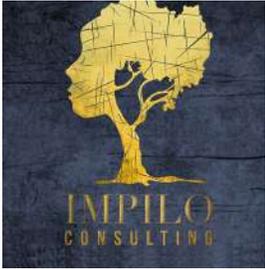# Who is the Client?
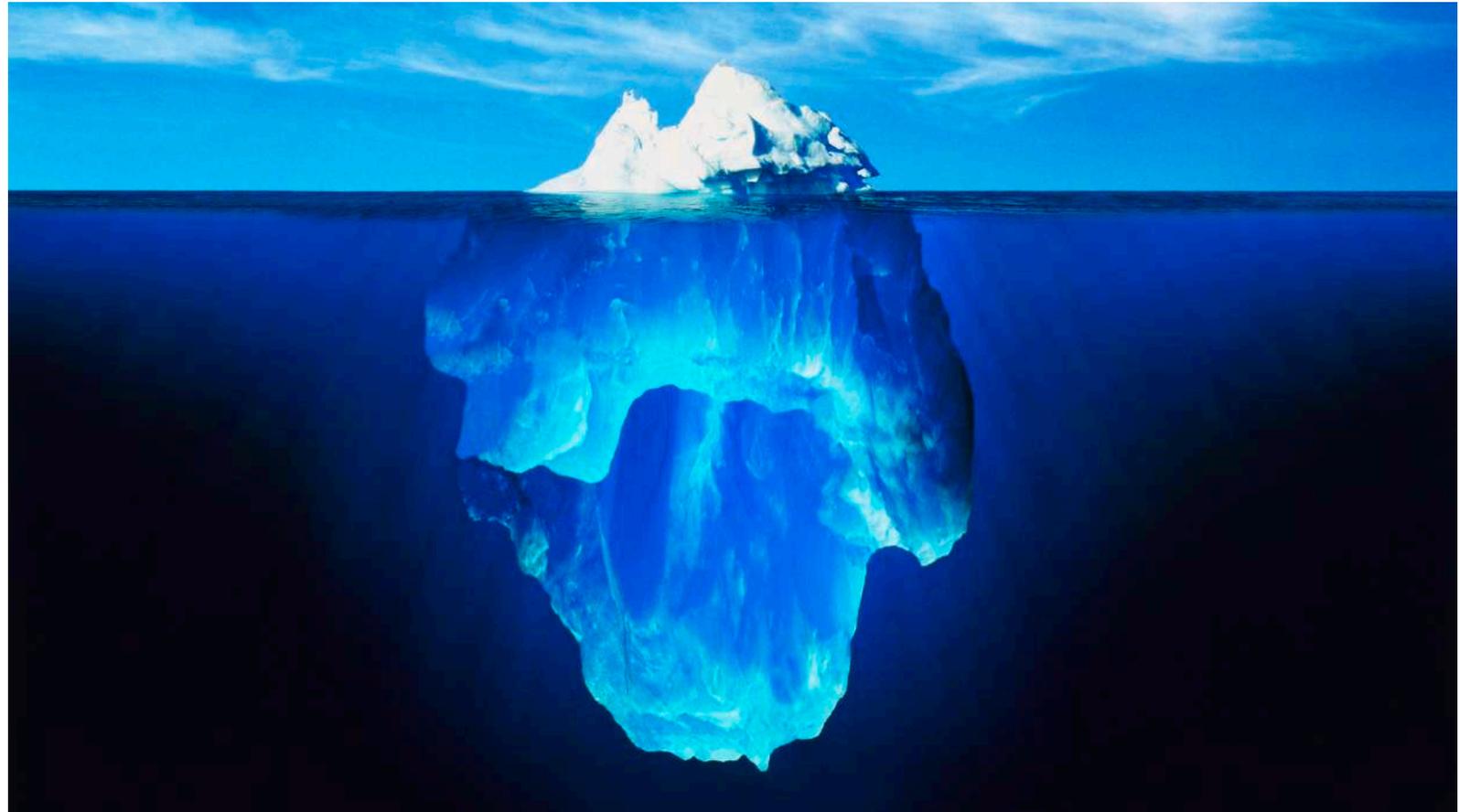# Using a systems-psychodynamic approach to diagnose and intervene with an organisation

"It is common experience at work, as it is in life, that plans that are made are not carried out, that decisions that are agreed are not enacted, and that timetables that seem obvious somehow turn out to be unmanageable"

Anton Obholzer, 1999

- Why do things go wrong?

