

■ THE NEW INTERNATIONAL LIBRARY OF GROUP ANALYSIS

# THE ART AND SCIENCE OF WORKING TOGETHER

PRACTISING GROUP ANALYSIS IN TEAMS AND ORGANIZATIONS

EDITED BY CHRISTINE THORNTON



ROUTLEDGE

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## **Responses to the book**

Christine Thornton has followed up her excellent previous book on Group and Team Coaching with this new edited book showing how psychoanalytic and systemic theories and approaches can be applied to work with groups, teams and whole organizations. A rich panoply of theories, case examples and dialogue between different perspectives, offering much to all of us who work with the challenges of enabling change in organisations and wider systems.

Professor Peter Hawkins, author of *Leadership Team Coaching*  
and *Leadership Team Coaching in Practice*

This collection of essays richly describes the work of consultants and leaders in group analysis in a number of diverse settings from the NHS to monasteries and more. It poses questions and offers theoretical frameworks for the consultant to hold in mind in the process of creating dialogue in order to capture the complexity in the work of leaders and followers, in teams and organizations. To quote the editor, 'Every team is threaded through, like a stick of rock, with the qualities of the organization and its purpose'.

The Editor has achieved a balance between theory and practice, art and science, that makes this an important book for all those wishing to understand more about their role as organizational consultant. This is a great book!

Frances Griffiths, Chair of the Board of Trustees,  
Institute of Group Analysis, UK

This book offers profound and revealing insights into how we humans work and live together in the groups we form and leave. Our development as a species has enabled us to trace the origins of the universe, to unravel the structure of our life forms, to understand something of the functioning of quantum particles and black holes. We have done this in groups and

teams over more than 300,000 years and evolved an ability and inclination to work and live in groups. This book is unique in enabling us to make wiser sense of the complexity and beauty of these interactions, predicated as they are on dialogue. It offers a richer understanding than many of the easy and superficial management books on teamworking and group functioning and enables us to begin to imagine how we can overcome some of the profound challenges of working within and across groups that we face.

Michael West, Professor of Organizational Psychology Lancaster  
University Management School

The current era is plagued by over-simplification, when it needs simplicity – the art of making things simple (i.e. understandable) but not simplistic. Group analysis is one of the most powerful tools we have to cope with growing complexity. This book is a major contribution into this growing field of insight and practice.

Professor David Clutterbuck, David  
Clutterbuck Partnership

This thoughtful book adds to the growing literature on managing group processes in teams and contemporary workplaces. Written by leading scholarly practitioners in the field of group analysis, it provides both important insights and techniques for intervening in the complex emotions, politics and interactions that typify organisational group dynamics. Here is a well-grounded riposte to those who see group dynamics as marginal to the effective leadership of contemporary organizations.

Michael Fischer, Professor of Organisational Behaviour and  
Leadership at Australian Catholic University.  
Visiting Scholar, University of Oxford

Christine's previous book, *Group and Team Coaching*, outlined what goes on in groups – key driving processes which are usually outside conscious awareness. In this latest book on group analysis she again lifts the veil to reveal the deeper factors at play. With the help of chapter authors many different perspectives of group analysis are explored. A distinction is drawn between group analysis in therapeutic work and organizational work. The book is extremely thorough and includes discussion about previous writing on the theory and praxis of group analysis. It will be invaluable to anyone already working in the field of group analysis and should be read by anyone working systemically with organizations, in order to increase their awareness and understanding of what is happening beneath the surface.

Gill Smith, Former Chair, Association for  
Coaching, and author, *Because I Can*

This book is a rich resource for consultants and managers looking for alternative ways of thinking about organizations. It brings together insights from a wide variety of highly skilled group analysts with many years' experience successfully supporting organisations to function better, and who point to the importance of paying attention to what is usually least discussable in contemporary organisations: feelings, anxiety, and seemingly 'irrational' group behaviour. It serves as a refreshing antidote to the current managerial preoccupation with metrics, targets, and positivity.

Chris Mowles, Professor of Complexity and Management,  
Director of the Doctor of Management, Research Theme  
Leader Managing Complex Change,  
Hertfordshire Business School

Group Analytic thinking has much to offer to the understanding of organizations. This book presents a rich compilation of papers from the organizational experience of talented Group Analysts and Group Analytic Practitioners. The chapters are accessible and offer an excellent insight into the complexities of organizational life, clearly outlining the dilemmas, struggles, competing pressures and conflicts for those working in and with organizations. The generous use of vignettes helps illustrate how group analytic thinking provides an in depth understanding of problematic dynamics emerging in various organizational contexts, and the potential traps awaiting the inexperienced or unsuspecting practitioner.

This book is an important must read for managers, organizational consultants or anyone wanting to understand what emerges in and between individuals, teams and organizations. It is the kind of book I wish had been available when I started my own journey in organizations.

Marion Brown, Former Chair of the Institute of Group  
Analysis, and organizational consultant

If leadership and management in organizations means anything it has to do with dealing with people and the often difficult relation between them as they do their work. Yet education and development progress do very little to help people acquire the skills required to understand group dynamics and so deal with people. This book fulfils a very important function of providing group analytic insights into these matters.

