

11 Psychodynamic Approaches to Group Coaching

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Introduction

Groups consist of two or more persons engaged in social interaction who have some stable, structured relationship with one another, are interdependent, share common goals, and perceive that they are in fact part of a group (Baron & Byrne, 1987). Within the group coaching context, a group comes together around a common theme or purpose. An example would be a general management program that brings together individuals from different companies who share a common purpose of improving their leadership capabilities. There is a power that is activated when a group of peers such as these comes together and commits to a collective learning experience. When that happens, each person's individual experience, talent, and energy contribute to collective learning and, if the process is synergistic, propels the group to achieve something beyond what a single individual could do alone.

At the same time, working in groups can be likened to navigating a field of icebergs. Group experiences are inherently complex because they are made up of people with diverse personalities, life experiences, strengths, desires, and challenges. Oftentimes, the mechanisms underlying group relationships remain unspoken, hidden below the surface. These unconscious dynamics consist of strong feelings, thoughts, desires, and assumptions. Yet these psychological forces serve as major sources of motivation and determinants of behaviour. They can either be mutually enriching or detrimental depending on the positive and negative forces that emerge as group members act and react to changing circumstances. This interactive psychological relationship in which members of a group experience and form a perception is what we know as *group dynamics* (Lewin, 1951).

A group's potential can be unleashed, and negative effects averted when the group is attuned to its explicit (*what it does*) and implicit (*why they do what they do*) dynamics, linked to deeper sources of energy and motivational forces. Within group coaching, one of the challenges of a coach who adopts a psychodynamic approach is to read under the surface dynamics, internalise the message, and intervene by remaining calm and providing timely

DOI: 10.4324/9781032614984-13

interpretation through bringing hidden issues out into the open in a way that can be discussed courageously and without fear.

In our experience with executive group coaching, a psychodynamically oriented approach allows a group of individuals to reflect on their behaviour, explore and deal with challenges, build relationships based on trust and mutual respect, foster a genuine exchange of information, promote open communication, and engage in collective problem solving (Kets de Vries, 2005).

The role of psychodynamic group coaching

A psychodynamic-systemic approach to group coaching is an orientation that makes conscious what is unconscious through the creation of a space for collective self-analysis, critical feedback and development (Kets de Vries & Cheak, 2014; Levinson, 1972; Ward, 2009; Zaleznick, 2009). Central to this approach is the construction of transitional spaces within which eight processes create tipping points for change:

- 1 *Psychodynamic orientation* – which addresses above and below the surface dynamics that drive behaviour.
- 2 *Systemic approach* – which considers the broader context and patterns of functioning.
- 3 *Mutual identification* – which involves listening to and identifying with the experiences of others, thereby creating compassion, solidarity and cohesion.
- 4 *Willingness to experiment* – in a space to test out new identities and behaviours with curiosity and without fear.
- 5 *Vicarious learning* – which strengthens the ability to observe, listen and learn from others.
- 6 *Collective learning* – in which each individual actively contributes and engages in a shared learning process.
- 7 *Cathartic experience* – a process of emotional release, insight and positive change or closure that comes through honest self-analysis.
- 8 *Peer learning community* – which binds people together for continued problem solving, accountability and support during and after the group coaching experience.

It is the interconnection of all eight processes that creates a psychologically safe learning space.

The psychodynamic approach

The psychodynamic approach helps individuals and groups understand the underlying causes of their behaviour with insight into how past experiences shape their present thoughts, choices and actions

