Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KATHERINE TULPA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface: what this book does</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Introduction: what is group coaching?</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Learning, holding and exchange</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Looking deeper: the secret life of groups</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Eight group factors influencing learning and change</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 3</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Understanding organizations, groups and teams: systems thinking</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 4</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Team coaching</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Learning group coaching</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Supervision groups</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://www.psychotherapyparena.com/group-and-team-coaching-9780415472289
viii CONTENTS

Part 5 191

9 Strategies for tackling problem behaviour 193

10 Groups that do not work: understanding and tackling dysfunctional patterns in group behaviour 214

11 Managing beginnings, middles and endings: boundaries of the group 233

Afterword 250

Part 6 251

Suggested further reading 253

Continuous professional development in the unconscious dynamics of groups and organizations 255

Frequently asked questions 258

References and bibliography 260

Index 269
Part 2’s opening page (p. 21) shows how this chapter links to group themes overall.

Two fundamentals
Implicit knowing
Projection
Transference
Holding
Exchange
This chapter sets out some essential concepts. It opens with a discussion of ‘implicit knowing’, ‘projection’, and ‘transference’, which are central to communication processes and to emotional and social intelligence. It discusses learning, focusing on a pair of ideas: ‘holding’ – establishing a sense of safety – and ‘exchange’ – enabling the encounter with something new. These are fundamental to all learning, and so to all coaching, and are discussed in relation to group coaching.

The antiquity of groups

The processes through which groups promote individual learning and change are widely relied upon, but little comprehended. For many people, why and how groups help people to learn is something of a mystery.

‘The relationship precedes the individual’, and we can speculate that the power of group learning has its origin in our origin as creatures who survived by cooperating in a group. Many theoreticians provide evidence for the unavoidably social context of learning. Groups were our original element, and being in a well-functioning group
can give a profound feeling of security and well-being. Conversely, we greatly fear bad group experiences. Most of our responses in groups are automatic, below the conscious level most of the time. This is because we are well adapted to understand non-conscious, non-verbal communication in groups. Recent neuroscientific discoveries suggest that our brains are actually constructed to respond to others, and join up with the work of Daniel Goleman, who has recently extended his concept of ‘emotional intelligence’ to ‘social intelligence’. Goleman argues that this ability to influence others’ mood and experience is essential to outstanding leaders.

‘Implicit knowing’

Daniel Stern, whose work blends developmental psychology with psychoanalytic insights, speaks of ‘implicit knowing’ – our ‘non-symbolic, nonverbal, procedural awarenesses’:

we feel it in our body and sense it in our mind, together. You can also grasp what a group is experiencing. Our nervous systems are constructed to be captured by the nervous systems of others . . . we resonate with and participate in their experiences, and they in ours.

Groups are particularly good at bringing these unnoticed aspects of knowledge into the conscious realm, because the multiple perspectives of the individual members ‘amplify’ the communication and act as a reality check on each other.

For this reason, in the interpersonal arena, groups score heavily over every other kind of professional development. While individual coaching offers an opportunity for effective feedback from one other person, group coaching offers the client a far wider range of perceptions and responses. As an arena for interpersonal learning and developing interpersonal skills, properly run groups cannot be equalled.

Projection

In psychological writing, projection is a defence mechanism in which we attribute parts of ourselves to others. These
parts are disowned characteristics, often parts of ourselves that we do not like and prefer not to be aware of. The process is unconscious, so we are not aware that the projected characteristic is our own.

**Examples of projection**

- I do not like to think of myself as arrogant, so deny my arrogance and regard another person as arrogant
- I am unfaithful, and I suppress my guilt while feeling worried about whether my partner is faithful
- I do not like myself and so imagine that other people do not like me.

For me, the other person then carries my disowned arrogance, unfaithfulness or disliking. Sometimes the person I project onto shares some of my disowned characteristic, and may project theirs on me, so that we are mutually critical of the same characteristics. In group analytic thinking this is called ‘negative mirroring’ (see Chapter 3).

