The lecturer must also modify the concept as presented in advance, telling the students that there are other concepts that may also fit. This increases uncertainty in the group. People who are used to being taught ready-made solutions are especially likely to complain that the change is not due to the overwhelming complexity of reality, but rather to the lecturer's incompetence. Nonetheless, the learning opportunities are significant if the facilitation of the group works. A wide space for creativity is opened. Students have the opportunity to gather different points of view and different emotional reactions to the issues discussed. The experience is primarily about students recognizing their own behavior and the reaction of the rest of the group to it – in other words, the here-and-now experience of a large-scale feedback process. Although there is no guarantee that the group will reach this state of the process, the approach discussed below can at least provide the possibility for it. The advantage of a group's here-and-now experience lies in the deep impact of learning by consciously including and connecting the emotional as well as the rational aspects. The basic ideas for this kind of learning have been developed extensively in the Austrian tradition of group dynamics, especially in the settings of T-Groups and O-Labs (cf. Kasenbacher 2013, 120–121; Lesjak 2013, 84–87; Krainz 2008, 27–28).

The challenge for lecturers (consultants) using the didactic approach is to navigate within the field of tension created by the two extreme poles, and thus to

- assume and fulfill the role of a professional authority (transmitting transcendent knowledge);
- shift from this role to that of a group facilitator (facilitating group reflection on leadership); and
- initiate a process by shifting the focus of the group from passive reception of transcendent knowledge to active participation in a mutual feedback process on immanent phenomena.

9.2 A psychodynamic view of leadership

I used the following considerations, based on psychodynamic concepts, to frame the design of a lecture on leadership.

For reasons of space, the view presented here is limited to the issue of fears and anxieties, and how they can be contained. From a psychodynamic point of view, one of the goals of leadership[3] can be seen as providing a way to contain such fears and anxieties of the individual or group led by the leader. By containing these fears and anxieties, the leader enables the led to focus their energy on the task at hand.

»**Anxiety** is a feeling of nervousness or worry« (Cobuild 1999, 64). Consciousness can be seen as a reason to know about the fact of individual vulnerability and the uncertainty

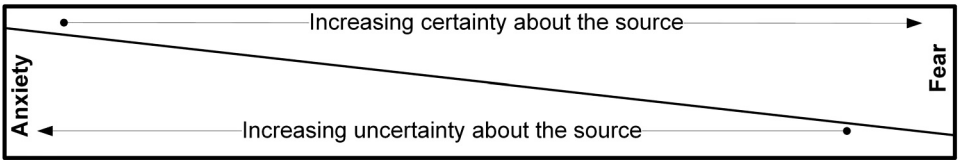
3 Leadership, as opposed to management, "implies looking to the future, pursuing an ideal or goal. Furthermore, leadership, by definition, implies followership, while management does so by a much lesser degree" (Obholzer 1994a, 43).

of life; the costs associated with this knowledge can be called »anxiety.« When the feeling of nervousness or worry is attributed to a specific source – e.g., I think I am going to die soon because the plane I am on is being rocked by a storm – it is called »fear.«

> 1 **Fear** is the unpleasant feeling you have when you think you are in danger. … 2 If you **fear** someone or something, you are frightened because you think that they will harm you. … 3 A **fear** is a thought that something unpleasant might happen or might have happened. (Cobuild 1999, 611)

Fig. 57 shows the relationship between anxiety and fear. Because of the certainty of the source, fear actually involves more rational aspects than anxiety. In the context of organizations, fear raises questions that are directly related to an assignment that is limited in both time and space.

Fig. 57: Relationship between anxiety and fear

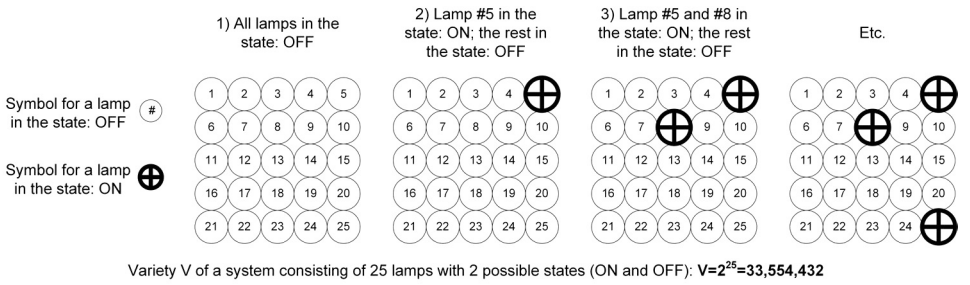


Source: Schuster 2015, 217

As for specialization, the fear of failure can be reduced by training. If you want to be a good accountant – and thus reduce your fear of being able to do bookkeeping – you must seek good training (education) in bookkeeping etc. Organizations can be seen as collective efforts to produce a certain output by coordinating different specialists. By connecting bookkeepers with software programmers, aspects of specific fear are blurred, since the fear of failure of a bookkeeper may not be relevant for a software programmer. The next level of the hierarchy is therefore confronted with decisions that cannot be based on specific analytical data, but rather must be synthesized from different types and sources of analytical data. This necessarily involves less specific sources of fear. It is not useful to define a specific point at which fear turns into anxiety due to decreasing certainty of the source. Furthermore, there is no escape from decreasing certainty, because organizations must reduce complexity in order to move forward.
To get an idea of the complexity of a system, one can calculate what is called "variety".