- Why do they keep going wrong?

Practical Realities of an Organisation and What Lies Beneath

Systems-Psychodynamic Approach:

- Three overlapping frameworks of thinking:

- systems thinking:

- group behaviour:

- psychoanalytic theory:

  one aligned approach

- Primary task → understand the deeper and unconscious meaning of organisations

- Organisations must deal with practical realities AND what lies beneath

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"When I'm at home, I think about work. When I'm at work, I think about home. When I'm driving between work and home, I don't know what to think about!"

The Organisation of Anxieties:

- What you do (or can't do) in your family is what you will do at work.
- Personal anxieties get played out at work.
- Examples:
    Sibling rivalry and conflict in groups.
    Problem with manager and can't get along with father
- Some people turn to organisations to take care of their personal conflicts and anxieties.
- Lots of upset when this does not happen.

The Role of Anxiety in Change

Core Anxiety (dread of the unknown)

Personal Anxiety

Work Related Anxiety

Organisational culture
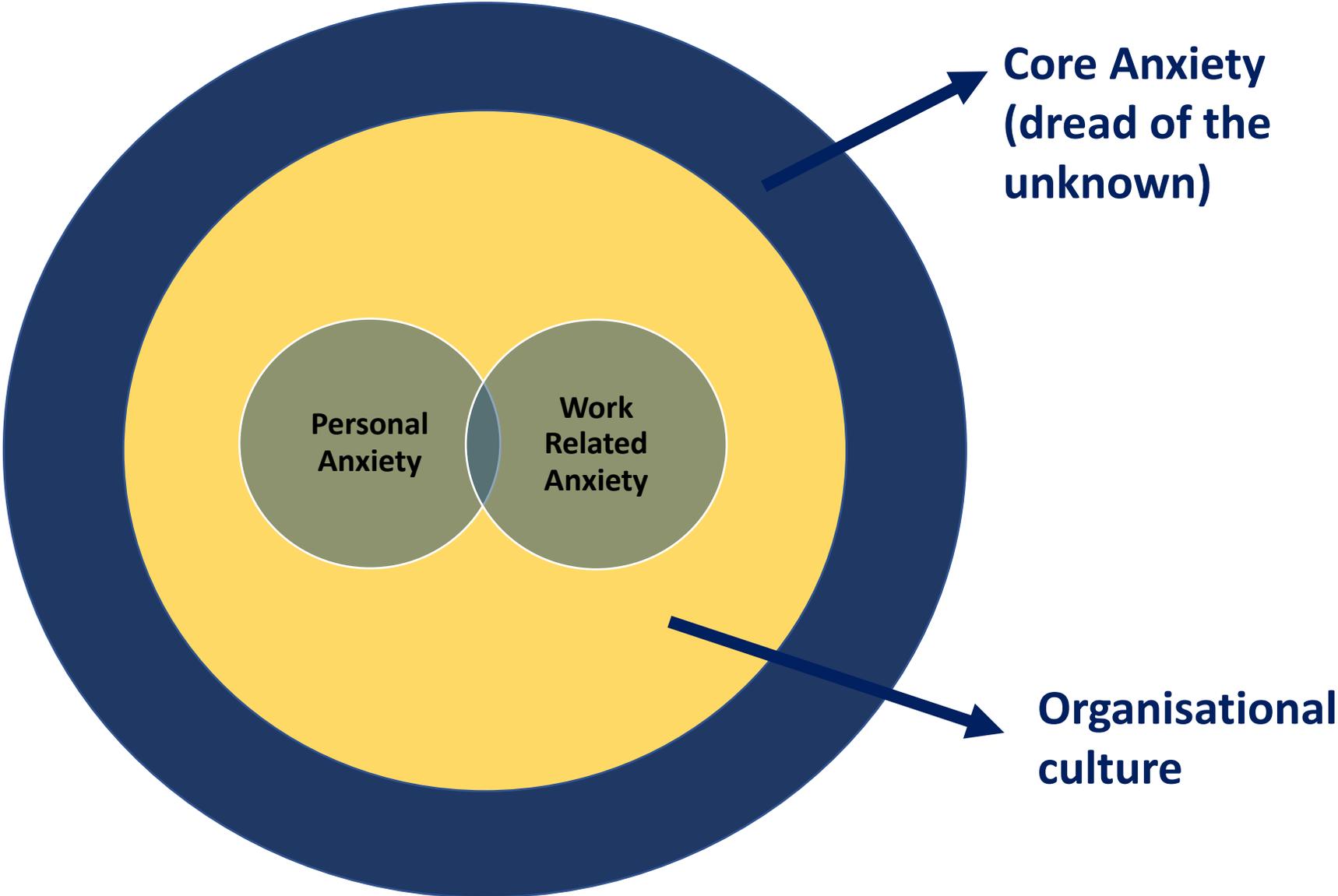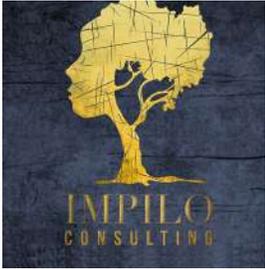
Core Anxiety