Not everything we project is negative: we can project positive aspects of ourselves, for example regarding the group coach, or a senior colleague, as having all the expertise in the world, while we ‘know nothing’. Whether its content is positive or negative, projection cuts us off from awareness of our whole selves.

Projection can be seen as a more extreme form of an everyday psychological process. When communicating, we all the time compare ourselves and understand each other through innumerable small identifications and distinctions. Our perceptions are always influenced, and sometimes distorted, by our previous experiences: we never have 20:20 psychological vision.

**Transference**

Transference is a particular form of projection. It is a pattern of relating to others in the present, influenced by projections
resulting from patterns in past relationships. It is a specific misinterpretation of relationship, which through repetition becomes self-fulfilling in the present. Strong feelings in the here and now are related to my past experiences. The past comes alive in the present, triggered by something happening in a relationship now. The process occurs below consciousness, in a way analogous to how smells can evoke strong memories.

Examples of transference

- I have the strongest sense at this moment that my boss is just like my beloved father
- I experience the same emotions towards a team colleague that I felt towards my brother, with whom I competed
- My current work situation feels just like a traumatic period at school in my teenage years.

My behaviour towards the people who are the objects of my transference is likely to provoke behaviour in them that ‘matches’ my transference, entrenching my belief.

These two concepts, projection and transference, are connected with ‘mirroring’ in groups, which is discussed in Chapter 3. It is worth highlighting that because we evaluate all new experience on the basis of prior experience, minor projective and transference reactions are normal and to be found everywhere – for instance when we feel warm or cool towards someone new, or say ‘you are just like my friend Jane’.

The clue that problematic transference may be present is in how intense and how apposite the feeling is: when the emotional response is disproportionate and/or inappropriate to present reality, it is likely to be transference.

In a coaching group, the first priority is to help people recover their grip on present reality, and the group’s feedback is often the most effective route. Minor projective misunderstandings are resolved in groups all the time,
sometimes without ever being spoken aloud, as people ‘get to know each other better’. More persistent misunderstandings, which affect individual or group functioning, require the group coach to take a more active stance.

**The two fundamentals of all coaching: holding and exchange**

All coaching is founded in a developmental relationship blending enough safety in the relationship to enable an encounter with new information, which Gregory Bateson has defined as ‘news of difference’. Holding is establishing a sense of safety in the relationship, which enables the individual’s encounter with something new. That encounter is called ‘exchange’.

**Holding**

The core skill in all coaching, as in all relationships supporting development, is *holding*: the capacity to enable clients to feel safe enough to learn. The term ‘holding’ derives from Donald Winnicott’s work on the mother–baby relationship, the first learning relationship. Holding means ‘not only the actual physical holding of the infant, but also the total environmental provision’. ‘Holding’ allows the baby to develop as a true self, *alone . . . in the presence of mother*. If the holding is good enough, exchange can happen.

Closely allied to holding is the concept ‘containing’. The difference between the two is largely a matter of focus. Both are theories about development in the very early stages of life: holding dwells more on the total experience, whereas containing focuses more on the parts – the metabolizing of frustration or discomforting experiences, to produce thought. In a group context, both ideas are close to the ‘group matrix’ (see Chapter 3), the group as secure ground ‘holding’ the individual and making her/his experience ‘containable’. In supervision too, the literature places holding and containing at the centre of successful supervisory relationships (Chapter 8).
Vignette: Holding reflective space in a career

Galvin had worked with the same client, Julia, over a period of seventeen years. The work was not continuous, but in four or five spells when Julia had contacted Galvin to help her with a new or changing role, Julia finally becoming a director. What tied all the assignments together was a focus on understanding Julia’s current role and its requirements, and the quality of their relationship in which Julia felt accepted and understood. Julia commented that she always felt ‘in completely safe hands’ with Galvin, ‘and that gives me free rein’.