> Variety is defined as the quantity of distinguishable states of a given system. A system consisting of 25 lamps either with the possibility to be switched ON or OFF has more than 33 million distinguishable states (Figure 58) (cf. Malik 2003, 187–188 [translated by the author]).

Fig. 58: Variety of a system



Source: Malik 2003, 188; slight modification by the author

Imagine the variety of 25 people – instead of the lamps – dealing with different problems according to their specialization and the role within an organization. Pragmatically, it can be said that, because of variety, people who are directly related to a certain task are likely to face fear, and the more people who are indirectly related to certain tasks, the more they will face anxiety. There is a certain amount of insecurity in any organizational endeavor, and therefore the only reliable answer to the question of the "organizational endeavor" in the end is the fulfillment of the whole task itself, and it is very easy to be wise in retrospect. Too much doubt during the working process can be the reason for failure, as well as too little doubt. Since fear is related to an identifiable source, leaders must always – at least in organizational endeavors of a certain size – deal with anxiety instead of fear. The reason for this is that even if a leader is trained in a particular field and therefore has deep insight into problems arising from that field, there will always be other areas of knowledge involved where the leader has no choice but to listen to the expertise of subordinates who are specialists in those areas.

Fear can help leaders identify areas within the planning process where adjustments to the ongoing process are needed. These adjustments are usually made by maintaining routines and demonstrating professionalism. The leader's challenge during the ongoing process is to listen to subordinates' questions about their fears and decide whether to make adjustments and/or to relieve the questioner of responsibility. Leaders must use subordinates' fears as data to make a decision, thereby alleviating the fear and allowing subordinates to do the necessary work undisturbed (cf. Halton 2009, 18). In routine, day-to-day situations within organizations, the existing specialized language, approved methods of problem solving, and standard tacit knowledge[4,5] about leadership are most likely sufficient for a leader to deal with his or her anxiety as triggered by subordinates' fear.

Basically, emotions are fundamental to the functioning of organizations.

4 Tacit knowledge is understood here as knowledge of how to do something correctly without having an elaborate theory of the underlying relationships.

5 It is critical to differentiate between reflection on immanent phenomena and transcendent knowledge as a more general concept of directness and uncertainty in contradiction to detachment and certainty. While the ideal type of transcendent knowledge is storable, immanent phenomena are elusive and storing such phenomena is rather difficult and is merely done in myths and tales.

> "Rationality" in organizations is … often nothing but a synonym for a certain discipline of speaking, thinking, calculating, and behaving, limited by taboos and prohibitions of speaking. … What is labeled rational is, with respect to cognition, a matter of standpoint; seen socially, it is a matter of power or a question of the applicable standards. (Krainz 2011, 26–27)

Emotions in general, and fear and anxiety in particular, can be seen as hidden or, as Lewin (2008a [1940], 187) put it, frozen in routine. Changes and/or disruptions to routine work, for whatever reason, can unleash collective anxiety beyond the capacity of conventional leadership approaches. Depth psychology provides useful explanatory models and possible scenarios for dealing with these situations. Obholzer identified three levels of anxiety: primitive anxiety, anxiety arising from the nature of the work, and personal anxiety (1994b, 206). *Anxiety arising from the nature of a leader's work* is discussed above.
Primitive anxiety, according to Obholzer

> refers to the ever-present, all pervasive anxiety that besets the whole of humankind. … It is the terror of the baby afraid of being left alone in the dark, of the child who hides under the covers from »the monsters under the bed«, of the person who wears an amulet as protection against "evil eye". … [P]ersonal anxiety … we feel when something triggers off elements of past experience, both conscious and unconscious. (Obholzer 1994b, 206–207)

Both primitive and personal anxiety – most often a combination of the two (cf. Obholzer 1994b, 207; Hinshelwood & Skogstad 2000, 4) – can be triggered by real or imagined life-threatening situations.[6] These anxieties can be triggered and spread among an organization's employees, for example, during periods of change, mergers, or acquisitions. Stein (1996, 123–151), using concepts from depth psychology, impressively elaborated the impact of anxiety triggered by mass layoffs on the functioning of organizations. Many aspects of human behavior can be reduced to primitive anxieties, as Diamond showed in his paper, "The social character of bureaucracy: Anxiety and ritualistic defense" (1985, 1–22).