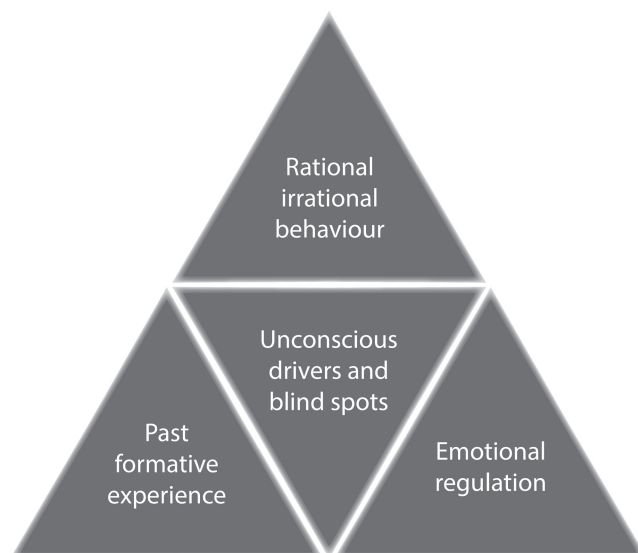


Figure 11.1 Psychodynamic approach (adapted from Kets de Vries, 2005)

(Kets de Vries & Cheak, 2014). Specifically, it addresses the conscious and unconscious psychological forces that determine the personality, motivation, and drivers of human action. The psychodynamic approach consists of four basic premises (see Figure 11.1):

- 1 There is a *rationale behind every human act*, even for actions that seem irrational. This explanation is often interwoven with unconscious needs and desires that govern behaviour.
- 2 We all have *blind spots*. People are not always aware of what they are doing or why they are doing it, as a great deal of our mental life lies outside of conscious awareness.
- 3 Nothing is more central to who we are than the way we express and *regulate our emotions*. Emotions imbue experiences with positive and negative connotations, creating preference in the choices we make and the way we deal with people and situations.
- 4 We are all *products of our past experiences*, and those experiences, especially early developmental ones, continue to influence us throughout life.

Using the psychodynamic approach, we can achieve a deeper understanding of the forces and rationale behind both personal and group emotions, thoughts and behaviours, triggering tipping points for change. Participating individuals become aware that they are not at the mercy of life's vicissitudes – they have choices. By seeing things in perspective, realising there are other ways to deal with challenges, and more importantly, getting

feedback, challenge and support from the group, the individual is more equipped to identify, implement and remain accountable to solutions.

Key psychodynamic concepts

In this section, several key psychodynamic concepts are highlighted that can be used in group coaching to surface and address hidden but influential group dynamics. These concepts are illustrated in Figure 11.2 and can be applied to both individual self-understanding, as well as an awareness of the group as a whole.

Basic assumption groups and sophisticated assumption groups: Detecting whether the group is focused on or deviating from its primary task

Wilfred Bion (1961) was one of the pioneers in the grounding of group development theory. His research and experience provided a means to analyse the emotionality or dynamics in a group. Specifically, he identified two

