposed on myself by way of unhealthy coping processes mirrors closely the type of harsh sanction and unwarranted abuse imposed on me as a child. Evidence of interrupted rumination through days of sleep deprivation, excessive alcohol and nicotine consumption, the removal of nourishment are all behaviours captured throughout the data. In the vignette entitled “The Dis-eased Leader” I told the story of how through S2-desensitisation, I ignored an emergent health need with the potential for quite catastrophic consequences.

Evidence gleaned from my literature review also points to a poor prognosis in terms of somatic health. The type of adaption that I overuse in response to chronic challenges / stressors, are known to result in long-term damaging effects that lead to cumulative ‘wear and tear’ on physiological adaptive systems (Langelaan et al. 2007). This condition was outlined as allostatic loading (AL) with over-exposure to repeated and cumulative load over a period of time resulting in various organ diseases (Tonello et al.2014; Booth et al. 2013). AL is labelled as the price of adaptation from experiencing chronic stress (Juster and McKewn 2014). In Figure 5 presented in my literature review chapter, Palmer et al. (2004) provided a schematic representation of the process of allostatic loading from work related stress. Work related stress symptoms included raised blood pressure, sleep and gastro-intestinal disturbances, increased alcohol and / or caffeine and / or nicotine intake. Outcomes included increased irritability and
negative emotions, back pains, tension, palpitations, headaches coronary heart disease, repetitive strain injury (rsi), clinical anxiety, depression and burnout. The description of symptoms and outcomes provided by Palmer et al. (2004) unfortunately resembles and an accurate description of this author. The confluent nature of my leadership role was seen to erode boundaries between work and home / family life leading to both spillover and crossover effects. This was characterised by the lack of ability to capitalise on down time during non work days, and the negative effects of work related stress that cross over into the family as my dominant mode of response is to turn inwardly, shutting myself off from environmental contact, and deflecting to damaging / autonomous coping mechanisms, in cycles of unhealthy experience.

Despite the prevalence in my story of most of the symptoms and a number of the outcomes of the Palmer et al. (2004) model, my healthy findings offer potential restorative and reparative implications from the imposition of healthy change. Firstly, although the work environment does represent threat and harm, the recalibration of thought regarding my own part in those hazards is an important outcome of this study. In addition, vignettes “Opportunity Knocks” and “Someone to Lean On”, the environment also provides goal congruent opportunities that tend to invoke healthy behaviour. Code SA2-egotism uncovered that I regularly turn away from a veritable wealth of environmental support that I have organised in table 27 taken from the integration of the socio ecological model and P.E.S.T.E.L model of the totality of the external environment. The vignette “You Don’t Scare me know” highlighted a leader with a track record of success and if this can be translated into positive appraisal, then M2-introjection can be replaced by the deployment of healthier M1-mobilisation. Vignettes entitled “The Craftsman”, “My Humanistic GPS” and “Frankl Would Be Proud” offer evidence of skills-demand compatibility, a humanistic philosophical grounding, and emotional intelligence, all positively linked with the reduction of effects of work related stress.
6.7 Implications for Theory, Practice and Policy

In addition to the stated implications in terms of my own functioning in work and social function, morale and life satisfaction, and somatic health, this research proposes a number of wider implications.

6.7.1 Theoretical Implications

On balance, my research has positive implications in terms of defending gestalt psychotherapeutic theory. My study achieves this by illustrating its efficacy in conveying a new empirical contribution to contemporary work related stress discourse. Primarily because of gestalt’s focus on process versus outcome, it enjoys homogeneity with contemporary stress theory. My literature review identified how, in terms of theoretical sophistication, it is generally accepted that interactional models have been ‘supplanted, or at least supplemented, by transactional theories’ (Houdmont 2009, p. 26). Because the process of organism / environmental transaction is now favoured in terms of providing a more sophisticated understanding of work related stress than in considering structures of objective work characteristics, gestalt theory thus provides a fitting framework in which to gain greater awareness of this dynamic and ongoing relationship.

Although transactional stress theory has enjoyed much popularity, my investigation has uncovered a substantial need for theoretical and empirical contributions in terms of helping to better understand the processes of discreet emotional organismic responses underlying coping and appraisal. The complexity and labour intensive nature of transactional theory was highlighted in my research as limiting the amount of available literature informed by that model (Mark and Smith 2012; Lyon 2012). The gestalt cycle of experience model however proved to be efficacious in this study in contributing to transactional theory, by capturing complex, discreet emotional responses, traced out during a longitudinal qualitative investigation. One of the key drivers for this success lies in the fact that transactional theory and gestalt theory prioritise the role of subjective experience in ways in other models do not (Dewe et al. 2010; Lyon 2012; Corey 2016).
A negative implication from this study for gestalt theory however emanates from the problem of not having a suitable gestalt developmental model; an issue first raised by Wheeler (1998). It is a fact that there is not a complete developmental framework within gestalt theory that can be used to trace one’s evolution from birth to old age. In order to apply a developmental model in my own research, I needed to defer to Eriksson's psychosocial developmental model, due to the inclusion of environmental forces as being a strong factor in its design. Wheeler (1998) argues however, that even this model is limited by the terms of the individualistic, separate-self dichotomy that Eriksson inherited from Freud. In terms of my study research, I believe that the need for a gestalt developmental model becomes extremely evident, particularly when the integration of gestalt cycles of experience was so useful when imposed onto transactional stress stages in my study.

A significant implication from this study is that it substantiates Lazarus’s (1991) belief that the processes of appraisal and coping in terms of stress response are less rational than previously thought. Indeed, an analysis of my findings demonstrates that the majority of blockages (28%) that I experience, occur at the very beginning of my cycles of experience (gestalt model); during the primary appraisal stage (transactional stress model). What manifested in my narrative is that emergent needs are habitually sensed as being a threat within an autonomously damaged mode of appraisal, without conscious and appropriate discrimination being employed. Energy necessary to invoke the positive deployment of mobilisation (secondary appraisal), and the choosing of healthy coping (action) mechanisms is deflected away. Secondary appraisal occurs simultaneously to primary appraisal and is dominated by introjection and the self-critic. This ensures that my ongoing processes of appraisal and coping are inherently and systematically irrational.

Transactional stress research has been criticised for not progressing further an understanding of maladaptive coping (Babatunde 2015). Lazarus (1986) suggested that the term coping is used despite whether the process is adaptive or maladaptive; successful or unsuccessful; consolidated or fluid and unstable. Adaptive refers to the effectiveness of coping in improving the adaptational outcome, for example, morale,
physical health, and social functioning (Lyon 2012). Mastery in terms of coping is not the same as management, and in terms of contributions to transactional stress knowledge; this study demonstrates how unhealthy processes take place in the context of a study where observational data was gathered over an extended period of time. Gestalt theory posits that the urge to complete is figural within the organism, and will occur through healthy or unhealthy means, and this study has uncovered the minuta of behaviours, cognitions and emotions that demonstrate this in action.

Literature reviewed for this research illustrates the ongoing argument in terms of whether leadership roles are more stressful than non leadership ones. The search for answers to this question identified a relative lacuna of empirical contributions however toward answering this question. On one side of the debate, leadership is posited to be more stressful due to issues such as work overload, role conflict and the potential for negative consequences from poor decision making (Roberts 2014; O’Neil and Davis 2015). On the other side of the debate, leadership roles are deemed to be less stressful due to privileges such as prestige, and having subordinates to offer support and share burden etc. (Sherman et al. 2012). My study demonstrates that this issue is complex and dynamic. For example, my findings indicate that my leadership practice is inherently stressful due to holistic work overload (HWO), permanent exposure to toxicity (PTE), and uncontrollable field threat (UFT). A deep and layered analysis of my findings however showed a much more complex picture, where the contribution of self to these work hazards is much greater than my findings initially suggested. Also, the impact of the self critic (ISC) for example is dynamic and changeable, and therefore one reason why my theoretical contribution has implications for leadership development theory, is because it proposes that leaders need to be aware in the here-and-now of what is happening in terms of stress response.

On balance, from a transactional stress perspective, my study points to leadership being more stressful in the beginning period of one’s practice, due to a lack of stress moderators such a felt sense of prestige and security of tenure in one’s role. Lovelace (2007) in a meta-synthesis of leadership development programmes identified an almost complete lack of focus on increasing stress awareness however in leadership
development theory. My study highlights implications for not only leaders themselves within organisations, but for those designing and managing leadership development programmes.

6.7.2 Practice Implications

In terms of psychotherapeutic treatment for work related stress, my research has implications for current practice. It does so by highlighting a considerable paradox in terms of the dominance of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) over other types of psychotherapeutic intervention. The contradiction rests in the fact that contemporary theory conceptualises work related stress as a continuous process of organism / environment transaction (Cox and Giffiths 2010; Lyon 2012). CBT interventions however, are generally short-term in nature (Hoifodt et al. 2011). This appears to be problematic because Lazarus (1991) advises that approaches to mastering chronic stress should be focused on allowing patterns of organismic response to emerge over an extended period of time. Data captured in this study over a two-year period allowed for such patterns of habitual response to be mapped across the transactional stress model, using the gestalt cycle of experience. This approach was efficacious by allowing “the gestalt of the elephant to appear” (Arthur 2004).

Criticisms found in literature regarding CBT include stated concerns over the extent to which the effects of interventions persist post-treatment (Butler et al. 2006; Parker et al. 2014). Because of gestalt’s lack of empirical providence in terms of defending its own efficacy, it appears that the medical profession in particular, is hindered in terms of having a limited number of evidence based psychotherapeutic alternatives to offer patients. An implication from this study in terms of work related stress treatment is that growth in CBT terms is measured against outcomes for the specific issue(s) that the client presented with in the first instance (Hoifodt et al. 2011; Joyce and Sills 2014). McLeod (2011) however highlights a limitation of this approach by proffering that when the client experiences a new / novel issue, further directed CBT interventions are likely to be required to treat the new issue(s). Gestalt psychotherapy predominantly focuses on helping a client to achieve self-regulation through heightening awareness of how
neurosis interrupts healthy functioning in all situations (Joyce and Sills 2014; Corey 2016). It therefore appears that contemporary psychotherapeutic treatment is missing an opportunity to take a more holistic approach to achieving self-regulation in the mastery of work related stress. Using the Taoist analogy (Ellis 1994), it appears that current work related stress treatment maybe offering the client a fish to eat for a day, but not teaching them how to fish for a lifetime.

Evidence gleaned from my literature review coupled with the integration of gestalt and transactional stress models in this research, does point to more optimistic implications in terms of psychotherapeutic practice. My study appears to add to developments in practice embracing more tailored approaches used to treat particular pathological conditions. Thus, rather than the ‘catch-all’-approach of the early school-based psychotherapies, my study is evidence of a development towards embracing more disorder, process, and person specific analytical and therapeutic approaches (Barlow 2016; Emmelkamp et al. 2014).

In terms of this change, my study shows that a key strength of the both gestalt and transactional models is in their recognition of the role of individual differences in the stress process (Corey 2016; Dewe et al. 2010). Furthermore, both approaches take account of multiple variables in the stress process and therefore, this implies a homogeneity with more bespoke therapeutic approaches based on what Lazarus labelled as ‘technical eclecticism’ (Norcross 2005, p.14). Thus, my study adds to contemporary thought that it is important for humanistic practitioners to overcome their traditionally individualistic and apolitical stance in order to build bridges with a range of potential allies (Woelbert 2015; Sanders and Hill 2014). Humanistic psychotherapy could also benefit from the selective implementation of effective intervention practices representative of other bona fide therapy orientations (Biehl Mizzal and Fitzek 2014). For example, the application of codes A2 (Deflection), S2 (Desensitisation), and M1 (Introjection) uncovered patterns of cognitive blockages at both primary and secondary appraisal stages of my process where thoughts are routinely interrupted. Therefore, an implication from this study is that CBT appears to offer a useful approach during the appraisal / re-appraisal phases to actively tackle distorted thinking. Patterns of distorted
response in terms of unhealthy coping however appear to warrant a more humanistic, longer term approach to continuously focus on heightening awareness in the here-and-now of discreet emotional responses in play.

Regarding the role of self-regulation in the mastery of work related stress, the results of this study have implications for anyone involved in a leadership capacity in terms of the need for continuous reflection both in, and on action, for a number of reasons. With respect to healthy findings, a number of key successes were captured in the data. In analysing the data, I reflected on the fact that these successes would have been forgotten had they not be captured in my journal. The process of reflecting on those successes was, in itself, a contributor to a felt sense of self efficacy. In terms of unhealthy findings, capturing data over an extended period of time generated a number of key themes. These themes joined together to form what I liken to a film reel that allowed the ongoing process of damaged response to emerge in a meaningful way. The practice of reflective journaling however, is not widely promoted outside of academia (Bolton 2010). Bradberry (2014) however, in commenting on the habits of effective leaders posits that reflexivity is a key skill that is homogenous to the group of successful ones that he studied.

Findings from my research coupled with extant literature posit a negative prognosis in terms of trends in work organisation and increased work related stress for leaders. Holistic work overload (HWO) emerged for example in my study to be a significant cause of work related stress resulting in confluence (blurring of protective boundaries) and egotism (treating myself like a means of production). Steiber and Pichler (2014) articulate how the speed of work appears to be increasing, and Campbell et al. (2010) spoke of leaders typically sacrificing themselves in terms of onerous commitments required to deliver one's role. The implication here is that reflection is a key requirement for the achievement of practice improvement, but it is a skill that needs to be attended to with a high degree of discipline in order to generate useful data. In this study, I have spoken about the benefits in terms of reflective journaling in heightening awareness for example spillover / crossover into non work time. With the pace and complexity of working life increasing however, it is likely that those in leadership capacities will
continue to see space for reflexivity being challenged even in supposed non work time, as protective work / boundaries become more and more eroded.

Implications arise for organisational leadership practices from this research also. In terms of that domain, I believe this study further demonstrates the need for a greater permeation of contemporary leadership styles notably leader member exchange (LMX), relational, authentic and humanistic approaches, replacing historical autocratic and patriarchal styles. One of the core justifications for this is that my research findings demonstrate that as a leader, when I am faced with a need, it is invariably appraised as being a threat (desensitisation and deflection at primary appraisal). Following that, a damaged mode of reappraisal leads invariably to the choosing of unhealthy coping methods (introjection at secondary appraisal). Ultimately, decision making is compromised and poor choices of action are routinely made. Thus, work related stress results in less than optimum performance for me on a regular basis. If I employed an autocratic leadership style, this type of damaged leadership behaviour could be allowed to continue unchallenged. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume in this scenario, that negative impacts would cascade down throughout my organisation, contributing to toxicity and inefficiency in the work place. Based on my research, I posit that a combination of autocratic and traditional leadership approaches, coupled with the adverse effects of work related stress are a recipe for significant organisational leadership failure.
6.7.3 Policy Implications

Limitations associated with current practice in terms of work related stress treatment, point to the existence of implications for policy makers. My review of literature for this research revealed what Angus et al. (2014) refer to as a perplexing contradiction between the weight of specific humanistic psychotherapy research evidence, and the present state of official professional advocacy. Specifically, this relates to the development of clinical practice guidelines, policy directives, and humanistic training programmes. Available evidence has been presented in this paper affirming the need to consider how more integrated treatments can be favoured in terms of funding and advocacy (Gustavsson et al. 2011; Wittchen et al; 2011; Orlinsky et al. 1994; Lambert 2013).

Despite this need, Schneider and Lange (2012) report converging research findings showing that large segments of the public, media, and the professional practice community continue to privilege CBT, thus helping to perpetuate the treatment paradox alluded to in the previous section. Given this situation, and the related limitations of a treatment culture based on short term interventions, the implication here is that policy is failing to enhance practice (Baker et al. 2009; Elkins 2009). Many questions were identified in this paper regarding the overall effectiveness of CBT, including its varying results by disorder, and the extent to which its effects persist following the cessation of treatment (Butler et al. 2006). A review of meta-analyses of primary studies on CBT for depression was cited in this research concluding that the effectiveness of CBT has been overstated in the literature (Parker 2014). Although outcome measurement is a key selling point for CBT, how outcome is defined also appears to impact findings of treatment specificity (Parker 2014). McLeod (2011) also identifies the lack of a precise role of cognitive processes, that is as yet, to be determined to be problematic. Maladaptive cognitions seen in psychologically disturbed people could be a consequence rather than a cause for example (McLeod 2011).
The reluctance of policy makers and other stakeholders to embrace alternatives to CBT, not only acts as a blockage to the growth of more integrative approaches, but it also presents disturbing implications for the optimisation of therapeutic training and practice as a whole, where the client will remain the biggest loser (Elkins 2012; Wampold, 2012; Heatherington et al., 2012; Längle and Kriz, 2012; Schneider and DuPlock 2012; Stolorow 2012). Humanistic practice principles of empathy, alliance, receptivity to client feedback, emotional deepening, and meaning-making are central to efficacious therapy. There is a growing argument for a funding and investment bias toward approaches based upon the relationship of client and therapist (Duncan 2010; Fauth et al. 2007; Geller and Greenberg 2012). A recent study by Heatherington et al. (2012) examining North American faculty theoretical orientations within clinical programs, found a significantly higher endorsement of CBT as compared with those from behavioural, psychodynamic, humanistic, and family systems orientations. Levy and Anderson (2013) analysed longitudinal data on psychotherapy theoretical orientations (PTO) for North American clinical psychology faculty members over two decades. Results demonstrated that clinical psychology has moved from a field that was relatively balanced in percentages of faculty from cognitive-behavioural (CBT), psychodynamic, humanistic, behavioural, and family PTOs to one that has shown highly significant linear growth for one single PTO: CBT. The net effect of these policies according to Woelbert (2015) is that we are now suffering a lack of differing theoretical traditions coming together to collaborate and dialogue in order to influence policy (Woelbert 2015).