A high-contrast example from real life might help the reader to understand the theoretical concept. The death of an individual is a typical fact of life that is highly likely to trigger anxiety.

> Death is universal and will come to us all and to those we care about at some time. We know this intellectually, but we may well try to defend ourselves from the emotional impact of personal death or the death of someone close to us. (Speck 1994, 94)

The fact of death shows the difficulty of awareness of that fact. If a person thinks too much about the possibility of his or her own death, life may become a horror of overwhelming anxiety. On the other hand, if a person does not accept the possibility of dy-

6 Here, it is important to understand that the problem for those affected remains the same no matter whether the threat is real or imagined.

ing at all, he or she may not be able to get in touch with life.[7] In the first case, the personal defense[8] against the fact of death would be too weak; in the second, it would be too strong. The right amount of defense is therefore critical to being able to maintain contact with the emotionally painful – and inevitably uncertain – facts of life. According to psychodynamic concepts, each individual has a greater or lesser degree of conscious and unconscious anxiety, and copes with it by using defense mechanisms. In addition, social systems can support the individual's own psychological defenses (cf. Hinshelwood & Skogstad 2000, 4). In light of that, Speck noted that "[o]ne of the unconscious attractions to working with dying people is that the work-role can serve to maintain the fantasy that death happens only to other people" (1994, 94). This shows that an exaggerated personal anxiety can be managed by choosing a correlating and, in the best case, a well-fitting and balanced job. In the following quotation, Speck describes his story of being called into a hospital intensive care unit (ICU) in his role as a chaplain to talk to the parents of a dying boy named John (1994, 94–100).

> John[,] aged thirteen, had been knocked down by a lorry on his way to school. His mother, Mrs Brown, explained how he had been late for school and she had shouted up the stairs, "You're late! Get out of bed or else …!" John eventually ran downstairs, dressing as he made for the front door. He said that he was too late for breakfast, ran off down the road, and at the corner ran out into the path of the lorry. He had been diagnosed as probably brainstem-dead, and the final definitive tests were awaited.
> As Mrs Brown talked, I became more and more upset and unable to listen to her. I just wanted to shut her up and to get away. It was increasingly difficult for me to stay in the room, let alone in my role. I realized I needed to leave and sort myself out; eventually I apologized and left the waiting room. Outside, a senior nurse, René, asked me what was wrong. I said I was very distressed about David. "David who?" she asked. "I said the David who was in ICU and brainstem-dead. But we haven't got a David," she said, "only a John. Come and see." She took me into the side room where John lay. I realized it was not David, my son.
> Then I remembered, how that morning as I was leaving for work, I had heard my wife shouting up to our son "You're late! Get out of bed, now!" When Mrs Brown had used almost exactly these words in telling me her story, she momentarily became my own wife, telling me that our son was dying. In the ICU waiting room, I had been so identified with the situation that I became a stricken father, not a chaplain. Once I realized what was happening, I returned to the waiting room. As I apologized again for leaving, Mrs Brown threw her arms around me and said, "It's all right, Vicar. I could see you were upset." We were then able to work together on how she and her husband might face the impending death of their son. (Speck 1994, 95)

7 The best way to get an idea of the expression »out of touch with life« might be to listen to the famous song "The Rose", performed by Bette Midler, among others (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxSTzSEiZ2c, accessed on July 27, 2022). Two verses are particularly relevant: It's the dream afraid of waking that never takes the chance … and the soul afraid of dying that never learns to live.

8 Defense, in the context of this paper, is seen as the psychological or mental response of an individual and/or group to external facts and/or internal fantasies.

This example shows how powerful the effect of triggered primitive and personal anxieties can be. Speck vividly described how he was overwhelmed by his anxieties about the possible death (primitive anxiety) of his son (personal anxiety of a father). For a moment, the inevitable reaction, according to Speck, was flight, but because of his professionalism, he performed the socially correct action. This shows that there was still some containment by Speck. It would be possible for a person who could not resist the impulse to shut down the source of the painful message to turn aggressively on the messenger. The limited complexity of the situation, the professional assistance by the senior nurse René, his own professionalism, and Mrs. Brown herself, despite her consternation, made it possible for Speck to be able to think clearly, step back in his role as chaplain, and quickly regain control of his anxieties. Nonetheless, this example shows how anxiety can influence rational thought by subconsciously defending against important parts of thought – and thus altering and/or prohibiting them. If variety is added into the social situation, it is easy to see how even small influences of anxiety can build up into massive confusion (disorientation) within an organization, especially if there is mutual reinforcement of anxiety among those involved. In terms of leadership, the most important aspect of anxiety and related defenses is to keep them in balance and, in doing so, maintain contact with the facts of such circumstances.