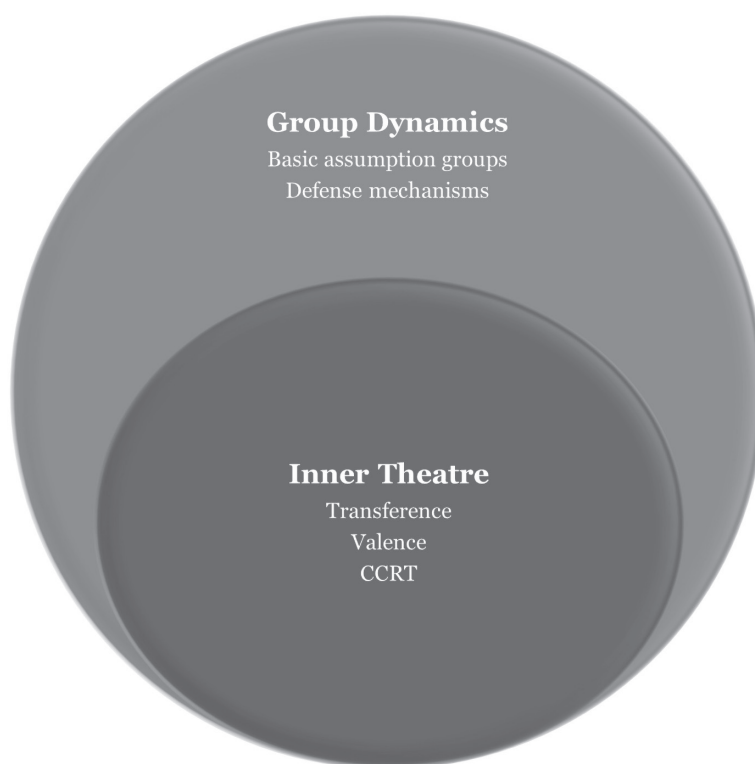


Figure 11.2 Psychodynamic concepts from individual to the collective

dimensions of behaviour within any group: *sophisticated groups* and *basic assumption groups*.

Sophisticated groups are focused on the primary task or the work the group has been put together to accomplish. They are characterised by behaviours that are mature and intentional. A sophisticated group is aware of its purpose and can define its task. It seeks to solve problems and make decisions (as opposed to avoiding them) and is attuned to the group process. Members freely provide and receive information, and outcomes include both individual and group development and learning.

Bion (1961) was also curious about why groups can engage in ineffective and contradictory behaviour, which impacts the group's effectiveness. Alongside being a work group, certain basic assumptions are also at play. These assumptions are hidden in the group subconscious, and their main function is to relieve anxiety experienced by the group, manifested by different reactions:

- *Fight-Flight*: Fight behaviours are marked by hostility, aggression, and often challenge. We might see attacking behaviours, push back, rebuking, resistance, self-aggrandising, as well as scapegoating. Flight, on the other hand, relieves anxiety by avoidance. People in the group go into denial, withdrawal, or simply refuse to acknowledge 'the elephant in the room'. Intellectualisation, rationalisation, and moving off the point of the discussion are often behaviours displayed.
- *Dependency*: Dependency reflects a *reliance on a person or external source*, e.g. an appeal for approval, undue attention to leader's cues, or fear of trying new things. The group seeks a leader who will relieve them of anxiety. Counter dependency operates when group members act as if they do not need formal authority. Behaviour includes a rejection of authority.
- *Pairing*: Pairing occurs when the group hopes for rescue through two parties joining forces to create a solution. However, when a solution does emerge, the group shuts it down so they carry on being inactive and hopeful rather than taking responsibility, and moving forwards.

In reality, groups switch between sophisticated task and basic assumption modes. It is the predominance of the interactions that leads to functional or dysfunctional outcomes.

Using the general management programme as an example, different individuals (including the coach) bring in their inner motivations, personalities and communication styles at the start of the programme. During the coaching session, differences between people can trigger various reactions: some individuals remain quiet or do not go into depth or detail to avoid personal or group issues (flight); others might adopt a defensive mode and act out aggressively, challenging others rather than truly listening (fight). Other members may gravitate or create alliances with people similar to themselves, resulting in mutual support but also exclusion (pairing), while others rely on the stronger voices to take the lead or control of the discussions (dependency).

Falling into these patterns results in uneven levels of openness and contribution, resulting in some voices and perspectives being manifested more than others, and the group becoming inhibited by their differences rather than leveraging them.

As a group coach, be attuned to the emotions and behaviours that emerge within individuals and the group as a whole. Ask yourself, is the group focused on the task at hand with behaviours such as having open discussions, practising listening, even participation, and a fair process for resolving differences and conflict? Or are there overt or subtle emotions or tensions that are being expressed or avoided?

As a coach, taking a step back and reflecting on the group emotions and dynamics that are being triggered can provide you with clarity on where the group is so that you can realign them back to the task. Having the group step back and collectively reflect on their own dynamics can also provide the critical distance needed to address core issues and to readjust behaviours (both the coach's and the group). In cases where one or a few individuals appear to be dominating or derailing the group dynamics, a group coach can also have a separate conversation with that individual to work through and understand their reactions.