Angus et al. (2014) argue that there are strong scientific reasons (for example, on the basis of the Bayesian model of inference) for humanistic psychotherapeutic researchers to lobby for meaningful representation on the scientific grant review panels and groups who are developing mental health treatment guidelines in various countries, pushing for full consideration of a wide range of evidence and a fair and balanced reading of that evidence. Thus, they invite a more strategic, activist and constructive stance with regard to mental health treatment guideline development on the part of organisations like the Society for Psychotherapy Research, the new German Association for Humanistic Psychotherapies, and the Society for Humanistic Psychology (in the USA and Canada). Supporting and engaging with each other in these ways will lead to greater
understanding of psychotherapy, a highly focused relational form of healing that is essential to the well-being of individuals and societies.

In addition to unhealthy findings arrived at in my study in terms of social functioning; job performance; morale and life satisfaction, and somatic health, extant literature was quoted in terms of unhealthy work related stress outcomes. For instance, work related stress has become a significant policy issue in terms of work performance as a result of various studies demonstrating the negative impact of work related stress on employee engagement and job performance (Chapman 2013; Teaching Council of Ireland 2011). The economic recession has led to an increase in workplace issues such as toxicity, due to the phenomenon of competing for less resources (Rajakakshini and Grimathi 2015; Gomes and Coehlo 2014; Cooper et al. 2014). It appears therefore, that the time has arrived for a fresh impetus into tackling the issue of work related stress.

The poor adoption of principles agreed in the Joint Work Positive Initiative (2007) however in Ireland (addressed in more detail later in this chapter) which is based on the UK Management Standards for work related stress mitigation, imply that policy makers have failed to adequately address the issue of work related stress in this country. Implications from this research suggest that much more needs to be done in terms of encouraging employers to create working environments where stress associated with one’s job is minimised. Cooper et al. (2015) were cited in the introduction to this thesis as highlighting that the burden on organisational leaders in particular, has greatly increased during the recent economic downturn. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2016) state that the existence of a well-established prevention culture within organisations seems to be highly efficacious in reducing stress. A lack of policy enhancement since the bailout of the banks in 2008 could be explained by the need for full employment figures at any cost. This appears to be more important politically than improving working conditions in terms of good mental health for those already in employment. We know from empirical evidence quoted in this research, that work related stress is the single main cause of illness based work absence, but it appears that pilot programs aimed at addressing this issue at an organisational level in Ireland are largely ineffective and are severely limited in terms of numbers of participating
organisations. Such failures to address work related stress appear to have no implications for funding in the public sector, and the question must be asked that given the statistics around the permeation of work related stress, why is this remains the case? Based on the implications identified in this research, a number of recommendations are now made and are summarised in Table 36.
**Table 36  Recommendations from this Study**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Finding</th>
<th>Interpretations</th>
<th>Implication(s)</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 x environmental work hazards emerged from the data: (a) permanent exposure to toxicity (PTE), (b) holistic work-overload (HWO), and (c) uncontrollable field threat (UFT).</td>
<td>Although I have identified environmental hazards, they are not wholly objective or uncontrollable. The part that self plays in appraisal and coping with same impacts outcomes.</td>
<td>Although at a macro level, certain hazards by their nature are uncontrollable, the boundary between controllable and uncontrollable is less fixed than I assumed. Also, my own part played in contributing to environmental hazard is a new realisation, but one that affords more control potential than was previously thought.</td>
<td>Take responsibility for self-role in hazard. Employ rational interpretation of demands. Review all job specs for goal alignment. Employ toxicity awareness training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary appraisal is dominated by de-sensitisation and deflection and secondary appraisal is dominated by introjection.</td>
<td>Re-appraisal leading to positive problem based coping tends to occur after cycle(s) of unhealthy coping causing wear and tear or allostatic loading.</td>
<td>The successful completion of a need is forced through damaging unhealthy cycles of experience until the situation is re-appraised, and a healthy cycle(s) are instigated. More rational primary and secondary appraisal are required to ensure healthy flow.</td>
<td>Employ use of CBT in a new schematic framework to tackle primary appraisal. Continuous reflection on impact through gestalt, but in terms of outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habitual coping mechanisms are damaging; self-defeating; and are grounded in neurosis. They are invoked in even the mildest of environmental encounter when the slightest of threat is sensed.</td>
<td>My way of coping could be described as self-exclusionary based on a damaged interpretation of self-regulation. Instead of achieving healthy contact and environmental support, I turn inwards, shutting off from healthy contact.</td>
<td>My dominant unhealthy appraisal process results in me turning inwards. In this mode of living and leading, the ability to identify opportunities and support is removed. Unhealthy coping cycles continue as the urge to complete is maintained. Energy that could be deployed healthily to the environment, is negatively turned inwards.</td>
<td>Seek suitable mentor and appraise of research. Introduce psychological mentorship programme for leaders and managers. Track impact of age / tiredness etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finding</td>
<td>Interpretations</td>
<td>Implication(s)</td>
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<td>A number of negative outcomes include poor decision making, ineffective use of energy, paradoxical approach to self-actualisation, significant health issues such as stomach, nervous system, sleep patterns.</td>
<td>A systemically interrupted pattern of living and leading where a paradoxical and damaged urge to complete impacts negatively on work performance; social functioning; morale and life satisfaction; and somatic health.</td>
<td>After secondary appraisal and before problem based / healthy coping cycles are instigated, initial coping strategies achieve negative outcomes in terms of inconsistent leadership, health and well-being, self-actualisation and relationships. Damaging outcomes based on frantic coping, replace healthy outcomes delivered by appropriate responses.</td>
<td>Start demand-satisfaction with end in mind and introduce S.M.A.R.T methodology for maintaining focus. Increase frequency of goal/effort reviews for self and teams to ensure outcomes remain primary focus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal congruent demands, mastery based self-efficacy and sensing the possession of necessary intrinsic (e.g. skill) and extrinsic (e.g. time, subordinates etc.) resources can lead to aware appraisal and the conscious choosing of effective problem solving coping strategies that fulfil my need in a healthy cycle of awareness.</td>
<td>I am equipped with attributes that can assist in achieving a degree of mastery over work related stress. The possession of skills - demand compatibility (SDC), emotional intelligence from survival abuse (EISCA), and a humanistic grounding (HG). Findings demonstrated a number of successes in leadership that constitute substantial grounds for the development of efficacy (GLE).</td>
<td>Each organism/environmental transaction is different and therefore, one cannot say that one is resourced to master all events/encounters/individuals. However, my research has identified a substantial cache of personal resources that if called upon, could replace anxious automation with autonomous and measured action.</td>
<td>Create inventory / portfolio of successes and skills demand compatibility; continuously add to and feel the efficacy. Introduce “strategy time”, diarised time for thinking and strategy for self and team to replace autonomous reactions with conscious responses at an individual, departmental and organisational level.</td>
</tr>
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6.8 Recommendations Based on this Research

The stated purpose of this research has been the achievement of heightened awareness for me as participant researcher in order to improve my practice of leadership and my health and wellbeing. Subsequently, there now follows a number of recommendations that I will be adopting, but in addition, I offer a number of wider recommendations in terms of theory development, practice, policy and further research.

6.8.1 Recommendations for the Researcher

The overriding aim of this study was to understand the role of self-regulation in terms of gaining a greater degree of mastery over work related stress. The research has reached a number of significant conclusions that can now be translated into actionable recommendations that will apply to his leadership practice. In turn, these recommendations will have implications for his employers, starting with his principal employer.

6.8.1.1 Taking Responsibility for My Role in Work Hazards

Through layered analysis of the research data and subsequent findings, the ratio of organismic (self) involvement to uncontrollable environmental (external) involvement in the creation of work hazards as antecedents of my work related stress, is far greater than I believed. In terms therefore of the role of self-regulation, this outcome of this study call for me as leader, to take more responsibility for my role in the part that work hazards play in my experiences of work related stress. Given that my research has demonstrated that the phenomena of work place hazards are more controllable than I believed prior to undertaking this research, a number of actionable recommendations will be adopted:
1. Transactional stress theory retains many useful aspects of interactional models such as the JD-C and JD-R models. Therefore, create an integrated framework to interpret emergent demands, levels of control over same, and available resources to promote a more conscious approach to primary appraisal.

2. Create a review of all job descriptions including my own and ensure that the organisation is providing adequate support, control and resources to allow all employees / managers and directors to execute their roles. Where the provision of adequate resources is not available or forthcoming, advocate for the removal of demands e.g. the number of additional projects being placed on our employees in terms of QA (Quality), auditing, business development, health and safety.

3. Ensure full alignment between organisational, departmental and individual goals. In order to reduce holistic work overload (HWO), demands should be screened and evaluated against whether they are aligned to either the overall organisational goals or to tactical departmental / individual agreed goals. Ensure also the structured performance related appraisals are completed and recorded. Consider the wider introduction of monthly goal reviews for all individuals and departments to ensure demands are goal congruent. Implement a self-review on a monthly basis immediately.

4. Use additional capacity from a reduction in work overload to commence tackling toxicity. In addition to the organisation’s policy on dignity at work, introduce routine departmental training immediately focusing on toxicity awareness; empathic listening; distributive bargaining, effective win-win negotiation styles etc.

5. Use my own study as an example of how we can be unaware in the part we play in toxicity. Employ earlier interventions in dispute resolution to ensure that toxicity is routinely avoided.

6. Gain regular feedback on self with particular emphasis on specific transactions to monitor instances of environmental contact affected by projection, retroflection, egotism and confluence.
6.8.1.2 **Schematic Approach involving CBT – Primary Appraisal**

Given the substantive weight of evidence provided in this research identifying deficiencies in all psychotherapeutic disciplines, I deem it no longer viable to confine myself to a particular dominant method that does not integrate empirically proven efficacious elements of other schools. Therefore, a number of recommendations will be implemented with immediate effect:

1. Acknowledge that although the gestalt cycle of experience has been effective in this study in tracing out my work related stress transactions, a significant amount of effort will be required achieve permanent change in terms of primary appraisal (transactional) / sensation and awareness (gestalt) phases of my process.
2. Acknowledge that the directed nature of CBT could be useful in this case because it deals with achieving cognitive change at a point on both the transactional and gestalt models that are influenced significantly by cognitive interruptions (Lyon 2012; Mark and Smith 2012).
3. Immediately undergo a course of cognitive behavioural therapy to address primary appraisal ensuring the agreement of measurable outcomes with the therapist.
4. Familiarise yourself further with other models of work related stress that have less empirical providence, such as the Vitamin model (Warr 1977), the Michigan model (French 1998), Demand-Skill-Support model (Taris et. al 2005), Demand Induced Strain Compensation Model (De Jonge et al. 2000).
5. From a gestalt perspective body and mind re-integration, continue to track growth over the coming months in terms of vibrant awareness with regards to if primary appraisal is improving in terms of the coping mechanisms that dominant journal entries
Research on reappraising arousal has extended work on emotion regulation (Gross, 2002) and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) (Hofmann and Smits 2008). According to Jamieson et al. (2013), the underlying theme of these approaches is that changing cognitions produces downstream benefits. Reappraisal, typically involves the re-interpretation of the affective meaning of contextual cues. In other words, emotionally charged stimuli are presented, and participants are instructed to reinterpret the stimuli (e.g. “The images are fake”) or distance themselves from the stimuli (e.g. by adopting a third-person perspective (Kross and Ayduk 2011: Ochsner and Gross 2008). Clinical researchers developed CBT to help improve patient outcomes by modifying faulty affective responses and cognitions (Barlow 2016). For instance, depressive patients are taught to identify errors in thinking (e.g. “Everyone hates me and always will”) and replace them with more rational thoughts (Figure 27). In the “classic” emotion-regulation literature, reappraisal has often (but not always) centred on decreasing sympathetic activation during passive tasks (e.g. Gross 2002). Likewise, reappraisal in clinical research typically either decreases arousal (e.g. mindfulness meditation (Cincotta et al. 2011) or teaches individuals to accept arousal (e.g. interoceptive exposure; Levitt et al. 2004).

Figure 27  CBT Potential at Appraisal Phase

Source: Jamieson et al. (2013, p. 51)
6.8.1.3 Healthy (Conscious) Coping from Unhealthy (Neurotic) Coping

The original title of my thesis referred to achieving self-regulation in the “management” of work related stress. By engaging with stress literature I realised that this aspiration was problematic as mastery and management are two very different things (Mitrousi et al. 2013; Babatunde 2013). My literature review indicated how management of work related stress can include maladaptive coping behaviours such as self-blame, wishful thinking, escapism and avoidance (Mark and Smith 2012; Lyon 2012). The study was successful from a transactional stress model in terms of being able to trace out patterns of environmental contact i.e. dominant ways of being in the world. The implication from same was that instead of exploiting environmental opportunities and support to achieve mastery, I turn inwards to fall back on neurotic coping mechanisms i.e. unhealthy gestalt cycles. Therefore, a number of recommendations are now made to address this issue:

1. Employ the use of the mentorship programme available from my employer. Seek out a supportive director with significantly more experience than I possess in a leadership role. Provide them with a copy of this thesis and appraise them as to why I am seeking their input on a continuous basis. Provide them with an overview of contemporary stress theory, contemporary leadership theory and also contemporary psychotherapy theory for context.

2. Propose to my employer the roll out of a program of psychological mentorship. Whilst the current mentoring programme is predominantly business skills and technical in orientation, it should be amended to include a type of pastoral care function also. Skills demands compatibility (SDC) and self-efficacy (GLE) were findings in this study shown to be moderators work related stress for me. In transactional stress theory, there is recognition that over time, situations etc. that would have been stressful will become less stressful due to experience etc. Let the benefit of that knowledge of the mentor flow, by helping to create awareness from their experiences.

3. Recognise also that over time that transactional stress model posits that age etc. can impact on one’s ability to meet demands and in converse to the previous
point, there will be a need to measure resources / capabilities in terms demands to continuously re-align organisational / job structure to ensure the conditions for holistic work overload etc. are not exacerbated.

4. Because my dominant process of environmental contact is to turn inwards in the face of threat, allow the new schematic approach to challenge this through a CBT type, directed challenge to turn outwards toward environmental opportunities and supports. Set personal goals such as participating in a healthy group based activity such as drama / sports etc. Focus on replacing inward oriented reflective coping activity such as drinking and smoking with same. Measure success in terms of self-reflections captured within the reflective journal. Ensure that all aspects of the gestalt healthy and unhealthy cycles of experience are considered on an ongoing basis.

5. In terms of end of year reviews etc., complete a self-assessment aided by the mentor with regards to performance on work related stress mastery. What has moved, what has changed? Complete coding against the journal, similar to that completed in this thesis. Of the overall amount of codes assigned to the data, how many now in percentage terms are healthy versus unhealthy? Where are the dominant blockages now? What do I feel has become even healthier in terms of sensation, awareness, mobilisation, action, final contact, and withdrawal? Use Bloomfield and Volpe’s (2011) analysis template to phenomenologically interrogate findings by asking why, why not, what’s happening here and what could be other explanations of same.

6. Take on an employee to mentor. Offer this as an incentive to the team. Spend time with them helping them to gain awareness of their own processes. Do not overtly diagnose or be overly prescriptive but allow them to view your journey also. As Ellingson (2011) states, the impact of such an approach is only as significant as it is subjectively interpreted by the individual. Offer what you can and hope that it inspires, but always under the banner of helping them to self-regulate.

7. In table 27, the process of creating an ongoing inventory of external supports based on the amalgamated new macro-environmental schema constructed in this study was presented. Make this now public in your organisation and get others
involved in updating it. As part of environmental scanning, continuously appraise and add to external sources of opportunity and support. Find out their contact details and about exactly what they can support. Continuously update this framework. Advise the team why we are doing this because like me, the individual, the department, the organisation can turn inward in the face of threat, but in doing so, we cut off support and opportunity. Through co-creation, in terms of my own change aspirations, the completion of this as a group endeavour is healthy within itself.