- All pervasive anxiety that is the fate of mankind

Situation:

Organisational and System Change

Our Approach/Diagnoses:

- Several changes in management over 5 years
- Fend off dread of the unknown; threatens bond of belonging causing resistance. Change immediately causes a defensive backlash.

Intervention and Outcomes:

- Shared sense that no one felt listened to or able to listen
- Understand →changes (what's really going on)?
- Process change→ acknowledge loss→ create openness to new structures
- New ways of working →new relationships →new boundaries
- More supportive of management and vice versa

Personal Anxiety
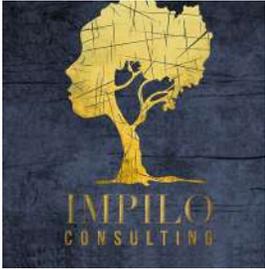
- External and work issues trigger → inner world → disturbance → manifest at work

**Situation:** Leadership Development

Our Approach/Diagnoses:

- Employee entry level management → history of authoritative parents → never felt acknowledged at home. Vulnerability and resentment. How does this play out at work?

- Hierarchies of authority in organisations evoke family hierarchies and reproduces sense of childishness

Intervention and Outcomes:

- Needs assessment, lines of communication, rules and roles : but what are we adding?
- E.g.: splitting and projection. What is being played out here? What are the roots?
- Race, class, gender, living and working in SA (embedded is a long history of trauma)
- E.g.: African black woman under protection of white male leader reproduces old colonial setting
- E.g.: a woman challenging a man in an authoritarian position?

Anxiety Arising from the Nature of Work
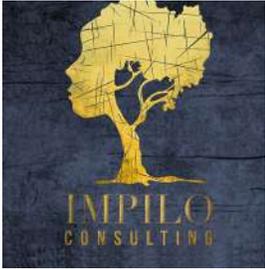
- Organisations good at promotions and incentives
- Not so good at "This work is hard, tell us about it…"
- Organisations continue to work with trauma and pain that is never spoken about

Situation:
- Conflict between employees in an organisation dealing with trauma.

Our Approach/Diagnoses:
- Understanding individuals, organisation and South African context.
- Presenting conflict was smoke, signaling fire within organisation.
- Power, race & trauma not spoken about→ people turn on each other
- Mirrors issues of clients, organisation and South African context

Intervention and Outcomes:
- Therapeutic space between manager and staff member
- Therapeutic group for all staff members.
- Staff able to express pain and trauma of the work
- Staff feeling empowered to express needs to Director of organisation

Who is the Client?
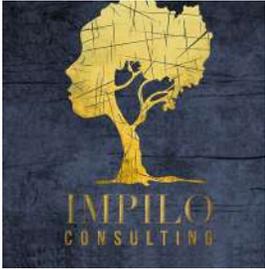
- **Why do things go wrong?**
  What lies beneath gets denied

- **Why do they keep going wrong?**
  "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." (George Santayana, 1905)