However, the process is not static, and at a later point, the group might once again fall back into a basic assumption mode. For example, the group may coalesce around collaborative problem solving but when it is time to implement their plans, they may be passive and look to the coach for answers and solutions (dependency). The coach can reflect this to the group, challenging them to take ownership and pursue the solutions themselves. The group recognises the pattern and re-engages with their own problem-solving capacity (sophisticated).

Effective group coaches learn to recognise these patterns and intervene skilfully – not to prevent basic assumption states (which are natural and sometimes necessary for group cohesion) but to help groups develop awareness of their dynamics and capacity to return to productive work when needed.

Defence mechanisms: Detecting when a group is struggling and experiencing conflict

Group interactions can trigger defence mechanisms within individuals and the group. 'Defence' is a general term to describe the struggle to protect oneself against perceived threats (such as feelings of anxiety, guilt or shame) through activating long-held coping strategies. Defences are a constant in the interactions among groups of individuals in all contexts, but individuals are not necessarily aware of them. While these defences can help the group and individuals feel safe and in control, they also prevent people from fully engaging with curiosity, openness, and compassion.

The conceptualisation of defences is rooted in Anna Freud's work (1936), based on the defences that appeared in the work of her father, Sigmund Freud (1894). Over time, a classification by George Vaillant (1992) provided

a framework to view defences as a continuum ranging from pathological to immature to neurotic to ‘mature’ defences. The manifestation of defences is a constant in the interactions among groups of individuals in all contexts, but individuals are not necessarily aware of them. A defence mechanism becomes pathological when its persistent use leads to maladaptive behaviour that severely impacts the individual. At the other end of the spectrum, mature defences can be used by individuals to respond to anxieties and adapt to the stressors in a productive way.

Some of the more primitive defences that take an individual and group’s focus away from their primary task include:

- *Denial* – refusal to acknowledge and/or accept facts.
- *Splitting* – seeing everything as black or white, idealisation or devaluation of self or others.
- *Projection* – attributing one’s feelings and thoughts to others.
- *Acting out* – violent, aggressive, and uncontrolled acts.
- *Passive-aggressive* – a pattern of indirect expression of hostility, including negative attitudes and passive resistance to demands.
- *Intellectualisation* – reasoning about a problem to avoid uncomfortable or distressing emotions.
- *Displacement* – expressing negative emotions by focusing on a less threatening target.

More mature defences may also be observed, signalling the ability of the individual or group to accept reality and to address uncomfortable thoughts, feelings, and situations, rather than denying them.

- *Humour* – the ability to perceive absurdity in highly challenging situations to lighten or deflect tension. At the same time, humour could also be used to avoid dealing with emotions.
- *Sublimation* – an expression of anxiety in socially acceptable ways such as redirecting negative feelings or impulses into positive ones.

Within group coaching, defences can play out at multiple levels: within the individual, the group as a whole, and the coach’s own countertransference. The group coach must be aware of these different dimensions to help the individual and the group understand the effects of their defensive style and facilitate the development of more effective behaviours. Recognising defences within oneself can also help the coach gain perspective and regain calm and composure in the way he or she works with the group.

The inner theatre: Personal experiences and scripts that shape our interactions

In *Prologue from the Theatres of the Mind*, McDougall (1985) uses the metaphor of a theatre to explain the themes that play out repeatedly in our lives.

Each of us carries within our inner universe a number of characters and different parts of ourselves that frequently operate in contradiction to one another, causing conflict and mental pain to our conscious selves. The thematic imagery in our inner theatre – or scripts – determines how we see ourselves, how we respond to others, and how we interpret the world in general.