Coaches are rightly nervous of creating dependency in their clients, and yet paradoxically a kind of temporary dependence is at the heart of all our work: the capacity to engender in the client a sense of enough safety, so that s/he can take in and learn from a new experience, including receiving difficult feedback. This may be for a few sessions or, as in the example, over a number of years.

Learning, holding and exchange

Why does learning require this psychological context? It is hard-wired, related to the underlying processes through which we learn. Learning occurs through balancing of security and risk. Both are necessary, from our earliest youth.

As babies and young children, if things go right for us, we explore the world from the secure base of someone who cares for us. We feel secure enough to encounter new things and new experiences, some of which are unsettling or even frightening, as well as intriguing. We need to know that we can beat a retreat to a safe pair of arms for comfort if the new experiences become overwhelming. As time goes on, through repetition we are able to tolerate the new experience more readily, and to bear different risks and greater
intervals between seeking safety. In other words, we develop confidence.

Throughout life, in order to learn, we must encounter something new, something different to our previous experience, that momentarily disorients us. We then put it side by side with previous experience to see how it fits into our world, or how our world needs to be remade to accommodate this new information. This exchange, together with the security of holding, is at the root of all coaching relationships, both individual and group. It remains easier to learn when we feel fundamentally secure and valued.

The development of thinking and obstacles to learning

Why is it sometimes so difficult to learn? Or to remember what we have learned in the past? To examine the roots of this, we must dig deep. Wilfred Bion’s theory of how thinking develops offers insight into the difficulties of learning. He proposes that thinking develops as a means to link thoughts. Thoughts come first. When the baby expects to be fed and is fed, Bion calls the experience a conception: expectation matches experience. When the baby expects to be fed and is not fed, expectation does not match experience, and results in frustration. If the baby can tolerate the frustration, it becomes a thought. The baby can retain the idea of being fed, even while not being fed. If the baby cannot tolerate the frustration, and must get rid of it, thought does not arise, and the development of thinking is disrupted. This is what happens when the holding is not ‘good enough’.

Every frustration has the potential to produce either a thought or a refusal to tolerate it which disrupts the capacity to think.

Thought is therefore born from an experience of frustration or disorientation, and thinking develops to link up thoughts. The process of thinking arises from linking many experiences of thought. There is a stage of frustration in all learning, a disjunction or not-knowing that can be tolerated and lead to a new realization; or the opportunity to learn can be refused. This is the central paradox of learning, noted by
social scientists from Lewin onwards. We all both want to learn and resist learning. Coaches ignore this reality at their peril.

Chris Argyris, who has devoted more than forty years to studying the ways in which individuals in organizations evade learning, describes the defensive routines through which these processes are played out in organizational life. His work is described further in ‘When working with conflicting expectations’ in Chapter 6 and in Chapter 10.

Learning is multi-sensory and grounded in emotional relationship

Learning is always an intellectual and an emotional experience at least; in infancy, it is an amalgamated experience which takes in a range of senses and dynamics – movement, sound, sight, smell – inextricably connected to the experience of learning.

Consider a typical game played between carers and babies involving chanting, touch, finger movement, eye contact and shifts in facial expressions, shifts in intonation and a crescendo of experience that culminates in tickling under the arm, usually followed by giggles as the decrescendo occurs:

Round and round the garden
Like a teddy bear
One step – two step
And tickly under there!

The infant is learning in several sensory modalities at once, in the context of a (warm) relationship with another person whom (s/he is discovering through the pattern variations in the game) s/he can influence, but cannot directly control. Babies learn in the context of relationship, and they learn to attune emotionally before they learn to communicate verbally.

The baby’s learning is inextricably bound to the full sensory array of that original experience. Cognition, when it arrives, always takes place in a context of emotion and relies on multimodal memories of experience: the baby
connects experiences, to create patterns that make sense of the experience. This too is hard-wired: we are creatures who understand by connecting, making patterns.34

All coaches have worked with clients who understood intellectually why they were stuck, but were nevertheless unable to put change into practice until they had more fully explored the emotional blocks to progress. True learning must involve head, heart and gut, and by bringing what was previously unconsidered into the light of day, we increase the client’s chances of consciously integrating the information coming from all three.