6.8.1.4 Guide Process through Better Outcome Awareness

By adopting a more integrative and schematic approach to mastery of work related stress, a far greater focus on outcomes will provide a measurable focus that has been missing. There is a need to reduce the space between primary appraisal and healthy outcome. My research found that outcome of forcing inauthentic change resulted in poor work and social functioning, depleted morale and life satisfaction, and drastic impacts and prognosis for somatic health. Therefore, a number of priority recommendations now follow:

1. Change direction of planning by now starting with the end in mind i.e. identify end goals first and work back (Bradberry 2014). Using your gestalt training, bring creativity to this by for instance drawing, capturing an image of what success will look like e.g. in terms of somatic health – set S.M.A.R.T (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time scaled) goals. What do these goals look like? How can I keep this image figural? How can the image sustain healthy cycles of experience where demands appear to outweigh resources?

2. Advise the organisation that you are now scheduling time for reflection and planning i.e. dedicated and diarised time for reflection. Continuously review goals and ask if what is happening in the present is goal congruent. Are their incongruent demands that need to be highlighted to the board? In addition to keeping the end in mind, what is happening right now in terms of PTE, UFT and HWO hazards? What supports do I need to reduce these? Commencing with
senior managers, introduce this process also and engage in reviews regarding the efficacy of the programme in terms of toxicity reduction, greater work organisation etc. Objective evidence in terms of outcomes does tend to support a male bias regarding poor outcomes. Suicide statistic rates, impact of allostatic loading, impact on male survivors of childhood sexual abuse (Corcoran et al. 2015; Lutwak et al. 2003). Hitherto, my goal has been to see my GP on the least amount of times as possible as a self-prescribed measure of good health! Shift the focus now on regular medical check-ups, starting off at quarterly and the active pursuit of somatic health.

3. Awareness in gestalt is about healthy, vibrant environmental and self-contact. Therefore, ask in all transactions is what I am doing goal congruent and healthy? Use the findings of EISCA and Humanistic GPS to continuously guide process by keeping the end goal in vision. This will prevent unhealthy cycles of experience taking over when the process becomes difficult or challenged or in the face of fatigue.

4. Create an asset register or success portfolio using the healthy findings from this study as a way of recording successes and grounds for leadership efficacy (GLE). Document newly acquired skills as part of my social constructivist epistemology and continuously review same to start feeling the prestige that can moderate unhealthy outcomes of work related stress (Sherman et al. 2012).
6.8.2 Recommendations for Theory, Practice and Policy

Although the purpose of this research is not to generalise, but to achieve practice and life improvement through improving awareness around work related stress, as a social constructivist I offer this research in the hope that it finds significance in the reader. Validity and transferability in autoethnography is judged by whether it helps readers to communicate with others different from themselves, or if it offers a way to improve the lives of participants and readers, in addition to that of the participant researcher (Ellis 2011, p. 124). I therefore offer some wider recommendations in terms of theory; practice and policy that I hope may be useful in stimulating further work related stress discourse.

6.8.2.1 Recommendations for Future Research

Because of the global issues relating to work related stress outcomes, most authors would agree that the plethora of research on the subject at least demonstrates that it remains a “hot topic” (Houdmont 2009; Mark and Smith 2012). Despite this positivity, the sheer variance in viewpoints masks the fact that there remains a lack of understanding in terms of the discreet processes that underlie appraisal and coping (Dewey 1991; Taris et al. 2004). The analysis of findings in my research align with a view extoled by Daniels et al. (2004) that the processes of discreet emotions involved in coping and appraisal are far more complex than originally thought.

It appears therefore that through multiple lenses and models of stress, that the type of adjectives used by gestaltists and autoethnographers in terms of describing existence such as “messy”, “swampy”, “gritty” etc. are becoming very applicable to the complicated and often irrational processes that constitutes the work related stress transaction. Dominant thinking in stress has moved from trait, to behavioural to structural, to process in orientation. What is the trend here, one has to ask? Instead of stress becoming a neater conceptualisation through the benefit of much empirical attention, it now appears to be a messier, more problematised and nuanced phenomenon. We have moved from a wide broad brush stroke of the GAS model to a much more micro-individual understanding of adaption for example. What my study did therefore
in using Silverman’s (2011) analogy of the kaleidoscope was to now place a microscopic lens to look into the discreet aspects of inherent processes. Let me draw a parallel at this point, that in rebuking traditional forms of neat validation in qualitative research, Richardson (1991) when introducing crystallisation i.e. a new way of looking at validity decreed that we do not triangulate, we crystallise. This meant moving away from the triangle - a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imagery of the new approach was the crystal that combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionality’s, and angles of approach. Crystallisation according to Richardson provides us with

A deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic. Paradoxically, we know more, and doubt what we know. Ingeniously, we know there is always more to know.

Richardson (2000, p. 934)

I have achieved a depth of understanding from this research in terms of my own processes that hitherto eluded me, because this approach allowed me to effectively peel away at a micro level at the shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionality’s of my processes. The real benefit of this study is that it followed those nuanced processes over an extended period of time thus allowing for patterns of environmental contact to emerge. Le Blanc et al. (2015), in recommending an approach to better understanding the nature of discrete emotions in improving health and wellbeing in health professionals, promote theory development that builds on current neuro-scientific (somatic marker hypothesis), and Cognitive (affect-as-information theory) models. In doing so, the aim is to more precisely understand the minutia of emotions involved in moment by moment transactions. Similarly, I recommend that work related stress theory continues to develop a more from a more micro orientation, to be informed now by a continued drilling down into patterns of what happens in the here-and-now of the organism / environmental transaction.
6.8.2.2 **Recommendations for Practice**

My investigation highlights a dearth in consideration given in leadership practice to the prevention of work related stress for those in leadership roles. Bradberry (2014) through a meta-synthesis of leadership biographies revealed a useful list of healthy coping mechanism employed by leaders. His research however focuses on a cohort of high profile leaders who use are self-prescribed coping practices. Lovelace (2007) was one of the few authors identified in this study have explored the lacuna in addressing stress awareness in leadership development.

The issue is compounded more however given the substantive ambiguity around definitions of leadership. Although authors such as Mengel (2012) draw extensive differentials between leadership and management, the extensive cross over in terminology means that on a daily basis, leaders will engage in management activity and managers will engage in leadership activity. Indeed, I personally have been involved in two corporate leadership development programmes aimed at bringing front line staff up to management level, and management level up to senior leadership level. Neither of those programmes had any training built in regarding the effects of work related stress. My research has shown however the extensive performance related issues both in terms of primary and secondary evidence provided and also the substantial costs to the organisation potentially from work related stress absenteeism etc. (Health and Safety Executive 2016: Korosi and Baram 2010; Khamisa et al. 2015). In terms of leadership development programmes and strategic human resource management, that appropriate recognition be given in terms the implementation of structured approaches to increasing awareness around work related stress, at all levels of the organisation.

In terms of psychotherapeutic practice, authors such as Norcross and Beutler (2014) and Norcross (2005) agree with my view that there is a need to integrate various schools of psychotherapy. According to Norcross and Beutler (2014), clinicians admit that there are strengths and limitations in all of the approaches used at present, and that presents an opportunity for integration. Norcross (2005) lists eight reasons integration has been important over the last two decades. These include the inadequacies of current
treatment, the need in this era for short-term and long-term treatments, and the fact that there are numerous common elements in various approaches. The most important reason according to Norcross (2005) is that different conditions seem to respond more favourably to different techniques. A continuing theme throughout Wedding and Corsini (2014) is that ultimately, it is the relationship between the therapist and client that is more important than any specific technique. This does not mean techniques are irrelevant and Norcross and Beutler (2014) posit that part of the reason for the effectiveness of the relationship between therapist and client stems from the fundamental philosophical and theoretical orientation of the therapist, and the client’s compatibility with it.

As a form of schematic psychotherapy, Norcross (2005) refers to the potential from an approach grounded in technical eclecticism that was first proposed Richard Lazarus himself. Those who embrace technical eclecticism use therapeutic techniques with no regard to their underlying theories. Techniques are chosen based on perceived efficacy when used to treat a particular condition. In the case of my research, one of my central conclusions is the fact that embracing the short term outcome oriented and measurable aspects of CBT could be pivotal in helping to address the cognitive blockages at the primary appraisal phases of my process. Norcross and Beutler (2014) note that ultimately, all therapy involves some form of learning and therefore can be said to use elements of cognitive theory. Lazarus (1991) advises that in conceptualising work related stress we should do so with a long term, process oriented focus and therefore, it appears that the subject matter of work related stress itself, acts as a justification for integration.
6.8.2.3 Policy Recommendations

Legislation regarding work related stress is covered under the Health, Safety and Welfare at Work Act (2005). The introduction of the act was useful in placing an onus on employers to minimise exposure to work related stress hazards but a fundamental question exists regarding whether or not policy makers are doing enough to address the issue of work related stress. Querstret et al. (2015) in publishing the results of a study demonstrating the positive effects of a one day CBT based awareness intervention, advocate the continuation of system whereby participation in stress reduction awareness interventions is largely voluntary.

The authors argue that employers have a responsibility to address work-related health risks, and it is increasingly important that employers make use of evidence-based practices and interventions in support of their workplace health and safety agendas. Participation in such programmes should be voluntary however they argue. If involvement in these types of programmes was mandated, employees could consider this an intrusion, violating their ability to segment their work life from their private life. They quote research that show how such violations increase perceived stress and reduce job satisfaction (Kreiner et al. 2009); therefore, organisations need to balance their desire to support their employees’ health against the need to protect their employees’ sense of work-life balance. If, however, an employee is going to be involved in lifting for example, then under Irish legislation it is a compulsion that they received manual handling certification. If someone was going to drive a forklift, they must receive training. Therefore, the question remains, is enough being done. Perhaps the answer lies in the poor take up of an imitative launched in 2005.

The Irish Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and the UK Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) in conjunction with six organisations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland jointly piloted the Work Positive resource scheme in 2002. This is a stress audit tool which can be used to assist organisations in meeting the requirements of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE UK) Management Standards for Work-Related Stress. The HSA and HSENI identified work-related stress as a
priority topic and asked employers to consider implementing the Management Standards.

The project was carried out in matching organisations both North and South of the border with comparable group sizes. The projects aim was to jointly implement the process in six organizations and therefore all organizations were chosen from border counties to allow for easy contact. The companies involved volunteered to participate and were thereafter chosen by the two state bodies. They were matched, as far as is reasonable, so that they could provide support to each other. Fermanagh College was matched with Sligo IT, Dundalk Town Council was matched with Newry and Mourne District Council and Craigavon Hospital was matched with Sligo General. The aims of the programme were to ensure that the 6 areas of the Management Standards were reasonably managed and monitored within participant organisations. These 6 areas are demands, control, support, relationships, role and change. These are based on models well established in the psychological literature and on on-going research and surveys carried out internationally. Following several audits completed by the sponsoring health service executives the results were wholly disappointing (Figure 28) with only one organisation identified as reaching satisfactory standards.

*Figure 28* Review of Joint Work Positive Initiative (2007)
The poor performance by the participating organisations in the Work Positive scheme tends to indicate that in real terms, not enough is being done to tackle work related stress. It is necessary to bear in mind also the small sample size of participating organisations but if the behaviour and results are extrapolated, coupled with the outcomes of my research, a recommendation follows that a greater onus be placed on employers in the adoption of mandatory controls in terms of training, prevention and remediation.

Another important recommendation from my study is that the bias towards CBT in isolation in terms of sanctioned and supported interventions to the detriment of other forms of intervention should at least be given significant attention and discussion. Earlier, I quoted Angus et al. (2014) who referred to the perplexing contradiction between the weight of specific humanistic research evidence, and the present state of official professional advocacy in relation to the development of clinical practice guidelines, policy directives, and humanistic training programs. My research demonstrates the efficacy of gestalt and the humanistic approach. Other authors quoted
such as Schneider and Längle (2012), Hager (2010), and Wedding and Corsini (2011) all reporting converging findings that emphatically affirm the value of humanistic practice principles, as well as the efficacy of humanistic psychotherapy treatment outcomes. Given however the issues raised with each form of individual psychotherapy school, I advocate however that support at policy level should now be directed towards approaches that are client oriented and that combine efficacious elements of the most successful schools i.e. there should now be a shift in thinking from CBT to schematic and integrative psychotherapy.

6.9 Chapter Summary and Conclusions

This chapter commenced with a deep analysis of the emergent findings from this research. Each of the findings that emerged in this research were treated to a multi-layered phenomenological approach to realising a depth in understanding that is not achievable through a surface level acceptance of findings. From this, a number of significant patterns emerged from the findings. These included a much greater and more nuanced account of the organism’s role in workplace environmental hazards. The wear and tear of extended cycles of unhealthy coping revealed themselves. The realisation of a distorted interpretation of self-regulation in my practice hitherto also showed itself. A paradoxical approach to leadership was uncovered through the analysis of findings where energy was found to be habitually squandered resulting in inconsistent performance. Finally, the inability to recognise skills and efficacy was identified in the findings and was deemed to be a major blocker to breaking through interruptions in my cycles of experience.

This chapter also involved a substantial debate as to the relative strengths and limitations of this research. Strengths and limitations were considered in terms of methodology, dominant paradigms used to consider the phenomena in questions, methods of validity employed, and the cultural, contextual nature of the study. A number of implications were extracted from interpretations of my analysis into the findings and these were organised and presented firstly in terms of my own practice and life in general. I also proposed wider implications for theory, practice and policy. This theme was
subsequently extended with a similar approach taken to the provision of a number of recommendations that extend over my own practice of leadership but also in terms of contributions to contemporary discourse into theory, practice and policy.
CHAPTER SEVEN - CONCLUSION

7.0 Chapter Introduction

This study has involved an auto-ethnographic gestalt exploration of the role of self-regulation in terms of achieving greater mastery over work related stress. Literature reviewed for this thesis demonstrated that contemporary stress theory adheres to a transactional model where stress is thought of in terms of the dynamic and ongoing relationship between organism and environment. In keeping with goals of transactional stress research, data was collected over a lengthy time period, allowing patterns of environmental transaction to emerge. That process involved the application of the gestalt cycle of experience (healthy and unhealthy), by way of data codes, applied within a directed content analysis methodology.

The deployment of gestalt theory as a conceptual framework extracted findings in terms of (i) antecedent work hazards (ii) cognitive appraisal processes (iii) coping processes and (iv) outcomes of work related stress. The process was repeated to akin elicit healthy patterns of environmental contact toward the creation of a gestalt level of awareness, conducive to the achievement of re-integration and authentic growth. All findings that emerged in this research were treated to an extensive and layered approach to analysis. This led to the creation of deep and nuanced insights into my work related stress transactions that went beyond what presented in findings at face value. As a result of the outcomes of this study, I believe the awareness I was seeking has emerged in terms of stated implications and related recommendations that I have been able to offer in terms of my own practice of leadership and health and wellbeing. In addition, and as a product of an autoethnographic study, wider implications and recommendations are offered for individual readers to assess if they hold significance for them. I conclude this thesis with some thoughts regarding the outcomes of the study in terms of the objectives that drove this endeavour some years ago now, and some personal reflections on the journey taken.
7.1 Research Outcomes versus Objectives

My research is now at a point where I can look back to a number of years ago when I set forth the objectives of this study. In terms of a qualitative study, it is up to the researcher to assess whether they have produced something that is important, meaningful, or potentially useful given what they are trying to find out (Patton. 2015). I reflect on my research therefore in terms of its substantive significance in addressing the objectives constituted the raison d’être for this investigation.

The first objective was to complete a systematic examination of literature relating to work related stress, gestalt psychotherapy and leadership in order to form a theoretical framework in which to complete this study. In reality, this research initially progressed without a systematic approach and problems subsequently arose as a result. Examiners identified that the unscientific approach taken resulted in an initial superficial engagement with a narrow data focus. This resulted in an unacceptable level of bias permeating the review. That problem was rectified by using a structured approach to the completion of a systematic literature review, and I believe it resulted in a very comprehensive interrogation of literature pertaining to gestalt, work related stress and leadership.

By conducting a literature review on three distinct phenomena, the scope of the literature review was large, thus compounding further an already labour intensive transactional approach to studying stress. I believe however that the conclusions around a convergence in terms of process orientation was a substantial breakthrough in terms of my own research, but also for informing fellow researchers with an interest in one/some or all of those areas.