Many of these key scripts are shaped by early childhood experiences. In the interpersonal realm, the way we interact with different types of people as adults is powerfully shaped by our emotional interactions with our early caregivers, which are the source of our attachment patterns (Ainsworth et al., 1978; Bowlby, 1988). An exploration of these formative experiences and the recurring patterns that replay in adult life can help us clarify what our values, beliefs, and attitudes are. These core drivers underlie our interpersonal relationships and lifestyle choices, behaviour, and give meaning to our purposes, goals, and plans.

To use a very simple image (see Figure 11.3), our values, beliefs, and attitudes are like the different layers of an onion. At the core are the basic scripts of our inner theatre. These, in turn, determine our values, beliefs, and attitudes that shape our personality. Our personality then drives our actions and behaviours.

Working from the inner theatre and identifying those recurrent patterns and themes throughout one's life, people can focus on the choices they have made in their lives and the reasons for those choices. In this way, they can identify ways in which they can make their lives more meaningful. It can provide insight into some big questions such as: *What is important to them? What helps them maintain their momentum? What do others notice when they are at their best? Why do they engage in self-destructive actions?*

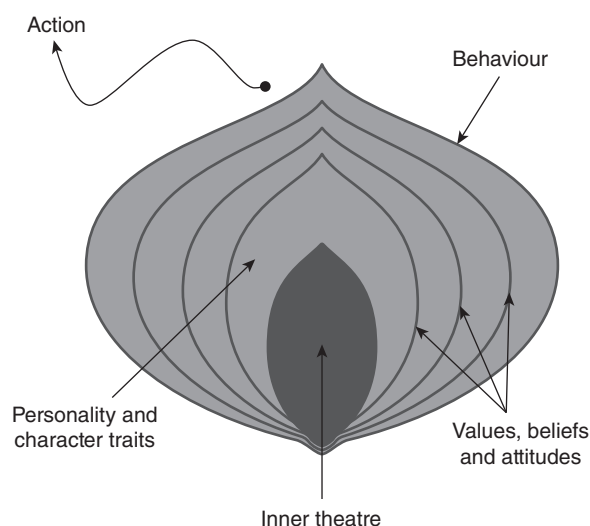


Figure 11.3 The inner theatre: The scripts of our inner lives

Within a group coaching context, this level of analysis can help the group to explain why they do what they do and why they behave in certain ways. Collectively, they can identify the values and characteristics that connect them to one another and of which they can be proud, allowing group members to align on common values and beliefs and what makes them feel fully alive and about which they are passionate. At the same time, such awareness can also shed light on the demons with which each person struggles and how they hold them back. This can create greater awareness of personal pitfalls and the traps others might fall into.

Within the Inner Theatre, three key psychological processes take place: Transference, Valences, and Core Conflictual Relational Themes. Exploring and articulating these processes provides us with more specific insights into the nature of our behaviour and interactions.

Transference: Detecting when unconscious relational scripts are activated

Transference is a pattern of displacing certain feelings, thoughts, and behaviour originally experienced in relation to significant figures during childhood onto a person in the present. This projection occurs when a person in the present triggers within the individual psychological experiences in the past. Understanding the mechanics of transference can help explain the frustrations felt with specific individuals in certain interactions and contexts. For example, a group member may subconsciously perceive another member as resembling her mother, in turn triggering an automatic range of reactions such as avoidant behaviour or defiance, depending on the nature of the original relationship. The unconscious nature of transference makes it both elusive and potent because individuals are caught in automatic behavioural scripts without realising it.

During a group coaching session, one way to detect the presence of transference is to be aware of unusually intense positive or negative reactions towards others, as well as deviation from personal or professional values and routines. During these moments, it would be beneficial to step outside of the situation and to ask oneself: “How do I feel listening to the other person? What is (s)he doing to me?” and “What do I find disturbing in this relationship?” Exploring one’s emotions and discomfort can provide insights into individual reactions, and to determine if one is responding to the actual situation constructively or playing out a potentially unproductive or detrimental script.