**Holding and exchange in groups**

Just as they are essential to individual learning, holding and exchange are also the foundation of effective learning in groups. Where there is adequate holding, the group begins to find an appropriate level of mutual challenge (exchange). This will usually start small, as, like the exploring toddler, we take small risks. When those risks pay off, we gain confidence to take bigger ones. Over time the greater safety of a group enables greater and greater risk.

**Effective group coaching**

- Keeping the group safe enough to enable learning
- Encouraging curiosity and exchange of views.

There is therefore a familiar paradox at the heart of working with groups: most of us can remember a time when we felt safe enough to take a risk. If there is not sufficient safety, group members cannot risk truly learning. Some kinds of behaviour among members can make a group feel less safe, and may need active engagement from the group coach. See ‘Limiting scapegoating and other destructive behaviour’ in Chapter 4 and Chapter 9.
Developing the capacity to hold a group

Many coaches have an innate capacity to work with groups, but all need to deepen and develop that capacity to coach groups effectively. It is curious that while we now devote considerable energy to developing our capacities and competence as individual coaches, the same rigour is rarely applied to learning how to work with groups.

Real skill cannot be learned from a book in either arena, since so much of the capacity operates at a non-conscious level. It must be learned experientially. Only by being and learning in groups ourselves, including studying that experience, can we learn to make groups safe places for others to learn. At the end of the book is a list of organizations providing this kind of experiential learning.

A book can however describe what is involved, so that we can recognize it when we see it, and through greater understanding begin to learn what we need to learn.

Holding a group

Effective coaches have the capacity to hold their clients; effective group coaches must have something more. They must have the ability to hold a group of clients simultaneously, containing more difficult feelings and stronger projections than with one person. For a team, or other group within a single organization, they also have to hold the impact of that broader system on the group they are working with – all the norms and expectations that organization members carry with them, many of them not conscious. See further Chapter 5.

‘Holding’ is the fundamental condition of all functional groups. Here is a group member’s description of what being ‘held’ in a new group feels like:

The way you managed the group at the beginning which meant that the boundaries were clear . . . the closest analogy I can think of is like a baby in its mother’s arms – a baby can move around but it still knows that its mother is protecting it – so in a way you are protecting a group from going all over the place.
So what is good ‘holding’ in a coaching group? Clearly at the outset of the group, firm boundaries and a kindly welcome are important, particularly for the wariest members. The demeanour of the coach early on is critical; people coming to something new need to know that they are in a ‘safe pair of hands’. The image of the baby held securely in its mother’s arms might translate to: welcoming individuals; giving a clear lead on task; modelling behaviour; engaging with what comes up in the group; conveying that feeling, including strong feeling, is OK and encouraging its translation into words.

**Holding difficult feelings: using all the information about work**

Many individuals, emotionally intelligent in their personal lives, believe that at work they must be completely ‘logical’ and remain emotionally unaffected by their experiences. To be ‘businesslike’ means to be unemotional. This mistaken idea leads people to cut themselves off from huge quantities of useful information about work, and so from crafting creative solutions to dilemmas.

Most of the emotion thus pushed away is uncomfortable in content. ‘Holding’ therefore includes ‘containing difficult emotions’ to allow group members to become aware of, digest and integrate them, and therefore able to use a broader range of information in their working lives. This ‘containing’ is a crucial part of holding. The coach conveys that difficult experiences can be borne, and their significance explored. Here is an action learning set facilitator describing what she did when a group member began to cry in the first meeting of an action learning set. The learning experience was particularly powerful because the facilitator had herself had a similar experience as a set member:

I just wanted to make her feel as comfortable as I could and to keep the group working and moving and I moved tissues towards her which I remember you doing with me actually and we waited and she was all very apologetic and saying everything that I’d said, I can’t believe I’m crying, I didn’t realize this was such an issue and we waited and
gave her a bit of space and time I suppose and when she
was ready, she carried on.