The second objective of this study was set in line with the aspirations of a transactional approach to studying work related stress in terms of collecting data over an extended time period. This was completed by way of reflective journal and through relational discussions in supervision regarding work hazards, patterns of appraisal and coping processes, and outcomes of work stress for me. This task involved a very significant
input of time and effort in terms of journaling on a daily basis and recording and transcribing a large number of supervisory meetings. What resulted however was a wealth of data to analyse. The amount of useful data from supervisory meetings was respectively less than captured in journaling. This is understandable from a frequency of input perspective but also, a large degree of supervision time was taken up with what I describe more technical and procedural issues. The dialoguous nature of that source of data however was extremely insightful, particularly the insights provided by my supervisor.

A gestalt approach seeks to achieve growth through engaging with both healthy and unhealthy aspects of personality. Therefore, the third objective of this study was to ensure that the extended period of data capture adequately addressed both healthy and unhealthy experiences in terms of (i) environmental work factors (ii) appraisal processes (iii) coping process and (iv) outcomes in terms of work performance and social functioning, morale and life satisfaction and somatic health. In all, twenty-three vignettes were generated incorporating the blend of narrative, scene and plot generation, characters and theoretical inputs required in an autoethnographic study which allowed for the subsequent and detailed analysis that identified dominant ways of being in the world, in terms of work related stress transactions.

This study is above all else a practical approach to achieving practice and life improvements (Doloriert and Sambrook 2011). As a result, I have offered several implications and recommendations for the betterment of my own practice of leadership, health and wellbeing; in addition to suggesting transferable implications and recommendations for theory, practice and policy in terms of work related stress, psychotherapy and leadership. Due to the dominance of positivist and CBT empiricial research, I can but hope that my wider recommendations make some contribution to the areas commented upon in my study. My commitment is however to animate with expedition, the personal recommendations that this substantive endeavour has generated.
7.2 Tension and Potential from Integration and Individuality

As the concluding notes for this thesis are being written, it is useful to begin this particular section by offering the reader a brief but relevant cultural and contextual update on a political outcome that I wish to draw a parallel from. As the opening activities of this research were getting under way, the economic and cultural landscape throughout Europe was in severe turmoil. In my opening salvo to this thesis, stark facts pertaining to Ireland in particular were offered to the reader, in terms of economic decline, emigration rates, suicide rates and unemployment statistics. As my closing remarks get underway, the global landscape, from an economical perspective, looks a little better and Ireland in particular presents itself to the world again as a fast growing and dynamic force. The pain of austerity however in the intervening period from when this research commenced to now as it reaches its conclusion, has taken a heavy toll on the people of Ireland.

This was reflected in the results of a governmental election dated 26th February 2016 that ousted the ruling Fine Gael party, leaving the country without a government and facing a return to the polls as no clear alternative emerged. The only option as of May 2016 is for the coming together of two diverse political entities in a coalition that will include other minority parties and independent candidates. From a political perspective, the unthinkable is happening, but it is happening as it appears that it is the only viable option to best serve the Irish people at this time. The process of forming this amalgamation is proving extremely difficult at the time of writing. Attempts at creating a harmonic blend from differing ideologies has proved almost insurmountable. Partisans on all sides are nigh on claiming “treason”, and in early discussions, no party were inclined to acquiesce on their opening positions based on their respective dominant political ontology.
I want to limit my reflections on the need for integration to my own turmoil in keeping with my own constructivist ontology with a natural bias toward making transferable recommendations versus sweeping generalisations. I have tried to not lose focus during the long tenure of this research as to its primary objective i.e. the creation of heightened awareness of the potential for achieving mastery over work related stress. My constructivist epistemology assumes that I will grow and change during such an endeavour as this research. New knowledge is continuously added to existing knowledge due to the subjective interpretation of lived experience during the process and what emerged therein. As a sort of meta-reflection on the findings, analysis, implications and recommendations from this research, an overarching sentiment is becoming figure from ground if I was to sum up what this research means to me now.

The resolution to my research question only came about through vibrant engagement with the environment. I started however from a rather closed, insular position in keeping with the very boundary disturbances this investigation sought to address. Based on a rather damaged conceptualisation of self-regulation and through operating under the duress of egotism, I unfortunately believe I fell into the trap of a type of “navel gazing”, a criticism that has been levelled at autoethnographers. But that is not what autoethnography is about. It is about engaging in the world in a collaborative way and above all else, in a practical way to answer research questions, in a manner that findings can resonate with others.

So the question remains, where do I stand now on research and practice? The answer is that I very much favour now stand in favour of Lazarus’s (1991) technical eclecticism approach. Let me yet again justify by analogy and this time I use the one of if all one has in their tool box is a hammer, then every problem looks like a nail. How can we call ourselves pure constructivists if we don’t try to gather as many tools in our kitbag as possible? Why should I believe that I have reached a point of mastery when I now know that knowledge becomes immediately obsolete with the emergence of the new? (McNiff 2013). Informed now by what Bradberrry (2014) cites as being a fundamental habit of successful leaders, is starting with the end in mind and working back from there. In this study, I was interested in trying to understand my processes in terms of work
related stress, but in honesty, it was only when the disciplines of gestalt and occupational health psychology were employed, that the whole of gestalt of the elephant did appear.

Does this eclecticism risk dissipating or dilute my approach? The answer is absolutely not. The key to integrative psychotherapy and integrative practice in general, is not for the entity to stop growing as an individual within a new relationship because that would be completely confluent. The secret I believe is to allow the new relationship to foster growth in the individual in an ever expanding sphere of influence. In terms of a constructivist epistemology, I aim to grow within the tension of integration and technical eclecticism because then, the answer becomes what is needed, and not what I have.

7.3 Final Reflections and Closing Remarks

Conducting this research was never going to be a straight forward, linear, or easy endeavour. The lack of similar empirical contributions points to the complexities and labour intensive nature of applying theory such as the transactional stress model and gestalt psychotherapeutic theory in research (Cox and Griffiths 2010; Houdmont 2009; Hager 2010; McLeod 2011). The depth and layered account of lived experience had to be captured over a number of years to effectively allow the type of patterns that Lazarus (1991) spoke of needing to emerge in order to understand processes of organism/environmental transaction. This has involved immersing myself within the swampy, murky, gritty existence that constitutes my practice of leading, and my practice of living.

The process of data capture required a level of discipline that was often severely challenged by the type of findings that emerged by way of environmental hazard e.g. holistic work overload. The drive to sustain oneself within one’s own narrative was exceedingly difficult because the reader has now become privy to some of the very difficult reflections that had to be made in this study. Even in writing up this thesis, difficult decisions had to be made regarding levels of disclosure. Several times, my frustrations led me to the point of near collapse such as exhaustive efforts in seeking out
empirical evidence to validate an approach that I so dearly believe as an experienced practitioner using its theory and techniques.

In this paper I told of criticisms levelled at the gestalt approach in terms of it being a bohemian approach that uses anything that works (Wedding and Corsini 2013). I found it to be a very unpopular banner to be operating under when attempting to translate its efficacy from a subjective appraisal perspective, in the absence of extant empirical supporting evidence. This lack of availability of gestalt empirical contributions coupled with the wide variety of approaches deployed in published autoethnographic studies made the construction for my own thesis a challenging endeavour, at times eliciting much criticism. In conclusion however, the words of my supervisor ring in my ear when he advised that I tend to find meaning only after swimming around the murky waters for some time, but it is in this type of engagement that eventually a deep and meaningful insight emerges. One of the key outcomes from this study is to deploy efforts to minimise the wear and tear that such an approach requires. It begins with the replacement of autonomous neurosis in primary appraisal with the deployment of conscious awareness, to ensure healthy coping and outcomes. As I set about implementing the recommendations from this study, I hope that at least now I am swimming toward the élan vital, and if this endeavour finds significance with others, it may help them reach their own vital core.
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### APPENDICES

**Appendix 1  Eriksson’s Psychosocial Model of Development**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Basic Conflict</th>
<th>Important Events</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infancy (birth to 18 months)</td>
<td>Trust vs. Mistrust</td>
<td>Feeding</td>
<td>Children develop a sense of trust when caregivers provide reliability, care, and affection. A lack of this will lead to mistrust.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood (2 to 3 years)</td>
<td>Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt</td>
<td>Toilet Training</td>
<td>Children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence. Success leads to feelings of autonomy, failure results in feelings of shame and doubt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool (3 to 5 years)</td>
<td>Initiative vs. Guilt</td>
<td>Exploration</td>
<td>Children need to begin asserting control and power over the environment. Success in this stage leads to a sense of purpose. Children who try to exert too much power experience disapproval, resulting in a sense of guilt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Age (6 to 11 years)</td>
<td>Industry vs. Inferiority</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Children need to cope with new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of competence, while failure results in feelings of inferiority.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence (12 to 18 years)</td>
<td>Identity v Role Confusion</td>
<td>Social Relationships</td>
<td>Teens need to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Success leads to an ability to stay true to yourself, while failure leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Adulthood (19 to 40 years)</td>
<td>Intimacy vs. Isolation</td>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>Young adults need to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. Success leads to strong relationships, while failure results in loneliness and isolation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Adulthood (40 to 65 years)</td>
<td>Generativity vs. Stagnation</td>
<td>Work and Parenthood</td>
<td>Adults need to create or nurture things that will outlast them, often by having children or creating a positive change that benefits other people. Success leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity (65 to death)</td>
<td>Ego Integrity vs. Despair</td>
<td>Reflection on Life</td>
<td>Older adults need to look back on life and feel a sense of fulfillment. Success at this stage leads to feelings of wisdom, while failure results in regret, bitterness, and despair.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Appendix 2  The Gestalt Cycle of Experience**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sensation</strong></td>
<td>At the point where the self is balanced, between cycles, after completion and prior to the next fore-contact there is either internal or external disturbances will impinge upon the self- heralding the start of the figure/background formation process. The self feels, senses, (a) disturbance, a change of status and so (a) figure forms to the fore front. The person is ready to notice, to be aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness</strong></td>
<td>Gradually or suddenly we become aware of events impinging via our senses, or our feelings, or mentally onto our consciousness. As a form of experience, there is a fresh gestalten. A need arises and the need is known - you recognise that you have a need; this is not the same as knowing what the need is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mobilisation</strong></td>
<td>Usually follows awareness in that the person becomes aroused or emotional of the opportunities leading to satisfaction of the need. The healthy person is alive to the senses, to the surroundings, is open to information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Action</strong></td>
<td>A punctuation - or figure formation - in the process of contact. The person chooses or rejects possibilities. Behaviour are relevant to the effective fulfilment of needs in the here and now. Action occurs at the boundaries of self and environment. Occurring within dialogue and within the contact with others. The healthy self is able to take from and give to the interaction and to experience its fullness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Final Contact</strong></td>
<td>Having healthily mobilised and acted there will follow full and vibrant contact, termed final contact by Goodman (Perls et al. 1951 p403) The whole (contact) is more than the sum of its parts - physical senses of touch feel, hear etc., and more than these senses might provide. Contact occurs at the boundary of our self and the environment. Within the moment of contact all else merges to the background; as seeing your loved one in a crowd, everyone and everything else blurs and melts with your loved one in the fore-ground The full and final contact marks the closure of a particular gestalt. Contact is a basic need of human beings, providing and opening to the possibility for change</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Integration and Assimilation: Satisfaction

Perls et al. (1951/1969) refer to this as post-contact. This is the afterglow, the satisfaction following the full and complete experience. This is the quiet after the storm prior to separation or withdrawal. In a full and vibrant contact-cycle the individual is able to savour the completion and is ready to move on with satisfaction and readiness of the next sensation.

### Withdrawal

Following the satisfaction experienced in the post contact phase the person is able to withdraw to the balanced fore- and back- ground stasis. Another way of viewing this is moving into the resting void; where sensation has yet, is waiting, to be felt.

Source: Stevenson (2010)
### Appendix 2  The Gestalt Cycle of Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desensitisation (Sensation)</th>
<th>The person will shut out sensations which may be impinging on the body physically or emotionally and mentally. For example, ignoring the (physical) pain of cutting the body; ignoring the continuing ache of an injury. Emotionally ignoring the ache of detachment from your fellow being, the pain of isolation, of being bullied. Such sensations may be diluted, disregarded or neglected. This may provide (short term) protection for the person but brings with it the (continuing) rejection of positive sensations.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deflection (Awareness)</td>
<td>To avoid becoming aware of what is perceived to be damaging or negative experiences the person will seek to turn away direct contact with another person. This avoidance ensures criticism is not heard and therefore does not upset or damage the person. However, in turning this unwelcome criticism away the person will also turn away the positive rather than accept (welcome) attention, meaning bringing awareness to a situation the person deflects, or side steps from the situation, voiding being aware; avoiding contact. The effect is to avoid your surroundings, your environment; and to miss the positiveness coming to you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introjection (Mobilisation)</td>
<td>Rather than mobilising the body and mind to the opportunities surrounding this new awareness the person switches to how he 'should' react in the predefined manner which seems appropriate to the situation. More energy would seem to go into deciding what the action is should be than would be spent in exploring the breadth and depth of the experience. The person may lack an inner feeling of self, of direction and thus be unable to differentiate in varying situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projection (Action)</td>
<td>The speaker is aware of his qualities and is seeing them in another. Projection would be when the speaker sees the qualities (or flaws) he possesses but only in another, not in himself. Projection may be described as seeing in someone else the qualities you are not acknowledging in yourself. A trait, attitude or feeling which is seen as being directed towards you but actually has stemmed from you. For example, you may see that people are difficult and reject your friendship, actually you are difficult and will not allow a friendship.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retroflection (Final Contact)</td>
<td>Retroflection may specifically interrupt the final contact phase. The person is not able to receive or assimilate with his environment and so resorts to retroflection. This behaviour is learnt, reinforced, in development when feelings and thoughts are not validated in the family group, or when expressed feelings or thoughts are punished without validation. There are two types of retroflection: (i) You would do to yourself that which you want done TO the other (ii) you do to yourself that which you want done BY the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egotism (Satisfaction)</td>
<td>Egotism may occur/interrupt at any time in the Healthy Cycle and does often interrupts satisfaction. This interruption may see the person being more involved with them self rather than the broader</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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| **Confluence** (Withdrawal) | Context of the contact and environment and thus miss the full impact of giving and receiving. Think of this in terms of the person who in watching the film spends most the time saying how wonderful it is, how superb the action, how exciting it is, and so on . . . the need is for the individual to step out and be the spectator or commentator. In egotism the individual has something to say about everything. This spectatoring, this commentating need not be externalised; holding the conversation internally equally destroys the pleasure of the moment, the event. This disturbance reduces the opportunity to live the experience. However, as with much of the Healthy Cycle and its disturbances, egotism plays an important part in the maturation process of an individual. Remember, the healthy becomes unhealthy when its dominance does not wane at the appropriate moment. |

| **Confluence** (Withdrawal) | Confluence may be seen in individuals whose self becomes as much a part of their job or past time. So the computer programmer who lives to code, to socialise only through bits and bytes; the sport enthusiast whose whole happiness seems determined by whether or not there is a win on Saturday, or by how well the sporting idol performs on the field. Confluence, merging, with another person or with a situation or the surroundings leads to loss of self, to lack of satisfaction and to the dulling of the receptiveness to sensation. Confluence is the lack of differentiation between the self and other. In the context of the disturbance at the withdrawal stage the individual clings to the gestalt, is unable to appreciate the letting go will allow a further new enriching experience to come forward. |

Source: Stevenson (2010)
Appendix 3  Bradberry’s Coping Mechanisms

1. They appreciate what they have. Taking time to contemplate what you’re grateful for isn’t merely the “right” thing to do. It also improves your mood, because it reduces the stress hormone cortisol by 23%.

2. They avoid asking “what if?” “What if?” statements throw fuel on the fire of stress and worry? Things can go in a million different directions, and the more time you spend worrying about the possibilities, the less time you’ll spend focusing on taking action that will calm you down and keep your stress under control.

3. They stay positive. Thoughts help make stress intermittent by focusing your brain’s attention onto something that is completely stress-free. You have to give your wandering brain a little help by consciously selecting something positive to think about.

4. They disconnect. Given the importance of keeping stress intermittent, it’s easy to see how taking regular time off the grid can help keep your stress under control. When you make yourself available to your work 24/7, you expose yourself to a constant barrage of stressors.

5. They limit their caffeine intake. Drinking caffeine triggers the release of adrenaline. Adrenaline is the source of the “fight-or-flight” response, a survival mechanism that forces you to stand up and fight or run for the hills when faced with a threat. The fight-or-flight mechanism sidesteps rational thinking in favour of a faster response.

6. They Sleep. When you sleep, your brain literally recharges, shuffling through the day’s memories and storing or discarding them (which causes dreams), so that you wake up alert and clear-headed. Your self-control, attention, and memory are all reduced when you don’t get enough—or the right kind—of sleep.
7. They squash negative self-talk. A big step in managing stress involves stopping negative self-talk in its tracks. The more you ruminate on negative thoughts, the more power you give them. Most of our negative thoughts are just that—thoughts, not facts.