Personal valencies: Exploring emotional reactions to specific situations

In chemistry, the valency of an element is a measure of its combining capacity with other atoms to form chemical compounds or molecules. Some atoms can combine more easily than others. Within group dynamics, Bion’s (1961) concept of ‘valency’ is a person’s readiness to combine with other members

influencing how they relate and react to others. It is the ‘chemistry’ of interpersonal relationships and attraction. Using this as a metaphor for group coaching dynamics, personal valency can be used to explain the presence or lack of cohesion in group interactions. Valencies are often unconscious; they may or may not ever be activated and often take us by surprise.

An individual’s valencies are determined by one’s identity (*who am I to be?*), level of control and influence (*will I be able to control and influence others?*), needs and goals (*will the group experience include my own needs?*) and the need for acceptance and intimacy (*will I be liked by the group? how close a group will we be?*). These questions can generate negative feelings (e.g. frustration, tension, and anxiety) when the underlying psychological needs are unmet, which in turn leads to defences.

Reflecting on one’s valency can help the individual better understand his or her reactions within a group coaching context.

For example:

- In situations of uncertainty, do you withdraw, go into action mode, get lost, etc.?
- In conflict situations, do you go silent, start speaking, attack?
- What happens when you feel excluded or not appreciated or not heard?
- What happens when people praise or congratulate you?
- What happens when someone ‘volunteers’ you? Do you comply? Reject?
- What happens when someone says something inaccurate or that you believe to be ‘wrong?’

During group coaching, working with the group to identify and understand personal trigger reactions and those of others to particular situations can give greater insight and control over the responses and behaviours within coaching interactions.

Core conflictual relationship themes: Identifying the source of relationship conflicts

A final concept in psychodynamic theory that can be used in group coaching is the *Core Conflictual Relationship Theme (CCRT)*. These relationship patterns are: ‘Core’ because they are rooted in deeply engrained unconscious biases at the heart of many of our relationship difficulties; ‘Conflictual’ because they are responsible for enduring conflict between what people wish for in a relationship, what they fear they will receive, and what they actually receive from the other; and ‘Thematic’, due to the persistence of interpersonal conflict in current and past relationships.

The CCRT method aims to make explicit these hidden dynamics by identifying several current relationship episodes characterised by conflicting emotions and thoughts, and to provide the means to analyse each episode along three components: (1) W (Wish) – *What an individual desires for oneself in the*

context of a relationship with another person; (2) RO (Response of the Other) – What is the expected (or actual) response from that other person; and (3) RS (Response of the Self) – How the individual responds, in terms of emotions and behaviours. This method can be used in group coaching to allow members of the group to make the unspoken components of their CCRT explicit.

One way we integrate CCRT into group coaching sessions is to ask them to write out in detail between 3-5 different relationship episodes that were challenging and created frustration. Next, we break each of them down according to the CCRT method. Finally, we step back to look for a recurring theme across the different episodes to identify an umbrella reaction that captures their essence. As an example, through the analysis of several relationship episodes (with a stranger, boss, and father), we can come up with a central CCRT focus as being (Book, 1998):

- 1 W: To speak up forcefully when mistreated
- 2 RO: A violent retaliation against me
- 3 RS: Remain silent and passive while feeling deflated and shamed

Within the group coaching conversations, the coach can ask the individual to go through their CCRT exercise, asking the individual to describe in greater detail 2 or 3 key relationship episodes. The coach then asks the group for their observations and feedback on what is happening. The individual is asked to just listen to the feedback, without comments. After group feedback, the individual is given time to reflect on the feedback and then respond to the group, after which the coach leads a group discussion to unpack the dynamics. Through this collaborative process, the individual is guided to understand why they hold back out of some fear that it is a risk to speak up, resulting in them feeling disappointed in themselves. The coach and peers can also help the individual challenge and work through their fears of perceived retaliation by providing examples from their own experiences of speaking out. With an awareness of other possibilities, the person can work on reframing the anticipated RO to experiment with more adaptive and satisfying responses.