Holding is an integrating process. It is the experiencing of
emotion that allows it to shift, and so allows the person to
‘move on’. The amplification of feeling in a group allows this
process to surface readily. (See Chapter 3 for the processes
through which this amplification takes place.) As they
understand their feelings about work more fully, group
members begin to discriminate feelings generated by work
from those of a more personal origin. This allows individuals
to decide how to act – or not to act – based on a fuller under-
standing, including emotional and social as well as intel-
lectual and factual information.

Vignette: Holding a change process

The CEO of a small communications company needed to
achieve cash savings and a more flexible approach in the
face of very competitive market conditions. She hired a
coach to help her manage the change. The coach encour-
aged her to explore her own frustrations and hopes
about the business situation. This helped her overcome
feelings of panic and helplessness. The next task was to
break the news to two teams that their functions were to
be merged, resulting in some redundancies and moves.
The coach prepared the CEO to present the facts directly
but compassionately, and ‘take the flak’. He worked with
her in a series of meetings with each team.

Initial feelings of anger, disbelief, worthlessness and
powerlessness were expressed, followed by reluctant
acceptance. Each individual re-examined their personal
goals, and in the end the redundancies were all volun-
tary. At the end, the teams, CEO, directors and colleagues
met to celebrate their contribution.

After a suitable break, the coach, who had become a
trusted figure, began work with the new team to help
them understand and organize themselves around their
new, more fluid goals.
Feelings about work and personal life can easily become muddled. Today this is complex, not merely ‘taking work home’ or having less capacity at work because of domestic pressures. Arlie Hochschild writes about how personal time poverty, resulting from the high pressure of modern work, can create curious reversals in our allegiances to and feelings about work and home.  

In a group, members come to understand their work situations more fully, and to integrate what they feel and what they think about work challenges. As a result their ability to act is liberated, often quite dramatically compared with previous performance. This ability to act on a fuller analysis is the core of the greater confidence and effectiveness that group participants report. It is not therapy, since it is focused on the-person-in-work-role, and yet its effects are (small-t) therapeutic, in that members perform better and feel better about their performance.

**Holding as time goes on**

In the early days of a group, the group coach must shoulder much responsibility for the group’s sense of safety. As a group matures, members develop confidence that the group is a safe place. Repeated experiences of safety with difficult subjects, and sharing struggles, in time make the group itself feel safe.  

Holding is an unintrusive process. It requires the self-restraint to wait to see what the group can do without jumping in too quickly to offer help. It links with the development of interpersonal skills in the group members. Three people training as group coaches were asked later about the skills they had gained. Here are their answers:

- I count to two before I jump in with questions, because I know I can think too fast . . . it’s important to slow down so other people have a chance.

- I control myself better from jumping in with both feet, not as well as I’d like to but better.

- Speaking less. Directing less. Becoming more comfortable with silence.
This restraint allows something very important to happen. Whereas at the start of the group the role of the group coach requires at least some active leadership to create a sense of safety, as time goes on, the group itself takes over this role; members become more active and competent in the group process. Repeated experiences of being held by the group enhance the security and sense of acceptance: ‘acceptance is the keyword’,\(^{37}\) and the group itself can then become ‘the container that helps transform incoherent and unconscious perceptions into coherent thought’.\(^ {38}\)

**Vignette: The phrasing of an intervention**

The action learning set was helping Helen plan for promotion. Her career had been ‘on hold’ since the tragic death of her partner a few years before. A senior post was coming up, but Helen had convinced herself that she would interview badly.

*JENNY:* That seems unlikely, you always appear so professional – what would stop you appearing professional in the interview?

*HELEN:* I’m afraid I will freeze, be unable to talk.

*MEL:* What could you do that would make you feel more confident?

*HELEN:* I’m not sure.

*COACH:* What has helped you in these situations before?

*HELEN:* Being very well prepared, thinking through all the questions, and remembering to slow down my breathing and moving beforehand and as I go in.