8. They reframe their perspective. Stress and worry are fuelled by our own skewed perception of events. It’s easy to think that unrealistic deadlines, unforgiving bosses, and out-of-control traffic are the reasons we’re so stressed all the time. You can’t control your circumstances, but you can control how you respond to them. So before you spend too much time dwelling on something, take a minute to put the situation in perspective.

9. They Breathe. The easiest way to make stress intermittent lies in something that you have to do every day anyway: breathing. The practice of being in the moment with your breathing will begin to train your brain to focus solely on the task at hand and get the stress monkey off your back. When you’re feeling stressed, take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing.

10. They use their support system. It’s tempting, yet entirely ineffective, to attempt tackling everything by yourself. To be calm and productive, you need to recognise your weaknesses and ask for help when you need it. This means tapping into your support system when a situation is challenging enough for you to feel overwhelmed.
Appendix 4 Postgraduate Academic Charter

Postgraduate Academic Charter

The University and the Postgraduate Student Association (P.S.A.) are committed to supporting the development of a partnership between faculty and students, which upholds the principles espoused in this charter. All postgraduate students are entitled to representation by the P.S.A. on University bodies that make policy concerning postgraduate students.

Responsibilities of Students and Supervisors

1. Students and supervisors are expected by the University to work together in partnership and should at all times maintain a professional working relationship.

2. Students undertaking postgraduate research will have been informed before accepting an offer of a place, as to who has agreed to be their supervisor, and the supervisor and student should then agree the terms and conditions of the research.

3. Supervisors must have a good working knowledge of the subject matter and ideally should be publishing in the area of the student's interest, unless new faculty, wherein a second supervisor should be assigned to provide additional support.

4. Students will receive clear details of the University’s academic regulations on enrolment.

5. Students will be allocated a departmental postgraduate adviser, who will meet with the student at the beginning of each academic year to discuss progress and any issues that the student may like to raise.

6. Students and supervisors will be expected to arrange a regular schedule of meetings, agree deadlines for submission of written work, and students must follow the guidance provided by their supervisor.

7. Students and supervisors shall complete a progress report on a twice-yearly basis, which will be discussed by the student and supervisor prior to the submission of the report to the head of department.

8. In instances where a supervisor may be away from campus for more than one month, excluding the summer period, arrangements for supervision should be agreed between the supervisor and student.

9. In cases where problems arise in the student-supervisor relationship the University will seek to address and resolve the issues as provided for in the academic regulations.
10 Students shall acknowledge the supervisor’s role in their research;
11 Students shall, where it is deemed appropriate, seek co-publication with their supervisor;
12 Supervisors shall acknowledge a student's contribution in any presentation, publication or meeting, which involves the student's research work;
13 Students shall conduct the research within the ethical standards of the discipline(s) and in accord with the standards detailed by the University and any other appropriate external agencies;
14 Students will be provided with the appropriate professional advice and support in developing their academic skills and career prospects;

**Responsibilities of Departments and the University**
1 The University will provide full-time research students with desk space, with graduate centres, departments, research centres or institutes responsible for ensuring students have access to computing and printing facilities;
2 Students should have access to graduate centre, department, research centre or institute facilities, such as telephones and photocopiers, for research purposes;
3 Students should be provided with graduate facilities in the library, including an agreed number of inter-library loans and photocopy allowance, where necessary for undertaking research;
4 Students should be made aware of the financial support available from the graduate centre, department, research centre or institute to undertake field research and to present papers at academic conferences;
5 Students should be informed in writing of departmental requirements and expectations with respect to demonstrating, tutoring or other academic work;
6 Full time research students on stipends are expected as a part of their duties to undertake up to 6-7 hours per week of demonstrating, tutoring or other duties assigned by the head of department;
7 Students not on stipends should be made aware of teaching and other employment opportunities that may exist from time to time in departments and research centres;
8 All students involved in tutoring or demonstrating should be provided with training and support in undertaking teaching activities, as well as receiving formal recognition for their teaching contribution;
9 Departments should nominate a faculty member to co-ordinate postgraduate teaching and demonstrating, to arrange training and to provide feedback;
10 Students involved in laboratory work will receive safety training in manual handling, chemical handling and basic first aid at the beginning of their studies;
11 A grievance protocol specific to demonstration, teaching and tutorials should be available.

**Taught Postgraduate Programmes**

1 Students should be provided with full and detailed information about their programme of study, including the nature and goals of the programme, and any prerequisite skills and knowledge required;
2 An introduction and orientation should given by both faculty and graduates (where available) of the programme by the first week of the semester, including the provision of course outlines and any specific course regulations;
3 Students are responsible for ensuring that all registration procedures are completed prior to or during week one of each semester;
4 Project work undertaken on a programme should be clearly defined, well-planned and there should be adequate facilities to ensure its completion;
5 Students should be made aware of procedures and deadlines for the submission of all course work, projects and dissertations;
6 Departments should provide formal and informal avenues for student evaluation of programmes, including written evaluations and opportunities to meet with external examiners where feasible;
7 Departments should ensure that students have the necessary facilities and access to resources to complete their programme of study.
Please consult the Handbook of Academic Administration for further details
Appendix 5  Supervision Excerpts

Supervision Excerpt 28th June 2013

Researcher: At the moment, with regards to work-related stress, and from a gestalt perspective, I've lost awareness of myself. I don't know what I'm doing, you know, that's the way I feel this week.

Supervisor: So in my head it would be utterly bizarre to engage in a Ph.D. of this nature, and burn yourself out.

Researcher: Exactly yes. Yes, that would be counter-productive.

Supervisor: No go back to my phrase, it would be utterly bizarre. It would be the equivalent of when (Politician) in the UK was the secretary of state for health and he comes striding along the road in Westminster, very obviously overweight and chomping on a very large cigar.

Researcher: Like (Irish Politician) for Minister for health in Ireland!

Supervisor: Yes. There is something not right about this (laughing). So it would be the internal conflicts generated by working on a stress thesis while burning yourself out. As a supervisor, I just think it's illogical, as somebody who works in the caring profession, it would make me very worried, but just as a personal thing, I think why, why, why are we doing this, this is daft. So the question becomes, if your awareness has gone down, that's fine, because it fluctuates. You've got the context, you got half of the American army looking at whether there is a cobweb outside or whatever it is that they do, so the question becomes, as a reasonable agent in your own life, what are you going to do?

Researcher: So we're in a peak period of busyness. Remember a few weeks ago when I was here, and the level of actual demand was such that was excited, energised, and everything. Obviously last week, it tipped into the realm of being ridiculously busy and this will continue into next week. Then, the next week after that, I have three days booked off work, so for me, this whole area of the GPS, the personal GPS, remember you made a very interesting point about systems, when I transcribed it really came out to
me was that the whole piece of the system, and regulation, you know how the system has to be able to fluctuate, to be able to expand up, at times like this, and then down. So that's kind of what I need to hold I think, it is to basically say, there is a rest period coming up. I need to hold that dear.

**Supervisor:** Yes you do, and I'm glad to hear that you've got your three days that are coming up and I think that's good, useful, but we want you to get your three days and enjoy them, as opposed to get your three days and fall in a heap. So the challenge is, what will you do? What can you do today to manage this? And tomorrow you ask yourself the question what will I do today to manage this? So bring this right to the forefront.

**Researcher:** To the here and now.

**Supervisor:** Absolutely, what is it that I need to do today to manage this time of peak activity, demand, in the knowledge that the peak demand isn't going away for two weeks, so what will I do right now?

**Researcher:** Yeah, because I'm not, I'm not good at caring for myself or protecting myself, and I just keep going on and on and on and I think that just comes from the home situation as well.

**Supervisor:** So, just hold the question what will I do right now?

**Researcher:** To hold it or to answer?

**Supervisor:** I want you to do both. Hold it or use it and I want you to give me answer now as well.

**Researcher:** Okay. (Laughing)

**Supervisor:** Right now.

**Researcher:** For me tonight, I’d get out of work tonight,

**Supervisor:** Comeback.

**Researcher:** Which? To where I’ve left to go?

**Supervisor:** Yes, so what will I do right now?

**Researcher:** Oh now, here now, okay.

**Supervisor:** Yes

**Researcher:** Take a deep breath first of all.

**Supervisor:** Yes, because you haven't taken a breath for about an hour so (laughing)
Researcher: Yes exactly (laughing). And it's funny that in any therapy…
Supervisor: You didn't do it.
Researcher: Which?
Supervisor: Take a breath
Researcher: I know, yeah.
Supervisor: So stop.
Researcher: I have a blocked nose as well.
Supervisor: Stop, you need to stop.
Researcher: (Takes a deep breath and exhales)
Supervisor: One of the things that happens to us is when we come to peak activity, is that we construe everything as needing to be active, and sometimes in peak activities, the activity has a life of its own as it’s going to happen, but somebody needs not to be active during that time, so that you keep awareness upfront, go back to our system that we talked about, if everybody in the system is going at 100 miles an hour, the guarantee is that the system will crash. When the system is going at 100 miles an hour, you want most of your people to keep up with it, but you want one person who is absolutely still and not moving, because they are the only person that can spot the trouble coming. And if they spot it in time, they can help to recalibrate the system so that it can sustain itself long-term.
Researcher: Oh yes, yes, yes.
Supervisor: So if all around you is very active, having two or three days off in two weeks’ time isn’t good enough. The three days off in two weeks’ time would be great in two weeks’ time. But what you need to do during your period of peak activity is make sure that you step out of it, and that might mean, the 10 seconds that it takes literally to lift your diaphragm and fill it and empty it, by breathing. It might mean that, every so often you leave the office, and you go and you pick up a glass of water at the machine just to get that break of 30 seconds. But if you don't do that, then the system will come bigger than you and the system will crash. And that ultimately creates more stress than you withstand because then all of your CIA ex-forces people would come in and say “Morgan why
didn't you see this coming”. You didn't see it coming because you were part of it. So, you need to hold the question, what will I do now? On the wall there behind me you see the red poster, that's there for a reason, and the reason is because if I didn't see that, at least 3 or 4 times a day, I would forget.

**Researcher:** I did notice it “Keep calm and carry on”.

**Supervisor:** So in other words, in order to remain active you actually have to keep calm, it's a paradox. To be highly productive and efficient, energetic and dynamic, you have the need to stay calm an awful lot because otherwise you only have energy for the first 10 metres of the race not the last 90.

**Researcher:** That’s very interesting. Do you remember what I said to you before, about relationships and everything you know, that I would get so het up and everything, that I couldn't sleep etc. and it's the same with everything for me, being that kind of way. Yes, yes.

**Supervisor:** What I have just done with you there in the last few minutes is toward achieving insight. You caught what was going on, but you just weren't in enough awareness to actually do something about it. So essentially what I'm doing through this process with you is, well I want this to become a place where you feel it's safe and fairly predictable. And in that space I don't mind giving you praise and I don't mind saying “good gosh Morgan, get rid of that paragraph, that’s nuts, and equally I don't mind saying to you you're not listening to my question”.

**Researcher:** Yes, yes, okay

**Supervisor:** And then you forced me, you put me into a place which was, no, I want you to do this now.

**Researcher:** That support and safe challenge?

**Supervisor:** Yes, and it's also a little bit of catching you firmly by the arm and pulling you right in beside me and saying no, no, do it now, and you resisted it a couple of times, until you took a breath, which was not really a breath, it was really a half-breath, so there is an interesting bit in it which is in terms of in here, this supervisory relationship needs to be a safe place where we can construct your thesis and get you writing in a particular
way, thinking in a particular way, but it's been done through an approach which feels free to call things as they are. So I’ll do “But what will you do now Morgan”, Well, “when I’m home this evening”. “No… Pause… What… Will… You… Do….Now”? You’re asking me to do it now - yes. Is that control, is that constraining you, is that making you obedient? Is that making me powerful and all of those things, the answers will be yes to all of those things and the question then for reflection is, is that okay? And that's for me to reflect on as well as for you to reflect on.

**Researcher:** Yes, yes.

**Supervisor:** But it emerged out of context and I want to link it to the question where in the middle of the session today, which was why, are you writing? Which is a curiosity question but I think one of my concerns was your head was down, you were writing frantically but thought you’re recording this and this is daft.

**Researcher:** And I knew the answer, but couldn’t answer you back as to why, but I was thinking afterwards, and I just forgot as to why and that there was again a case of mental capacity again, so instead of going through, why things seem to work best for me, like the layers of onion, when I have stuff structured and I can manage it, I lost my power to respond when challenged.

**Supervisor:** Yes, that’s true because you do work with structure but go back to our messy ethics bit, we've only been able to arrive at structure because we swam around and mucky, grey, swampy waters. So you're only half right when you say that you work with structure. You are very good with structure when it has emerged out of confusion. Take away the confusion and you just become a bit robotic. I don't mean you personally, I mean, we all do.

**Researcher:** Look at the example of the course, I jumped into delivering the course, you know literally, I had one week to prepare it and then it started the next week. I had to design and deliver in that time. Then, I had the messiness of issues like the lifeline exercise, some good feedback and some negative feedback. You know, on the whole I omitted the practical
business piece, so because I had to rush it with so much going on, I muddled it. It is like there is a third piece within the structure that causes the confusion, then out of the confusion comes the real re-engineered structure.

**Supervisor:** Well, that makes sense. I think maturity and wisdom removes that third piece over time i.e. you go in with less and less, and you just allow it to happen.

**Researcher:** It is action research isn’t it, you try it, you reflect on it, you try to improve it, you reflect, so that works for me. So obviously in that cycle, there is a very uncomfortable place for me, a stage of confusion. I suppose I don't make things easy. Yes, that’s a lot to chew on.

**Supervisor:** As always.

**Researcher:** Yes exactly.
Supervision Meeting 4\textsuperscript{th} April 2014

**Supervisor:** So when you listen back to the tape, you will hear a comment that I made at the beginning of this phase which was that you have got tremendous energy and ability, but you send that in too many directions simultaneously.

**Researcher:** And you know what, it’s funny because as you were saying that, there is a lump in my throat because it is so true.

**Supervisor:** So that’s why somehow we have slowed this down completely to bring this right back, and I’m holding you to this. There is a mantra that supervisors use, and should use all the time with students, which is that really good research has its one question or two questions, it has its methodology, and it has the doing of that, and good research, always assumes that there is really interesting stuff that has been left out.

**Researcher:** Can I ask a question, this is to do with, with what is going to come out of the study or I suppose put a counter argument back. Given that I don't have a lot of self-confidence and no great self-efficacy, is not my ability to dispel a lot of energy in various different directions simultaneously, not one of my core skills? I say this because at the moment in managing the job, a daughter doing the Juniors Cert, and for her home economics, we’ve basically we’ve been cooking shepherd’s pie every night this week. My wife is working very late. I play with my five-year-old writing this presentation and doing work. And it’s all done. Like you said good work, great meeting in Dublin yesterday the night before I did that presentation, doing the health and fitness, off the cigarettes. There is a lot going on, a lot of energy being dispensed, but it's keeping a lot of plates in the air, not allowing anything to drop. You mentioned as well, about stressful times at work etc. but it's been extremely stressful because our company in the UK has not hit its numbers so basically there was a big meeting in Glasgow at the beginning of last week. My boss told me that he may be coming back to you on Wednesday with consequences for Ireland. So basically, I was holding onto that at the weekend, going into
the week. Now, the consequences for Ireland could be anywhere from I need you to cut three heads or I'm really sorry but we’re taking you out of your level of management. That is something that is completely outside of my control. Now, it’s not anything to do with Ireland, because we’re doing our numbers, we’re delivering, and very solid plans are in place. I spent a lot of time over those few days, not sitting back and waiting for him to come back, but I sent him messages and figures, and when he came back, he did say, you know what, I think I'm going to have to have cuts, but Ireland isn’t going to be and could not be affected, because you have done your numbers, your plans are robust and you got so much in business in train. So all that work that I’ve been doing has been effective, but it is a hugely, hugely stressful time and again I have given about 8 min. long to that the question that I asked.

**Supervisor:** Well caught, well caught. So here's the bit, and we have been here before to and that is fine, that’s how we learn, we layer the learning and that sometimes mean we have to come back, come back, come back. This happens in your work environment and a lot of that environment, if it is it controlled externally there is nothing to do about that. So the question becomes, what can we do when the external environment that we interface with produces a pile of crap? The only thing we can influence is our response.