The defense mechanism of hierarchy – in the best case – is for a leader to contain fear and/or anxiety by removing uncertainty from his or her subordinates. Part of this would be making decisions and telling subordinates clearly what to do. The problem with this is that the leader's view, as mentioned above, is inherently fuzzy. This means that the leader's source for removing uncertainty from subordinates cannot be certainty, but must be faith in the future and in the rightness of the planned goals. Nonetheless, the leader must frequently conduct reality tests to ensure that he or she is still on the right track. The ability to contain one's own anxiety and that of subordinates is therefore a very important aspect of a leader's personality. Especially in situations involving change or surprises of any kind, the level of anxiety increases in both the leader and the subordinates. A leader is therefore not only confronted with his or her own increased anxiety, but also with the increased anxiety of all his or her subordinates. Using the example of the »Jonah« sequence from the movie "Master and Commander" (Weir 2003 [1:09:20-1:22:20]), we can distinguish three ways in which a leader (captain) may respond to the anxieties of subordinates (the crew). (1) *Containment of anxiety;* the leader (captain) faces the doldrums and can accept that this may be his and his crew's death. He is also able to conclude – as well as he can do – that no matter how long the doldrums last, it is best to control the crew and their increasing anxiety for as long as possible by giving them hope and remaining convinced of a positive outcome. He is experienced enough to know that there is a possibility that the crew will panic and mutiny, so he thinks about how best to distract them. (2) *Presentation of a scapegoat*[9] *to the crew;* the leader (captain) knows the relief a scapegoat can bring to him and his crew. He also knows that it is a matter of buying time. As a result, the leader himself sets up one of the crew as a scapegoat to

9 In the "Jonah" movie scene, there is a brief sequence where Dr. Maturin accusingly remarks to captain Aubry that he, like many other men, also might believe in the curse of Hollom [01:17:41-01:17:56].

distract the others.[10] (3) *The leader becomes a scapegoat himself;* if a leader cannot handle the situation and provide a container for anxiety, he or she may end up as a scapegoat. The scapegoat also functions as a container, but at the cost of being sacrificed for the (unconscious) purpose of containing a group's anxieties. Conscious, ritualized "sacrificial death is a bargain with the gods for the benefit of the community for which the sacrifice is made" (Krainz 1989, 115 [translated by the author.]). This paper focuses on the unconscious potential drive of groups to seek a scapegoat to contain their anxieties. The leader is not exclusively at risk of becoming the group's scapegoat, but the exposed position of leadership increases the likelihood that the leader, rather than another member of the group, will become the scapegoat. Another aspect of choosing a scapegoat is that

> many groups and organizations have a »difficult«, »disturbed« or »impossible« member whose behavior is regarded as getting in the way of the others' good work. There may be a widely shared belief that if only that person would leave, then everything would be fine. (Obholzer & Roberts 1994, 130)

These authors refer to the biblical story of Jonah and the »popular explanation … that all would be well if only the evil ones, the troublemakers, could be got rid of« (Obholzer & Roberts 1994, 129).

9.3 A psychodynamic perspective on the »Jonah« film sequence

We used the »Jonah« scene from the movie "Master and Commander" (Weir 2003 [1:09:20-1:22:20]) to teach the possible effects of anxiety in groups and how to deal with it as a leader. The characters focused on in this paper are Captain Aubry, Carpenter's Mate Nagle, and one of the midshipmen, Hollom.[11] The captain is the leader of the crew, and as such, has the highest rank on the ship. In terms of physical space, the captain has his own cabin. Carpenter's Mate Nagle is at the bottom of the hierarchy, and as such, he lives with the crew in shared quarters. The midshipmen are in a transitional position. They must sleep in the crew's quarters and are physically still a part of the crew, but they are also already in a higher hierarchical position than the other men. This situation has a high potential for distress. The midshipmen[12] must deal with the following four extremes:

1. The physical force they must face. If the rest of the crew were to turn on them physically, their chances of withstanding the onslaught would be minimal.
2. The principle of hierarchy, which gives them power over all the subordinate men despite their (relatively lacking) physical strength.

10 This is a very common way for leaders to shirk their responsibility to contain the anxieties of their subordinates. The scapegoat takes all the blame and relieves the anxiety of both the leader and the subordinates. An interesting movie that deals with the issue of a sacrifice provided by a leader to avoid responsibility is "Wag the Dog" (Levinson 1999).

11 For the corresponding cast of the movie, see the appendix 9.6.

12 The commander is under the same stress but has already learned how to deal with it by following a similar career path as a former midshipman.