The group had accurately pinpointed Helen’s dilemma, but their future-oriented questions were increasing her anxiety. A traumatic loss had made it difficult for her to focus on the future. By tilting the focus of the question to positive past experiences, the coach enabled Helen to reconnect with her capability.
The role of the group coach gradually becomes more unobtrusive, quietly attending to the group while the group attends to the work – available if needed, but generally less active, involving maintenance, help with overcoming new or reappearing obstacles, and refining and deepening communication. This requires a deeper understanding of the nine group processes to which we will turn in the next chapter.

What enables the group coach to hold a group effectively?

In this chapter we have covered several elements of the group coach’s behaviour, and how it must change over time. What does not change, though intervention may be more rarely needed, is the group coach’s role as the boundary-keeper, the person who holds the framework within which the group works. Although using psychological concepts, the group coach’s role is very practical:

- focus on self-at-work
- personal links under the control of the person concerned
- communicating that all feelings are allowed
- tolerating the feelings oneself
- ability and willingness to voice the feelings
- encouraging the exploration of feelings
- asking about the distinction between feeling and action
- helping members link problems, new information and action.

Notice that the group coach, like the individual coach, focuses on the group’s task mainly indirectly, by promoting group members’ capacities to tackle it. This is a guideline, not a straitjacket. There are times when the group coach shares insights or information to move the task along. But this will be incidental, and usually explicitly bookmarked as a brief stepping out of role. The primary focus is on helping the group to move the task forward by concentrating on the quality of interactions in the group. If the group coach is seduced into focusing on the group’s task rather than her/his own, which is to help the group improve
its functioning, then the group and its task will be the loser.

For the group coach to hold a group, s/he must feel confident that s/he can keep the group safe and productive for its members. Such confidence is based on the experience of having been held in groups, previous experiences of working productively with groups, and having one’s work with the group held. Training, practice and supervision are key.

**Exchange**

‘Exchange’ is the encounter with what is new, different or previously unknown in one’s experience. Difference carries information. Without difference there is no change and no development; yet without some sense of common ground there is nowhere safe to stand while you are challenged. You can only engage with difference in a sufficiently holding context.

Exchange in a group has many advantages over exchange in a one-to-one relationship. There is a far wider range of opportunities for productive learning. It is ‘on the level’, that is, an equal exchange between members of a group, which many people find easier to swallow than coach/client feedback. The reality testing of several perspectives also greatly increases the probability of accurate feedback.

**Vignette: Unanimous feedback**

Graham regularly caused extra work for everyone because he never thought ahead. Various individuals, including Carol, the team manager, had taken this up with him, but with little effect. In a team coaching session one day he was talking about an event that had ‘gone pear-shaped’ and commented ‘I suppose I could have got that part sorted in advance’ about one of the crucial details. ‘That’s right!’ was the emphatic response from everyone else in the circle. ‘But I’m not that bad at forward planning’ he protested. The coach said nothing. Nor
did anyone else. There was a moment’s pause, and then someone began to giggle. Graham looked round, and a smile crept across his face as everyone began to laugh. Helpless to protest, he laughed too. ‘Bang to rights’ he said. ‘OK, what do you want me to do differently the next time?’

The acceptance that Graham simultaneously felt while receiving critical feedback made the experience tolerable. Notice that the coach did nothing active; s/he simply got out of the way and allowed the group to take care of the necessary feedback.

The ‘aha’ moments we occasionally experience are only one aspect of exchange: ‘aha’ moments are moments of reordering information in a new pattern.40 The genuine lightbulb moment is a profound experience indicating a deep-seated reorganization of our perceptions, but is not the common currency of exchange. It isn’t usually one ‘Damascus Road’ exchange that makes the difference. It is the continuous iterative process of taking in new information, a different ‘explanation’, with its implications. The process is constant, and as a result can become invisible.

It was more the experience of being part of a group and sticking with it when I could have left quite easily . . . more the whole process of being part of the group rather than the particular moment in time.