**Researcher:** Yes

**Supervisor:** And you see when your manager, your director says to you, look I might close the company down I might take out your job and three others, so if you feel desperately panicked by that, and frightened and all of that, I think that is an absolutely legitimate reaction and I would say have it, have that feeling, have the response, and have that reaction, because you don't want to be in some form of denial, and then have that, and then the next bit is, okay what can I do, I tell you what, I did some stuff about a month ago, it is about three quarters finished, it is a whole whack of numbers, and he knows about it but he has not seen it in black and white, I’ll do a couple of hours of that, I would wrap this back up and see does
this influence the deliberations. And again you do not know when or not. It is you taking some control. This is about you having some efficacy in the situation. So again, it is about taking responsibility for your response, have the panic, have the fear and then go, what will I do? So you did that, and interestingly, you got a response which was positive, you may have got no response, and you may have gotten a negative response, it doesn't matter. You did what you could, so, that would be as an outsider, as an objective person, I would say that that is a really good thing that you did. The bit that I didn't hear was, I tell you what I did Patrick, because I had to get this paper back to him in 24 hours, whatever you did, because my young one is doing the junior cert and my wife has to work 9 hours extra a week, what I did was I put the PhD aside for two weeks, and said that I would come back to that on 16 April, and I decided that instead of doing the treadmill every night for an hour, I would do it every second night for half an hour, and I also decided that the five-year-old would not be going to music class this week. So I took out five things.

**Researcher:** Yes, yes

**Supervisor:** And I managed the current stressor. And I rarely hear you say that. I tell you what I do hear you saying. I think if we did the supervision in two weeks’ time, you would come back and tell me, you know what I did in the last two weeks, and I did that and that and that. So there is something about learning, when you get into those stressful situations, that as well as being responsible for your response to the stressor, you may also have to take out one or two of the stressors, and you don't do that very well.

**Researcher:** No. I set goals, ambitious goals and again as you said where there isn't really any wiggle room. Therefore, and I don't stop until I get them because like my health has been one of the most disastrous areas in my life.

**Supervisor:** Whose health?

**Researcher:** My health.

**Supervisor:** Whose health?
Researcher: My one.
Supervisor: I’m going to ask you again, whose health?
Researcher: Yeah, yeah, my own.
Supervisor: So my health and disaster in the one phrase; stay with that.
Researcher: Yeah, that doesn't sit well.
Supervisor: I know you, if I was coming to you as a client, and I give you the story, you'd be very calm on the outset with me and try to facilitate my learning, but the bit that you beat me up saying oh my god, what are you doing you a big clump, so my health disaster in the one phrase, I think you've identified, part of the issue, which is, by only adopting a goal-setting approach, it means that if other, if life gets in the way, because Charlie over in London has given you a flake in the ear because numbers have not met, there is no wiggle room. So goal-setting is fine, clarity, you put in the processes to it, but if you have every goal lying up to happen all in around the same time, it doesn't work.
Researcher: Yeah, yeah.
Supervisor: And I think coming back to the PhD, and the things about doing the academic research, which is what a PhD is, is the capacity to have goals but have processes built around them that are movable feasts. Because a large part of doing a PhD requires time for reflection, time for creativity, time to be able to write, but there is no point in you saying, I'm going to write chapter 1, from 9 to 1 o'clock on Friday morning, it's a reasonable goal, but what happens at 9 o'clock in the morning if both kids have tonsillitis, and they’re at home, they're not at school. And you're there with a typewriter on the table, and the two kids are at there, sick.
Researcher: It’s not going to happen.
Supervisor: It isn’t going to happen. And what happens if you decide that the last Friday of October is when you are going to submit, you’re going to rattle off the research rationale, and Charlie in London gives you a buzz, the evening before and says, we've just lost the contract for half 1 million, what can you do? That is, I have the sense that this is where we have
been before goal-setting is set, goal-setting is bang on, but how you use it is very, very harsh on yourself.

**Researcher:** It is obsessive.

**Supervisor:** Okay, it is obsessive right.

**Researcher:** Absolutely because I obsess about it, I set the goals, and it is kind of like, it is almost, I remember on the psychotherapy masters we used to do a lot of artwork and stuff in class, I drew this picture and it was of me in a kind of the jail but with blue sky outside, because I vision what I see is perfection, as in the perfect outcome, and that is my vision that I hold or whatever, but I'm locked into that thing.

**Supervisor:** Yeah, so one of the things is to keep that loosened up a little bit because the other lesson that you learn in research is that there is no perfect outcome, not that there is never, but that research is a very dynamic evolving process. Some people think that if I got my Ph.D. I have it done, but that is actually not a really good way of seeing a Ph.D. A Ph.D. as you know is those bound copies of things that sit on the shelf, but your Ph.D. produces other ideas and other projects, and other papers, and other conferences and in fact it should never end. So there is no perfect outcome. In fact, is there an outcome? Most of the learning in research is that there are hundreds of outcomes which becomes “which two of these will I do this year”? So I think the goal-setting needs to be loosened a little bit because if you lose a week or two on your PhD if you’d come in this morning and said to me, “Patrick it’s mad for the last two weeks, I haven't done a tap”, your Ph.D. is not going to suffer, because equally in six months’ time, something would have happened where you’ve got some bonus days, and you come in and say, “I have three days, you know, everybody in England went on their holidays”. And I got three full days and I managed to write this whole chapter and that's the swings of the roundabout and rigid goal-setting does not allow for the swings.

**Researcher:** Even remember at the beginning, when I said I was into DIY and you said that you could not supervise me because you’re not into DIY.

**Supervisor:** Yeah, yeah, yeah [laughing].
**Researcher:** When I’m at home, I say, okay that I’m going to power wash the walls, I have to paint the fence etc. so I start off with this vision of you know, I’m going to take the time off and go around the house, do a few jobs etc. get it started and this will be lovely, to take the stress off me. And then it becomes, “I’m going to do this by Friday, and then I have to get this done by Monday, but then Thursday is coming, haven’t done anything”. If I cannot get it done I become obsessed, that’s on top of the work, now there’s study. Then I say “You know what, I can’t do this”. I start fantasising etc. and that’s the type of cycle that I have been living in.

**Supervisor:** The power wash one is interesting, because the image I have my head is, that if I said that I would have done that by Friday, this is the image I have in my head now, and that it's Thursday and it's not done, then you have an hour, you have a power washer in this hand and the paper on the other and you’re doing both things like this and there is no enjoyment, there is no sense of timeout, there is no sense of, “oh it is great to do something a little bit different from blah blah blah”.

**Researcher:** Exactly, not at all, it’s like “how quickly can I get this panel done to get on to the next panel because”.

**Supervisor:** Yeah, yeah, chatter chatter chatter. That is all interesting because that's how we see in your writing every so often, or how you present the material, we see it in some of your tables, when I say whoa, that's not a table, that is up frying pan hitting me on the head. So it is useful, it is also interesting, and I know we have hit this once before, we were due to meet a couple weeks back, and I had to cancel it. If we run outside of the time are due to meet, even by a week or two, it actually becomes a little bit catastrophic, whereas if we managed to stay within the time we said, there’s something that regulates that fear and that is interesting. What happened, I had to change it because something had happened here and it needed to be sorted so I became Charlie in England that rings you and says that the company's gone wobbly. I became that person and that it's today that we meet up, and then it’s almost something like, “oh my god”. My question is I wonder if we met two weeks ago, in fact would this
really happen? The answer to that is importance because what you don't want to have is either me as an individual, or me as a supervisor, having that power.

Researcher: Okay.

Supervisor: It is good to be rated as if it is an issue because you need to think about it, I’ll think about it, because what I will do is, if I sense that at all, I’ll send it back to you. It is like, “No, I’ve told you before to have a look at this, so go do it”.

Researcher: Yeah, about this process of mine.

Supervisor: Yeah, because it’s a same process in work. It is happening with the PhD. It happens in your writing. It’s all the same thing. It all becomes really busy, and all the wonderful energy that you have gets sent everywhere at the same time when in fact what you need to do is the opposite. You need to sit down and go, there is the power washer, there's the paint brush, here’s a seat, and I’m going to sit down and look at them both and then decide “you know what, I cannot be bothered. I’ll go for a walk, where's the five-year-old, come on we’re going down to town, we might get a couple of ice creams. Why? No reason”.

Researcher: Yeah, yeah. That is not sitting comfortably with me.

Supervisor: No it's not, I can see it. Even the image of it!

Researcher: But when you say sit down and have a look at them and do nothing, I think aggressively, the jobs are there, get the job done, get it finished, and you can move on.

Supervisor: Well,

Researcher: It's funny because I was thinking, when I sit outside, she’d (my five year old) could also be outside if I was power washing.

Supervisor: Here's one and we need to finish, but we would put in a supervision session sooner rather than later, because we have got through an awful lot this morning, and I think there is some good learning at it so I would like to maybe come back to that in terms of the material that is on the paper, and in the computer, and on the projector, and where it is all, it is coming from everywhere. Here's a thought, and here is an instant thought
of mine, so it doesn't need any response at all. The two words you just used “moving on”. I think there is a dynamic in society that unless we are changing and improving and moving on that there’s something wrong with us. I'm going to say to you take the two words moving on and question the validity of that as a motivation.

Researcher: Yeah.
Supervisor: Okay.
Researcher: Perfect.

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Researcher: In the emergence of the findings, I have found them to be tremendously emotive and draining, particularly when I brought about the allostatic loading before. I went back to that again and found another paper as well, that demonstrates the long-term effects on adulthood from childhood maltreatment. We are talking things like advanced ageing processes etc. Given my own place now and the state of my family of origin, these are difficult topics to engage with. So the concept of me trying to plough through this, like it was when we were at the beginning, when we were looking at methodology etc., it just wouldn't work for me. I have found this quite a challenging subject matter to engage with.

Supervisor: And do you understand that response? So let's hold the line here, so it's not that you need to tell me all the ins and outs of it, but it is important that you understand that, so you can accurately capture it in your written work, in a way that it’s scholarly and useful.

Research: I think I do and as you read it, because I do reflect on this, reflect it in the introduction and also as we go.

Supervisor: As sense of melancholic response.

Researcher: Yes

Supervisor: It’s interesting as I'm skimming this and already this chapter is written in a completely different way from a completely different headspace.
Researcher: Yes, yes, and as I said, even though it is not there, I was just able to assimilate what we had talked about the last time, get back to my writing style, as well, and that's kind of coming about because I have taken literally the time scales off this.

Supervisor: Isn't it interesting when you take off the timescales, you were able to do something in a more timely fashion.

Researcher: It is and it is scary for me to say that.

Supervisor: It's an interesting one though from your work situation, so much work is goal driven and time driven, what targets can you reach in what timeframe? I just wonder if you left it off what would happen.

Researcher: What I see at work is very funny, for somebody who goes around talking about how busy they are.

Supervisor: (laughing) Yes stop talking and just work

Researcher: And they're talking about the fun run they've done for a charity during the weekend and talking about that at work all day. So, I'm quite excited about it and as I'm thinking I’m going to go in now and you will think this is off the wall and end all you don't like three letter acronyms (laughing).

Supervisor: (laughing) yes but I'm ODD.

Researcher: I kind of feel that there is something a bit new about my first finding and how it is constructed. Will I just talk you through my rationale to try and defend them so to speak? So if we go to page 8 and permanent relational toxicity. My point here is that, my role as a leader, as I find it, brings me into toxic encounters on a daily basis, predominantly because I work in two organisations of limited resources. Then I bring the concept of distributive bargaining which is basically the types of behaviours that take over when there’s a fixed pie and various parties have to get their bigger share of the fixed pie. As a leader then, I’m the point of escalation for over 260 clients so basically when a client comes to me it’s when all has failed and they are in an unhappy situation. Also there is the allocation of limited resources, failures of software systems, and they all lead to negative behaviours, that I encounter. “That is not my fault that is
not my problem”. So nearly on a daily basis, because I lead the organisation, I am exposed to the toxic situations that empirical evidence say are causes of chronic stress. And remember again, I am not trying to prove that every leader is in a toxic situation, I’m saying in my practice, my portfolio practice, on a daily basis, because of the leadership role that I am exposed to toxicity. So that is the first point. Because again the first finding is what are the specific triggers of work-related stress that I encounter. And again this is a qualitative study, this is a self-reflective, this is what has emerged from me, in my findings. Do you want me to go into the second finding?

Supervisor: I'm taken by the word toxicity and the word toxic. The image that it conjures up is of barrels of toxic substances etc. The Italian mafia drop people they don't like into this (laughing).

Researcher: So toxic situations often involve exposures to behaviours that ultimately are defeating organisation, this is when individual or organisational behaviours are propelled by personal gain, power struggles, financial disputes, status claims, unethical behaviour, vindictiveness and sometimes illegal means, manipulation and annoyance. So in addition to the distributor bargaining, other toxic behaviours that leaders will face includes distraction attempts to divert from performance shortfalls etc. Toxic situations often involved exposures to behaviours that ultimately defeating the organisation's main objectives to other employees, and to ethical and performance standards. According to Cusy and Holloway (2009), the number of toxic employees in the workplace currently appears to be growing in relation to increases in workplace stress, attributed to items such as lean staffing levels etc. stress from potential layoffs and removal completion of current benefits. So toxic work environments would be a very well-known term in the human resource management.

Supervisor: Here's what would really be interesting to have a look at in your data - if you work in an environment that is either permanently toxic, or acutely toxic, in other words it is grand, three weeks, and then it flares up and
then settles and flares up again, and if your own personal story has a lot of toxicity exposure in it, what happens if your vulnerability to your personal story is confronted with the toxic environment in the workplace? In other words, let's say that you meet somebody from your past, this weekend, and you're really distressed by it, they leave you very raw, and all your memories of childhood hurt and pain and distress get absolutely brought out as if that was yesterday. And that happens to coincide with a really bad week in the work environment, where you found out you have lost a big contract, looks like they're going to shut half the unit down, there’s four claims of bullying and harassment that need to be dealt with by tomorrow, four losses coming in the door and the company cat dies. What happens when those two things then overlap?

**Researcher:** In my second finding, what I have is my habitual responses to work-related stress, and that is kind of along similar kind of line.

**Supervisor:** Absolutely, that is absolutely true. So if your habitual responses are of let's say when your own personal story gets triggered, and your responses are to work harder to pretend it's not there, and if, the response of the work environments when it goes toxic is to repress all work motivations, so everybody goes “I'm not doing that”, or they'd do it 50% slower, or do much poorer quality, “something doesn’t meet our agreement in the work environment which is why we're not doing this”. So the work stands, but we say that “we're not doing it” but your personal systems say “do more, more, more, more, more”. What happens then? What's that clash about?

**Researcher:** I have just started to pull out findings that are related to that, and that is where we are getting to. For me, it is the role of unfinished business, which is covered in finding four that relates to the internal self-critic. So what I'm getting to there is the amount of pressure that I put on myself, the expectations that I set and the impact of unfinished business and the self-critic. It is what happens when my insecurity meets those situations, like the unstoppable force meeting an immovable object.
Supervisor: Absolutely, absolutely. Our likely inclination is to come away at the end of the week and go god, “I’m such a bad manager, director, leader”, when in fact, that is only partly accurate, because you may have well have, been a bad manager, or a leader, but, at another week, you might have gotten away with it. Because it is the interaction between the two systems, your personal one and the bigger work one, that determines the outcome and your response when you have a lot of psychological pain, is to say that it's all my fault.

Researcher: I think this is going to be very figural in the discussion chapter.

Supervisor: Absolutely. And this is the classic stuff that came out of cognitive psychology around thinking. The thinking styles of people who get depressed regularly, and people who get depressed regularly tend to have a poor view of themselves, a poor view of the world around them, and a poor view of today and a poor view of the future. At a micro level, one of the things that they do is, is that they don't accept, they don't accept responsibility for things that are going right in their lives, they don't attribute that to themselves, there is an attributional error. They attribute to other sources, so if I do a really good piece of work, ohhhh it is because of the book I read is brilliant, not because I wrote a great piece of work, so for positive events in their lives, they diminish their roles.

Researcher: It's like an external locus of control.

Supervisor: You are right, it is external locus of control, but they magnified that external locus and they minimise their own contribution and then do the complete opposite with negative events, when they write an essay and get a really poor mark, the attribution is I am stupid, I am thick I will never get this.

Researcher: Yes, yes, yes,

Supervisor: And they don't take into account that fact that they had a diagnosis of double pneumonia for the last three weeks, and they couldn't read any books or papers, so they maximise their contribution for negative events and minimise their contribution to positive events.
**Researcher:** That is hitting me like a bolt, particularly the second bit, my tendency to magnify the negative, and this is funny, I have listened back to the tapes and the transcribed supervision sessions and there are times, remember the time you said to me “why are you writing everything down when you are recording it”? I remember leaving that day feeling “you are such an idiot why are you doing that”, and for a good while in here, I forgot, that day the reason why I was doing it. And the second thing is that, the minute something goes right from me, like the minute I do well, there is an immediate sense of okay, let’s forget about that and now we need to move on immediately. There is an awful sense of “okay, well something has gone right now, so let’s just wait for the piece to go wrong”. Because that was very much the home situation, like my mother would be completely violent, if she ever saw you getting ahead of yourself, and would react. She was completely selfish, self-centred, egocentric, psychotic and like birthdays and everything would be destroyed, and you would be. I remember after my leaving cert party, where the parents were there, getting beaten afterwards just because I’ve had a good time, she could see it, and I was driving bananas, so I really learned to know, or have learned, to expect, the very worst, and it is almost as if the more you celebrated growing up, the bigger the price you had to pay. So those points have resonated very strongly.