While the CCRT approach can be used to create mutual understanding and improvement of dynamics within their coaching group, it can also be extended to explore other key (and challenging) relationships outside of the group coaching group to improve how they relate and behave in the broader world.

A laboratory to experience and master group coaching dynamics: A case study

To illustrate how psychodynamic principles can be applied in practice, we present a case study based on firsthand experience with the Kets de Vries Institute Group Coaching Practicum programme.¹ This programme brings together 16 experienced coaches and senior team leaders to learn and sharpen their understanding of psychodynamic-systemic group coaching, but also to

live it – working together to experience the tipping points required for personal development and change. All names used in this case, except my own (Margot), are pseudonyms.

Although the modular programme spans ten months, we will share here a specific case study example of a group coaching session ‘Self as Instrument’, that took place at the beginning of the programme, and whose purpose is to create the transitional space for participants to build mutual understanding, trust and cohesion with one another. The programme was delivered by four coaches – Dave, Susanna and Charlie, the supervisors on our Group Coaching Practicum, and myself, the programme director. Each of us was responsible for a group of four participants.

The day of this group coaching session started with a drawing activity. Participants were invited to think about their lives and create a life spiral illustrating the seminal moments of their lives. Next, *psychological safety* was addressed, and participants had an opportunity to articulate what they needed from others and what they were willing to contribute to the session.

As soon as the coaches felt that the code of conduct was clear, the participants had about 1.5 hours each to present their insights about their life spiral and the 360-degree report of their life anchors. The rest of the group was encouraged to ask insightful questions, to postpone any judgements they might feel, and to help the person in the ‘hot seat’ to reflect and learn. The session concluded with the participants sharing their insights from the group coaching experience.

First impressions: Tapping into the emotional experience

One coach, Charlie, was very excited to share his feelings in the debrief meeting. He felt his group had bonded, went deep into the work, and came out with many insights and were eager for the next steps in the programme. In contrast, Susanna stated that she was quite tired by the end of the day of group coaching. The participants in her group explored their inner theatres, and the session was very emotional. Some of their life stories were heavy and filled with traumas, and it was, overall, an intense session. Despite these challenges, Susanna felt that through shared experiences and mutual support, she had built a good foundation for the work they will do together in the future. Dave was anxious about his session. He felt the defence mechanisms of the participants in his group were triggered and there were some passive-aggressive behaviours, with one of the participants expressing being hurt by some of the comments of the group. Another participant was acting out, becoming a little aggressive towards Dave.

Unpacking the experience: Understanding the psychodynamics of groups

As first impressions illustrate, each session manifested different experiences, with groups staying generally on or off task, exhibiting different defences,

surfacing different inner theatres and CCRTs, and triggering different emotional reactions from the coaches.

In Charlie's group, the people listened attentively to each other's stories. There was empathy and mutual understanding; some had worked in the same global firm, and some came from similar family backgrounds. They were in similar life phases and were at the point where their coaching practice was starting to flourish. The group was able to ask insightful, surprising, creative questions to help each other to learn. Members bonded very well, and there was a high level of trust. In Charlie's group, the members were mostly focused on the *primary task* of sharing their inner theatre stories and receiving feedback. *Defence mechanisms* were low, allowing the group to listen to, understand, and mutually support one another.

Susanna spoke primarily about Paula, one of her participants, who learned in the session that her impoverished upbringing underpinned her strong desire for financial security and restricted her in her happiness. She had an alcoholic father in her youth, and she could not rely on her parents for emotional support. She took on considerable responsibility, taking care of her two younger sisters. Her tendency was to take care of others first, and she does not put enough boundaries when it comes to her own needs, resulting in being stressed and unhappy. The others in the group showed substantial empathy when she shared her story. They helped her expand her thinking through questions such as: *How does your background influence your work? What are you afraid of should you draw boundaries? Who do you go to for support when times are tough?* The compassionate listening and caring questions helped Paula to create new insights in her current behaviour and what was blocking her in making the desired changes in her life. She wrote down several experiments she wanted to undertake. As was the case with Charlie's group, group members focused on the *primary task* and were able to support Paula in a constructive and caring way.