New thinking in psychological fields understands individual identity as a process, shifting through time, not a fixed quantity.41 Exchange is the process that allows identity to be formed and reformed through innumerable small identifications and distinctions. The repetition of the group process gradually allows more acceptance of our individual foibles, so that idiosyncrasies are acknowledged and accepted, sometimes non-verbally:

people would look at each other and everyone would have a bit of a giggle, but actually it’s quite helpful because that’s the sort of stuff you reflect on at a later date.

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it’s a certain amount of acceptance and being given, yeah people giving you a bit of a nudge and an elbow about it, but saying actually it’s quite funny but you are a bit peculiar and yes, that’s good.

Although words are an aspect of exchange, meaning can be seen here to be communicated non-verbally, relying on the pre-verbal learning processes and emotional attunement which so enrich the life of groups. Words for the exchange will arise spontaneously in the group, but the recipient of the feedback has already been prepared by the non-verbal communications. It relies on the ‘implicit knowing’ discussed earlier.

Conventionalized exchange in action learning sets and team coaching

This gradual exchange develops over time. Where time is more limited, other conventions are adopted to encourage a more direct encounter with difference. For example, in action learning, the core activities are listening and questioning. Questioning is the primary medium of exchange. It is impossible for the questioners to determine in advance which of their questions will be experienced by the presenter as challenging; the challenge is where the presenter finds it. The task for the questioners is to respond increasingly sensitively to the presenter’s cues, dropping or pursuing a line of questioning according to its value to the presenter.

In action learning questioning is balanced by listening, which seems to provide the holding that allows the method to work so well. Practised rigorously, action learning is robust. Even relatively inexperienced group coaches can hold challenging material in the group if they stick to its conventions. Action learning is discussed in Chapter 7.

There seem to be two further factors that make the challenge of being questioned bearable. There is the fact that it is shared, so that everyone undergoes the same experience – sometimes supportive, sometimes an ordeal, sometimes both. And there is the fact that it is time-limited.

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These factors are also critical in using feedback tools with teams.\textsuperscript{42}

When working with teams, there are literally hundreds of possible tools, offering a framework for understanding (see ‘Using teams tools and models in coaching’ in Chapter 6). These tools seem to have at least three purposes: to offer a conceptual model that more or less usefully (over)simplifies reality, to depersonalize and reduce threat in what may be quite sensitive feedback, and to ‘kick-start’ a conversation about how individual differences hamper and help communication and therefore the team’s performance.

The tools alone will not do the trick. The group coach’s capacity to ‘hold’ difficult conversations is indispensable in using tools to promote feedback with teams. The usefulness of a structured approach also requires calm, reassuring leadership, even-handedness and clear time boundaries.

### Final remarks about exchange

In human relationships, exchange is of value in itself independent of any content, because from the earliest days of life, before words, it communicates the relationship: you cannot talk \textit{about} anything to a baby, but the exchange is known to be of value.\textsuperscript{43} When mothers and babies communicate, there is patterning of variations on a theme; the sense of belonging and acceptance is reinforced simultaneously with the experience of difference, through the rhythms of play.

There are many kinds of exchange, and ‘calling a spade a shovel’ or ‘saying what has not been said’ are only one kind of challenge. Many challenges in the intimate medium of a group are unspoken, known only to the person who has noticed and taken in, at first non-consciously, some aspect of another person’s reality.

It is in the group, paradoxically, that we can be most fully ourselves. We become aware that other people feel differently to us, laugh at different things – but that no one way is better than another.\textsuperscript{44} It is our differences that define our individuality. The experience of ‘groupness’ allows individuals to feel secure enough to risk self-revelation, and
therefore the possibility of encountering some feedback that might influence them and allow a choice to change.\textsuperscript{45}

Getting feedback about how I present myself to the world, and hearing how others assumed me to be one sort of person, who was now emerging as quite different, was interesting and surprising.

In this chapter we have reviewed the processes involved in human learning and how well-held groups can amplify the process of feedback and exchange. In the next chapter we examine the group processes through which this occurs.