**Supervisor:** So it will be interesting to track that or seek if it has emerged in the data. We have to watch here carefully your analysis. You could analyse this in a course way. It could be like “is my analysis head today negative or positive, and I am analysing from a place of a wounded child or analysing from a place of rational adult or successful parent, a successful employee etc”. That will be an important thing to keep an eye on, because your data can change, your themes could change depending on what shape you make of it.

**Researcher:** And yes indeed, and for me as well, situations where there are meetings where there is conflict and it triggers me to that being a child. My powers are diminished immediately, because I associate it with violence,
practically when I was a small child with violence, and it was due to alcoholism and stuff, and it was irrational, it was late at night, so if I'm tired. I know myself that tiredness is a big precursor, a big trigger of my negative cycle of responses, because I'm less capable of responding appropriately.

**Supervisor:** Yes but that just makes you normal.

**Researcher:** Oh absolutely but it has…

**Supervisor:** No go back, that just makes you normal.

**Researcher:** I do remember one school report saying that he constantly seems tired.

**Supervisor:** So that is survival mode, you were always expecting, and the difficulty is I suspect is, I remember working with somebody years and years ago, God almighty, way back. She's an adult, and living in a very difficult situation, all sorts of emotional abuse, verbal abuse, very little physical abuse, very little. But the other stuff was just so head wrecking, and naively in my head, because it is the only model I use, is the cognitive therapy model where you take thoughts and beat the hell out of them and you make them right, and I remember in the middle of work with this lady, when I realised, okay so you always expect the worst to happen but actually it does, so your so-called irrational thoughts, are actually perfectly logical and rational. Every day he did come in and say this to you and do that, or throw it in the wall, whatever.

**Researcher:** I made that point in one of the findings where I say, just as self-efficacy is the belief that I can because I have done, my irrational, my constant state of fear, is almost based on a similar thing because, I fear because it has always been that way.

**Supervisor:** And I think that is so true, so go back to that tiredness piece, if your body is in that state of arousal, it is arousal, it is an arousal response, and you will be tired. Because in effect you are working, your body is working all the time to keep you safe, to spot threat and to make sure that you duck and dive. And the way to manage it is to be able to look around and say well are there are real threats, and not just perceived ones, and if there are in real ones, then what will I now do to switch off the mechanism,
because it will not switch off itself, because you were conditioned to leave it on. And that’s where your work then like, you would take a breath, you would take a day off work, or if you’re at work you go and sit in the loo for 10 min, just because. It is those bits that actually then almost recondition your body to learn to switch off.

**Researcher:** We have that in another supervision session that we said that even just getting that 20 seconds to the water cooler, the hour in the car to go in to the meetings.

**Supervisor:** Yeah, yeah, yeah

**Researcher:** It just bought me into which finding is it, if you look at page 15, what I have called the uncontrollable field threats and paragraph 2, what I just said was that just as self-efficacy believes that I can because I have those in the past. I describe UFT as the permanent state of work-related stress I experience resulting from the impact of uncontrollable and unforeseen events, when issues within my control, these illicit anxiety-based responses which I address in the second finding, when these issues are of my all making I know that I can allay quickly with those massive all impact and it tends to be quicker because the cause and solution are visible early on. A significant theme emerged from that analysis is that the majority of issues I encounter daily are beyond my control, and that is also the demonstrating that there are two fundamental layers this. So if we go back to the first paragraph, contextually my practice is set within a time of increased threat from issues such as employee litigation, global corporate governance and response to the high-profile cases such as Enron and Anderson, and generalised threats from ever increasing globalisation etc. My previous sub finding pertaining to holistic work their loading addresses of the chronic stress I experience from the aggregate tasks completed in the execution of my portfolio role. My research also found that the majority of these tasks are executed in response to unforeseen circumstances. The impact of which over extended period of time has appeared to have resulted in a general state of anxiety from the constant knowledge that something is going to go
wrong today. I have applied the term uncontrolled field threat to describe the chronic predictive anxiety experience based on impact of uncontrollable phenomena to date.

**Supervisor:** So this is an interesting finding because almost my first response to this is that, you know what, go out of the road, hand in your resignation letter, and get the hell out of here. There is something about this which is, if you live in a world where there is that amount of threat, for the reasons you have outlined, corporate governance, fraud litigation, either you perceive that world to be full of threat, you stay in it and get sick, or you get out of it because it is not for you, or you completely re-frame it, so why does it have to be threat, so the norm in your work, is that there are unpredictable and unforeseen circumstances, that is the day-to-day experience.

**Researcher:** Yes.

**Supervisor:** So that is the norm, and if that doesn't happen and then, that should be the thing that throws you.

**Researcher:** Okay, yeah, in one way-

**Supervisor:** Because if it doesn't happen, you're saying well what is going on here, and if it didn't happen every day, if everything calm down, would you get out of it because it wouldn't be for you.

**Researcher:** Two things on that, they are very apt, one when it does calm down, I get a very eerie sense that there is something happening in the background.

**Supervisor:** (laughing)-conspiracy theorist

**Researcher:** And two, when I worked for at (Employer in the public sector) that was a very sedate role which nearly killed me, so yes. I longed to get back into that.

**Supervisor:** (laughing) you longed for frauds cases

**Researcher:** Absolutely, I needed that speed, because remember we have spoken before that meeting in Dublin till 4 AM in the morning, the buzz, the excitement, around all of that. That was lacking from the other job. I suppose like the system analogy, there are times when yes as you say, everything meets and I think that that is a very good point, everything
meets bringing tiredness. For example, when I'm lecturing at the same
time as there is a big issue at work or when there are two or three big
issues at work. There are other times whereby with self-efficacy, and
from learning my trade, I have gained respect from my job by actually
dealing with issues and getting through them. So a major client
complaint, in relation to data protection breach, how we have handled
that, how we have turned a client around who threatened to terminate,
how I responded to the class complaints when I did the ill-fated lifeline
exercise, now I look at situations and say, I know I can get through them
because I have dealt with worse before.

**Supervisor:** So here's the question? The question is, are you accurate in saying that
you live, that you work in an environment that is completely
uncontrollable, with unpredictability, the only predictability being that it
is unpredictable? Is that fully accurate, that's a rhetorical question,
because here's the bit, the other end of that becomes if that is your
environment, that is how it works and operates, then is it not your natural
response that is absolutely critical here.

**Researcher:** If we take that right, just argue it and discuss it, what I have said here are
two elements. The first piece is the fact that, in the business environment
that I work for example, over at the recent weeks whatever we found out
our company would be sold next year, it will be floated, it will go on an
IPO. If we're bought by a competitor, they could come in with their
management team and wipe out a management team below me, me
myself or significantly change it. I have no decision over the sale of the
company or who is going to buy it. So that is obviously fundamental,
that is huge, so that now has hit on the horizon, political changes, legal
changes, the whole area of compliance every time there is a change - I’ll
give an example, the last time, an employee of our company in Canada
recently stabbed four people, he was just about to be met, that brought a
whole new of plethora of controls. I could not control what an employee
in Toronto was going to do, so there is every aspect of that uncontrollable
environment creates a potential knock on effect i.e. every action has a
reaction. Now the other side of it which is, getting to some of the points that you're making, is you know the way that I use Bronfenbrenner on the next page, my argument is that leadership models tend to look at leaders in isolation in within a business context, but the model that I put together on page 19 integrates Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model also. So here I am, right here as a leader, but there again my daughter is doing her junior cert and is likely to throw something at you as opposed to you know coming to talk to you. My wife's stressed at work, friends and family seem to be all over the place with stuff going on. On the other side, my daughter and two of her other colleagues at school won in the science quiz, beating Laurel Hill School as well as 20 other schools she was up till two o'clock in the morning hyper because she wouldn't go to bed afterwards. So even before, on a daily basis there is this intrinsic combination of Bronfenbrenner’s model and the PESTEL that I as a leader have to cope with, which are largely outside my control.

Supervisor: But what is in within your control, and one of the things that you focus on in your thesis, is your responses.

Researcher: Yes correct. Frank!

Appendix F - Journal Excerpts

5th September 2012

I’ve been working on a key project to drive organic growth for the business but have failed to gain senior leadership buy-in despite the fact that this is worth 5 million to the company. I really believe that I didn’t handle the negotiations well and felt my power abate when challenged on this. Felt my grounding go and went back to feeling how I did when I am controlled and I really hate that. I need to work on where I go to when dealing with senior management and with aggression. I must say, I am really angry with myself and I am questioning my ability to influence people.
Most of the time, I am the little boy and am fearful of being punished and the minute it kicks off, I just lose my sense of self. Other times, I can move from being too docile to being too aggressive without finding the middle ground. I do like the fact that I didn’t give up on this and even though it has taken a lot out of me, I think I gave it every opportunity to happen, but why couldn’t I turn them around. It is a very difficult time at work, as I have to make three people redundant. There is a lot of anger turning toward me, particularly from those made redundant, but also on those who depend on them. There is an acute sense of being caught in the middle and a lot of anxiety all around the place. There is also a lot of intrapsychic conflict and the critic is telling me they will appeared. This is negating my role as a leader. Criticism of me from both today from an engagement session was that I was am present enough, not visible enough. Therefore, how can I call myself a leader? How can I negotiate number of transactions over the coming weeks to basically improve my visibility throughout the company?

2nd February 2013

I am sitting down to my PhD now against a back drop of a lot of negative feelings mixed with a certain level of work related excitement. I am feeling negative in that I am smoking a lot, having supposed to be off them, have been drinking more than I should have, am not doing exercise and I feel a great degree of existential vaccum i.e. outside of study, what do I really have? Constant financial problems are weighing heavy on my mind and frustration over a lack of progress in all aspects of my life are weighing heavy on me. Honestly, today, I am feeling awful- sick, tired, inadequate, just all the things I hate uuggghhh!

This week at work has been ok from the perspective of a lot is happening and it is busy so the adventurer type excitement is there. This increases my energy, my masculinity, my hunter type as I am heavily involved in sales this week. I had to travel to Dublin this week for sales meetings and do hold a frustration that things can’t move quicker. Felt weird on the train, as if I was a weirdo, sitting around people, who thought I was weird. Not a great way to be heading into important meetings.
Although I am a leader, I really do hate dealing with people a lot of times. Take (employee) for instance this week and all the conflict around that. Would like to be able to get her to see herself as other people see her to understand where she is going wrong. How can someone lack the capacity to change so much as she does? Also (Manager) is obviously losing it and relationship trouble at the back end of it however, this is turned externally and often directed at me. I am also wondering if (Manager) is trying to get my job? Could be, that leads to a constant paranoia but also a good stick to make sure I don’t slack off. Keep them close and all that.

16th March 2014

Feeling very unsure about my leadership credentials in both of my roles. I feel exhausted and really want to start feeling confident, you know, being able to relax a bit instead of thinking every day that I’m going to be found out. I’m doing this study and can see it all down on paper now, how things feed off each other and I know I need to reflect in the here and now and take my power, but why oh why can’t I do it in practice. Remember the advice from PR re actively catching it and consciously doing something with it, but why do I let it wash over me, unsettling me. Then I react and into all my bad habits, my boundary disturbances. It is absolutely painful. What did Perls say, a product of anxious automation, well that is me isn’t it. I have the tools, to reflect on any phenomena, and to achieve improvement in same. Why can’t I do this on continuous basis? It is like as if I am caught in a continuous cycle of reactivity and I lack the power to catch things in the here and now and not react. It gives me a feeling of being weak. When I feel weak I feel like why should people trust in me to lead them, when I can’t even trust in myself.

Had the recurring Wolfe Tone street (previous rented accommodation) dream this week. How much rent do I owe, oh my god, where am I going to get that from. Have to get away from mother and have got my way into town, but no, I’ve forgotten my keys, but then I find keys. I go into the room, it’s the same but different. How damp will everything be? This dream is unbelievable and I keep having it. Surely we must be talking unfinished business here. Does this have something to do with my constant
anxiety over what is around the bend i.e. that I could become homeless? I worry incessantly about that, losing the job and making the kids homeless. I think that is why I push myself so hard. It’s as if that is the fate that lies before me and because I am not good enough, I have to work harder than everybody else. When I try to relax I feel guilty and I know I don’t inspire confidence because I am always tired, always drained. What did Shakespeare say in Macbeth “Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care”. Oh God, now I am thinking about secondary school. Another recurring dream lately is that I have an exam coming up but I have nothing done for it and don’t want to do anything for it but I am powerless to make myself do anything for it. What’s that about?

I do want to get healthy but the minute I stop smoking etc. everything is magnified. I interpret language different and can jump by mail, or at people. I think very negatively as a default worrying about absolutely everything – what if the job goes, what if this happens, what if that happens, why was someone nasty to me, why didn’t that work out or why can’t I misadventure?

25th September 2014

Looking forward to the weekend because this is one week that I would hope I could relax with a degree of contentment. Have started lecturing again positively with a new sense of awareness. We have achieved a number of world class metrics in my commercial role and I am really enjoying my research. I feel that I have moved beyond the heavy lifting of data management and analysis and I am beginning to see how things knit together. All in all I don’t know how I could work any harder, but this week, things seemed to flow. I didn’t feel the critic was as strong and I seemed to be very sharp. There was a clarity there that is not always present and I felt a sense of aliveness.

I got some good feedback in employee engagement updates and people are referring to me in terms of being an astute leader. I like that and it conjures in me a sense of being street smart. When I think of myself as a child, I often think of that lad in Oliver, the pick-pocket fellow that even though was an orphan; he had the guile to survive. God, when I think of it now, I ran out of home at 17 with nothing. I remember sitting in No.3
Wolfe Tone Street (my old flat) with a candle because I had no money for the metre, and writing out a plan to get out of there on an old journal. I was savvy enough because I identified things like getting my driver’s license, moving out of Limerick at that time to make a new start, getting some work experience and changing my habits. You know what I did that and that was not easy. There is something in the space that what I call the “night of the candles” gave me without distractions. This was reflexivity in action. This was the survivor in action. Good night to that boy.

14th March 2015

I am just taking time out having finished work on my Ph.D. today. If I ever write a memoir, I think I will name it “The Only Car in the Estate”. To get the space to write, I need to come into the office I know that but how many bank holiday weekends have I been in here. Everyone else is out there enjoying St. Patricks Weekend (there I go again, the whole world) and I am in here again studying. I think that this is when I feel it most, when “all” are out there and I am here. Seriously though, there is not one car on the estate and when I say I have been studying all day, I have been working for half of it. We had big issues this week with hosting (cloud) and nothing seemed to be working. I was taking a lot of heat from staff but thankfully it didn’t transfer into customer issues as that would have been double trouble.