Dave was still figuring out what had happened in his session. There were some strong personalities in his group, with forceful and direct communication styles. He started talking about one participant, Bernard, who had worked as a strategy consultant for most of his career and had also been a coach for eight years. In his previous role, he was used to positioning himself strongly to create immediate respect for himself and to being appreciated for his smartness and quick thinking. In the first break, Bernard had told Dave he was disappointed with his small group, and he felt he was stuck with some of the less experienced members in the group. He asked if he could switch groups. Dave was anxious about these remarks. He knew Bernard would learn much more by staying with this group, learning from his triggers, exploring more deeply how he was impacted and why, and how to take responsibility for this. However, he wanted to ensure Bernard understood this for himself.

Another member, Jessy, was in her early forties and younger than the rest of the group. She had felt something of an impostor and questioned whether she could help seasoned executives. When she told her friends she wanted to become a coach, some challenged her. Whilst drawing her life spiral, she realised that she grew up with demanding parents and spent her life always proving that she was worthy of their approval. Bernard started to attack Jessy during the session, telling her that she just needed to be stronger and that she might not be a good coach if she did not believe it herself. Jessy was baffled at first and became passive-aggressive towards Bernard, with comments about his arrogance and ego-driven behaviour. Dave was guiding the session to the best of his ability, employing techniques such as asking people to rephrase their questions in a more neutral tone, going back to the agreements they made when they talked about psychological safety, and using humour to decrease the tension in the air. In contrast to the other groups, Dave's session was characterised by high levels of *defences* and different *inner theatres* and CCRTs of group members coming into conflict with one another.

Reflection and mutual support as a group

Although we were the supervisors in the programme, we applied the same principles of psychodynamic group coaching to ourselves. Through understanding the different dynamics of our individual group coaching sessions, we gained better awareness of our personal triggers and insecurities, and clarity on how to deal with the issues and conflict in future sessions of the programme. In our meeting, we felt sympathy for Dave. We explored his own defences and CCRT, namely his natural behaviour of withdrawing to protect himself and to be conflict-avoidant. Stepping back and looking at his reactions, he was able to work through his frustration and plan for the next session. He confronted Bernard with care, asking if the conflict with Jessy made him think of other difficult encounters with clients or people at work, and how that had bothered him. That opened a more constructive conversation about patterns in relationships. As a group, we engaged in mutual identification and collective learning, leading to '*aha*' moments, especially for Dave. We left the meeting feeling supported by one another, and with extra inspiration and energy for the rest of the programme.

Conclusion

As this chapter illustrates, group coaching experiences are journeys of self-discovery and transformation. It leverages the collective wisdom of its members through shared experiences, the mutual exchange of emotions and behaviours, modelling, and interpersonal learning. If conducted in a safe environment, peer exchange and support about significant challenges and events help an individual work through internal conflicts, identify new

solutions, and how to integrate them into their lives. The support given by other members of the group also helps instil a sense of hope and accountability in one's ability to change (Kets de Vries, 2005, 2011; Ward et al., 2014). Applying a psychodynamic lens within group coaching allows us to navigate the complexities and tensions within groups, but also to identify and leverage the potential within groups for meaningful and emotionally enriching experiences.

Points for Reflection

- 1 What defence or coping strategies have you experienced in groups you are part of?
- 2 How do these defences relate back to life events you recognise?
- 3 What feelings and thoughts are triggered in you as a coach in response to others' defence and coping strategies?
- 4 How can the coach support individuals to adapt their responses to one another in a group?

Note

- 1 <https://kdvi.com/group-coaching-practicum/>

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