I feel absolutely exhausted this evening and inspiration was sadly lacking and therefore I found writing hard, very hard today. I think I would have been better off taking a break and I know PR (my Supervisor) would be saying the exact same thing. I will be in here though tomorrow and on Monday (bank holiday) trudging away. I feel enormous pressure but again, I have to say, I am doing nothing to catch this, to rationalise it and to maintain my perspective. I am being extremely hard on myself and I am lacking compassion. I need to bring my research to life now, to start trusting that adult voice and fighting back against the critic. I am so tired now but all I can hear is what I need to do tomorrow and the next day and the next day. Right Ok, tomorrow I am at least not going to set the alarm clock. I’d rather do 3 productive hours in the afternoon than torture myself as I have done today.
Appendix 6  Sample Vignettes

My Entangled Domain
Wolters (2015)

I had thought upon entering education that the “current actual” (Kauffman, 2010) of my teaching life would be defined only by the needs of my students and my own knowledge of teaching and learning. My pre-service training program had taught me to deliver small group reading instruction by judiciously matching learners with appropriate leveled text, then guiding their thinking in order to build the tool box of reading skills and strategies used by effective readers (Chall, 1996; Ehri, 1995). This pedagogical content knowledge, a healthy book room, and current knowledge of trade books prepared me to teach groups of readers with substantial spans in their reading ability. I appreciated having a framework for instruction that responded to individual student interests and needs; I thought the “adjacent possible” (Kauffman, 2010) for my instruction would be defined by matching my own teacher tools to what students needed to learn, but I was soon to discover that, for public school teachers, policy determines to a large degree both the “current actual” and, consequently, the “adjacent possible” of classroom life. In the 2004-05 school year, my second year of teaching, the newly adopted Houghton Mifflin Reading (Cooper & Pikulski, 2004) basal was thrust upon me. As I studied the teacher’s manual for the program, which was based on “scientifically based reading research” (p.iv), I noticed that, in comparison to the flexibility and responsiveness of the literacy methods I had used in my first year, the new curriculum literally tied my hands as a teacher. It was paced at one short story (or excerpted chapter book) a week from the grade level basal, each of which had a corresponding set of leveled readers, ranging in readability from one grade level below to one grade level above the basal story (p. vii); the leveled readers connected topically to the basal story. The lessons were targeted toward one skill and one strategy per week (p. 28), and there were copious numbers of workbook pages to accompany each story (p. 26-57L). Though the series was not fully aligned to the Nevada State Standards, the supposition, communicated by the trainers from the publishing company, was that the partial alignment of the basal would be sufficient to improve outcomes on Nevada’s CRT. I can say in all honesty that improving
student test scores was not once a motivating factor in my choice to become an educator, but since the No Child Left Behind Act had been passed it seemed to be the only thing driving decisions about the work of teachers. My “adjacent possible” altered drastically; no longer defined by the teacher/student/text/world connections I wanted students to explore, I was faced with innumerable tomorrows of an homogenized march of routinized, sterile, banal tasks and an endless stream of worksheets. (By the end of first month of instruction my students would have completed 83 worksheets related to the four stories read). I puzzled over my situation in attempt to find a way forward that would best satisfy the many stakeholders I served, while also meeting my own ethical imperative: to create learners who were critical thinkers and empowered self-advocates. I stared across a chasm between the pedagogical content knowledge I brought into my classroom and the curricular knowledge that I was being asked to utilize (Shulman, 1987). I suddenly felt terrifically anxious. I had not yet enough experience to realize that this programmatic prescriptive response to high stakes testing was common (Dennis, 2008; Shannon, 1987). The Houghton Mifflin trainers assured me that students simply needed to master these skills and strategies and to become effective readers; once mastered, these tip and tricks would coalesce into a controlled system for regulating meaning in text (Chall, 1996). Because the National Reading Panel’s recommendations had been made sacrosanct by federal law, the school district’s Curriculum and Instruction department tasked all teachers with implementing the new reading series with “fidelity.” There would be no avoiding the 83 worksheets. This new “current actual” meant that all decisions about text, lesson sequence, content, questioning, pacing and assessment had already been made by the publisher and my job was to follow the plan as written. Feeling irrelevant in my own vocation, I hoped that the publishers were smarter than me, because I was confused and scared.
What am I feeling? What are the Indicators in the body and what is the affect on work? What then, is the impetus to change?

(Keep 2013)

Using auto ethnography was new for the researcher and it was inspired by the work of Chang (2008), Ellis (2000, 2004), Etherington (2004) particularly as it was seen as ‘an excellent vehicle through which researchers come to understand themselves and others’ (Chang 2008:52). Journal Entry September 15th 2006 JK “For many years I have wondered from my own observations of myself, how could I maintain personal well-being and balance when working in a busy role? And what difference would it make to my work if I was taking more care of myself? Looking back, I have pushed it, working way too hard without care and attention for me. I have worked in HR, offering services to staff who work in organisations for many years, and 88 now I am a freelancing coach, and facilitator offering similar services to organisations. I’m not sure I know what ‘well-being’ looks like, although I have seen books and papers written about it, and I know something just doesn’t feel right about the way I work with little regard for myself. So, I have made a choice to ‘take stock’ of myself. The impetus for taking stock is that I can feel some of the symptoms I regularly had in the past in my body (exhaustion, aches and pains) are exacerbating, and my skin (eczema) is worsening. As I pause I can start to feel that I am exhausted, depleted. The way I am running my life is way too fast paced. I work long hours (often 6 days a week, and around 9 + hours a day) and I eat on the run, or while I’m driving, I never take time out for breaks during the day, dashing from one meeting or event to another, without giving myself time to reflect, or even use the washrooms – or breath. I am actually quite shocked and saddened realising how little time I give myself. I am constantly in a rush, and multi-tasking, (e.g. when in one task, or meeting, or discussion/phone call, I am already planning the next moment, or next task). I do keep physically ‘fit’ by walking, swimming, or cycling, but all of this is done in a driven way, all still pushing myself hard, (when I run in the gym I am reading study books!). I consciously use lots of chocolate and cups of tea to keep me going as well as eating lots of carbs as I am constantly running out of energy and use these as quick fixes. Even writing about it feels exhausting.” Journal Entry 25th September 2006 JK “I want
to break down how I feel to specifics to help me understand more about what is going on during my working day. I’m on my way home, how do I feel after a day’s work? I wonder if I did enough, did I complete all that I needed to, what have I achieved? that question badgers me - what have I achieved? I feel as though I have to have achieved something so that I can deserve to finish work, to rest, to have my supper. I haven’t given myself time today to pause, and actually if I am honest I have even delayed going to the toilet to finish an email. I certainly don’t feel very relaxed either. I am tired, dead on my feet. Feels like business as normal for me, and, like I just accept that this is how I always feel at the end of a working day, not even questioning why I feel like this, or whether I could do things differently.” Journal Entry 26th September 2006 JK “How do I feel this morning after a busy day yesterday? Tired, so I wear something that makes me feel good, more confident, I have a cup of tea to perk me up and I feel better after a cup of tea. I take some work to do on the train, and realise I always work on my train journeys to and from whichever city I am working in. I pack my days up tightly. I make sure I have some snacks in my handbag as I am always peckish, and running out of energy during the day and I have a fear of being somewhere where there is no food. When I don’t have enough food I get grumpy and find it hard to focus.” 89 Journal Entry 30th September 2006 (Saturday) JK “How do I feel on a weekend? I wake up on a Saturday feeling a sense of relief that I don’t have to travel by train anywhere to work today. I can take my time this morning. I go to the gym, and I then look forward to something I often do on Saturdays, shopping. I live near a city centre with shops nearby. I think about what I need to buy, and I walk to the shops. Saturday shopping feels like a reward for the week of working. I earn reasonable money, and so I can buy nice things like shoes, a bag, or perfume. I feel as I am shopping is how tired I am, and how much I want to go home and lie down, but I have a list of other jobs to do on Saturday, and I am a hard task master. I stop on my way home in Starbucks for a tea and something to pep me up - chocolate, and then I go home feeling like I have a hill to climb to get all of my domestic jobs done this afternoon.” Journal Entry 1st October 2006 JK “I have some relatives I have promised to visit and I feel tired again, I want to step off this treadmill, I feel too restless to rest, yet I feel too tired to do anything. There must be a different way to live life than this?” The researcher started at this point to look at the literature about self-care at work. Something struck a cord... Carl Rogers (1995:80) cites ‘I have
always been better at caring for and looking after others than I have in caring for myself’, with Pope, Tabachnick and Keith-Spiegel (1987) suggesting that 60% of practising psychologists surveyed indicated that they very often worked while under distress. There is further literature about therapeutic professions, for example counsellors - ‘psychological principles, methods, and research are applied rarely to therapists themselves, we help clients but we do not always practice on ourselves’ (Baurch 2004:64). The researcher was intrigued to understand more about this, both from the literature, and from her own journalling and reflections. Also at this time the researcher was inspired by ‘an unbiased observation of one’s inner experience and behaviour’ is thought to be foundational to self-care (Baker 2003, Brady, Guy and Norcross 1995). The researcher realised that whilst to some degree she was aware of how she was feeling that she didn’t actually know herself very well. Journal Entry 30th September 2006 JK

“I am starting to realise that if I make a conscious effort to regularly reflect, and journal, and deepen my own self awareness I might be able to understand what drives some of my behaviours. Even if I don’t get to the root of things, I may have a better 90 understanding of myself. The act of reflecting and observing myself feels daunting, as I may find out things about myself that I do not want to know, or I may not know how to deal with some of the things I observe in myself. It also feels a bit narcissistic, and self indulgent. Offering myself time to reflect does though feel already to be a potential support for me, as it does offer me a few moments here and there to pause, which is not something I have been doing. As I sit here now I feel both familiar to myself and unfamiliar to myself, I can feel some of things I do in my day, yet I don’t know why I do them. I realise that some of things I do aren’t my preference, for instance, even if I’m tired I often still make myself go out in the evening if I have committed to meet a friend, and I feel rotten for doing so (tired, grumpy, restless).” Around this time, the researcher read an quote which was due to be published in a book by Serge Benhayon (2011:583) ‘is it not better if not truer to question and or arrest the disharmonious way one lives that has caused the exhaustion in the first place than to harm the body further by making it artificially act as if it were not exhausted?’ This offered a stop moment for the researcher to contemplate further.
This period felt as though I was on a runaway locomotive that could not stop as it rampaged through sensitive areas and danger zones. The themes in the period from January 2006 to July 2006 show anger, bitterness, feeling misunderstood, and suspiciousness 116 (see Appendices B and D). The team dynamics and the power balance became very difficult. Explosive behaviors began to emerge in team meetings and there was a raised level of tension at all times. Suspicious motives were projected onto my activities, and I was feeling the slow creep of bitterness, paranoia, and suspicion with every new rule with which I was told our NGO had to comply—particularly when it usually meant an increase in salary, time off, or new benefits. I wondered at the time if I was taking on too much of the traumatized culture and if my perspective was skewed. I wondered if it was time to leave. According to McCormack et al. (2009) negative reactions are cumulative, and the fieldworker can lose sight of his or her own “normality” over time. Their case study of Vincent, a 35-year veteran in humanitarian aid, showed that prolonged involvement in difficult environments could lead to burnout, cynicism, and paranoia within the whole organization, without adaptive self-care and awareness. This period was further challenged by the addition of two new staff members, one of whom I had notvetted properly. Knowing both individuals as personal friends, and assuming I was familiar with their abilities, I believed their strengths would add energy and productivity to our work. Warchild agreed to support a temporary contract for each, and they were hired to free my time from fundraising and office administration so that I could develop our community clinical work. But an unfortunate misconception of role functions quickly led to an immediate power dynamic and a divisive fragmentation of the team. There were a number of management issues and mistakes, but the biggest failure in leadership may have been my lack of willingness to walk into the mire and meet things head on. I chose instead to stand down and wait it out. Big troubles at work over communication. For the first time I feel badgered to death. I don’t have any strength to fight anymore. (Journal log, March 22, 2006) 117 Am I making things tougher than they need to be? I have lost authority with this team member…For the first time since I came here, I hate going into work. (Journal log, April 12, 2006)
contrast to the rest of the team, I am between 20–30 years older, a foreigner, and require time to reflect on most matters, especially in the local language of which I had only a basic comprehension. Social Identity theory (Knippenberg, 2011) suggests that the more prototypical a leader is perceived to be, the more trust he or she has in representing the interests of the group and therefore being effective in initiating organizational change. At the age of only 24, Het was an idyllic leadership figure. Our new fundraiser was exceptionally bright, precisely articulate in both English and the local languages, and was politically well informed. I liked Het as a person and as a friendly ally in my personal life. She also had an impressive academic background and a strong work ethic, so I overlooked the fact she had very little experience in the area of fundraising for a charity, program development, or managing a team. Along with the positive organizational contribution Het brought to our work, there was also unfettered critical thinking that revealed itself in vitriolic, hit-the-jugular-criticism against incompetence and badges of authority. From my perspective—and to her credit—she was an outspoken, active champion of the oppressed. But the local team, seemingly feeling blocked from developing their own potential, gravitated to this ideology. It was like an instant magnetic lightning storm in the gravitational pull of this pool of unmet needs. While I write this, I am mindful this period of time would be experienced differently by the team members, and I take responsibility for my own perspective, as others will have experienced this period differently. I cannot include all the factors that developed into an acidic interpersonal environment and maintain a coherent narrative. But the elements for disruption were already present in the team, not the least of which was my burnout and fatigue, so identifying any one protagonist is not only unfair, it is also inaccurate. While our team had a public identity through its high-profile service of music therapy in the community, we were viewed from the outside, at least, in a positive light. But points of conflict and confusion constantly arose around local expectations on entitlements, perceived motives of the leader, judgments of leader competence based upon the former cultural norms of a Yugoslav communist regime, and the manipulative style of exchange that had become a common practice in the community. While the unraveling of the team was, for me, the lowest period of these four years, it was also a period of personal stretching and transformation. Adler (1975) defines this period of integration as a “basis for new intuitive, emotional, and cognitive experiences. The
reintegration phase of the transition may be a point of existential choice for the individual experiencing a broad spectrum of intense emotions” (p. 17). These posts precede the entry of the two employees and refer to both my personal friendships outside of the work environment and my own intersubjective world ethos that is not a new issue. And I have since learned that this is the crux of transformational opportunities where early maps of beliefs and ways of being are confronted in disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 1985). This fluctuating sense of power to impotence is a daily theme. Yesterday felt empowered—but then the impotence returned. I must focus on where I feel potent— where I can be effective and make a difference. (Journal log, January 18, 2006) Notice the vulnerability again – but not so unmanageable. Decisions are mine for me to decide, not based on someone else’s approval (Journal log, January 19, 2006) But the reality for me was that the team was galvanized into a frenzy of excitement, not the least of which was about having a new flag to fly under and gaining personal authority in the situation while the old authority was undermined. Up until now, program development and our outreach work took most of my attention. So when Het correctly identified several administrative areas that needed strengthening and set to work, the team was ecstatic. I was 119 relieved with mixed emotions because this was not what Het was hired to do and role-boundaries were crossed constantly in the interpersonal dynamics. Things were moving too quickly for me. Fundraising was largely sidelined, and everything seemed out of control as Het took charge of our team meetings and changed decision-making into a democracy model—from which I was not allowed to vote. Nobody noticed the irony of this. Such glory all around me … The throne was gold and dressed in red—not fancy— A woman’s voice—singing…’entreated me to receive my rightful duty’. So I followed the path before me…but only stood before it. ‘Sit!’, they implored… It is your duty—your right—the voice reminded me. Still—I could not sit. It was not for me, this throne. Then I heaved it up onto my shoulders— On my shoulders it was light—a normal chair. Ibbotson (2008) says of leadership, “The director is not one who hires you or rewards you in financial terms. The director is the one who holds the narrative—who makes sense of what you do”(p. 11). When the programs were first set up in 1998, the vision and planning for sustainability was removed by the then director of the PMC at the last minute. Henceforth the program existed from year to year on its good work in the community, but with no provision for eventual local control. No
one held the whole narrative—save for a partial legacy handed aurally from one leader to another at handover time. It was my hope to retrieve this part of the original vision and build a sustainable, coherent program. The formation of Musers was the first step in this, but it forced us all to look at our roles and responsibilities differently while simultaneously 120 fundraising. Het’s energetic entry into our small work community was like bringing in the whole train to travel a few blocks. Instead of creating a map, it ran amuck through the middle of town. I had lost myself and it did not occur to me to take a stronger mentorship role to help order the forces. At the time I was not functioning from a healthy perspective. I became very saturated and had to leave work…Feel boundaries have been crushed, and feel harm is, or has been, done…depression creeping in. (Journal log April 14, 2006)
Appendix 7  Excerpt from 1 x Finding Analysis Protocol

Analytic Category: Hazardous Environmental Factors

Finding: (Subfinding). The holistic or aggregate of demands I experience as a leader constitutes a hazardous environmental factor.

Why? Demands that are outside of my control are continuously bombarding me preventing the satisfaction of one need before a multitude of contemporaneous demands are placed upon me.

Why Not? I don’t feel like I can argue with this. The evidence from the data supports this. I don’t enjoy the same protection as employees and I am expected to deliver, no matter what comes my way?

Why? This is my job; I am the leader. It is expected of me. I am expected to set the agenda, to be invincible and to deliver, no matter what.

Why not? Well, I push myself. I say yes. I set higher and higher targets. I need to prove myself, and the voice keeps telling me that I am not good enough no matter what and I have to be seen to succeed, to show them all, that I am not a failure.

Why? Because I am a failure, that’s what I think and that’s how I go into everything, so every little victory is a notch on the belt, a sign to myself I’m not a failure. I am however, only as good as my last little win.

What is happening here: I have no boundaries, I can’t say no, the way some of them do to me. I think, how can I possibly refuse. If I do, they’ll get someone else. I live in constant fear and I need
to do it all. If I stop I’m going to make the kids homeless, it all comes down to me.

What other explanations are there? Well, I am very competitive, and quiet vain, although I deny this openly. I hate loosing and can be quiet obsessive once I set my mind on something. So I will take on more and more and more because I want more and more. I did hear some comments in 360-degree feedback that “he’s empire building”. I don’t think this is true but I am trying to do my job and I see that as growing the business.

What assumptions am I making? That there are objective hazards outside of my control i.e. legislative, compliance? Then there are subjective demands like trying to be too ambitious?