Ralph Stacey, Professor of Management, Hertfordshire  
Business School, University of Hertfordshire



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# The Art and Science of Working Together

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*The Art and Science of Working Together: Practising Group Analysis in Teams and Organizations* is a primary resource for anyone wishing to learn more about the complex unconscious dynamics of organizations, providing a practical guide for organizational work, a guide to how to improve things, and a strong theoretical foundation in the group analytic concept of the 'tripartite matrix'.

Group analysis is a highly developed science of group relationships, which allows complexity and systems perspectives to be held in mind alongside organizational psychology, strategic development and business wisdom. Organized into eight sections, the book describes the essence of organizational group analysis, including the art of conversation, leadership, ethical issues in team working, and working with whole organizations. It addresses issues such as 'us-and-them' dynamics, the nature of systems boundaries, and the relationship between an organization and its context.

Leaders and leading consultants give case studies, describing their thinking as they work, to illustrate the theory in action. This essential new resource will allow clinically trained practitioners to extend their scope into organizational work, and all coaches and leaders to benefit from knowledge of the group analytic discipline. It is essential reading for consultants and coaches working with teams and organizations, and for leaders within organizations.

**Christine Thornton** is a group analyst, organizational consultant, and author of the best-selling *Group and Team Coaching*. She was Founding Director of the IGA RPiO organizational training and has been honored for contributions to the coaching profession. Christine works with organizational leaders and coaches, enabling better understanding of complex, perhaps unconscious systemic and relationship dynamics.

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The New International Library of Group Analysis (NILGA)  
Series Editor: Earl Hopper

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Drawing on the seminal ideas of British, European and American group analysts, psychoanalysts, social psychologists and social scientists, the books in this series focus on the study of small and large groups, organisations and other social systems, and on the study of the transpersonal and transgenerational sociality of human nature. NILGA books will be required reading for the members of professional organisations in the field of group analysis, psychoanalysis, and related social sciences. They will be indispensable for the “formation” of students of psychotherapy, whether they are mainly interested in clinical work with patients or in consultancy to teams and organisational clients within the private and public sectors.

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# The Art and Science of Working Together

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Practising Group Analysis in Teams and  
Organizations

Edited by Christine Thornton

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## Series editor's foreword

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Writing a foreword to a new book in the New International Library of Group Analysis always gives me a sense of satisfaction, especially when I have been very involved in editing the book. However, writing the foreword to this study of group analytic consultation to teams and organizations has reminded me of how much I have also enjoyed working with Christine Thornton and her authors and consultants. Christine is an experienced organizational consultant who latterly trained as a clinical group analyst. She founded and chaired the Diploma in Reflective Practice in Organizations at the Institute of Group Analysis from 2015 to 2018 and has many publications to her credit.

For this book Christine has conceived, authored, co-authored, and edited a set of linked discussions and written contributions from a network of colleagues who share her commitment to the practice of reflecting together, or 'dialogue', as the essence of organizational consultation informed by the theory of Group Analysis. The chapters are based on consultations to organizations in virtually each *situs* of the occupational structures of contemporary societies, ranging from health care to government to education to manufacturing. Although focused on the dialectical tension between theory and experience, the chapters convey the healthy curiosity which seasoned consultants bring to their work. Small, median, and large groups are discussed, as are those patterns of leadership, followership, and bystandership associated with basic assumption processes.

The consultant authors are fascinated by the connections among the personal, dynamic, and foundational matrices of the social systems of organizations. Although organizations have the power to be effective in delivering goods and services, a sense of accomplishment, and wealth, they can also be inefficient, causing frustration, emotional pain, hatred, and destruction. What is the purpose of a consultation to an organization which (or who) has been brought to see the 'doctor' by those members/participants in the organization who have the power and resources to authorize the consultation? In fact, the organization is more likely to be troubled than it is to be ill. Therefore, from the very start of the process, the

consultant must become a kind of healer who wants to engage in a special kind of conversation regarding what are perceived to be the obstacles to the growth and development of the organization.

Consultants informed by Group Analysis are aware of the rituals which characterize all forms of healing. They are protective of the liminal processes through which new spaces might be discovered, and they are oriented towards integration and wholeness. Imbued with knowledge from the social sciences, the study of group dynamics, and depth psychology – if not psychoanalysis itself, such consultants are sensitive to unconscious processes. If the participants in a troubled organization are good people who are trying to do the best they can with limited resources, so too are the consultants. They can only encourage people to take as 'problematic' the social, cultural, and communicational dimensions of the matrices by which they are restrained and constrained.

Keenly aware of the vicissitudes of organizational trauma, and the consequent regression in the dynamics of large groups, the authors are sensitive to the restraints and constraints of what has come to be called the social unconscious. This involves an appreciation of the sociality of human nature and the dimensions of the tripartite matrix. Their goal is to broaden and deepen their understanding of the organization in order to be better able to change it, but not always as they would please.

The authors of this book include both men and women, which is unusual in consultation to organizations outside the field of healthcare. There is a feminine sensibility in their descriptions of the consultative process. Their special conversations are oriented towards the mutual and relational discovery of the nature of the problem, which is often invisible except in its affects throughout the system.

This very personal book illustrates the steady development of a group analytic approach to organizational consultation, with its own identity, strengths, and weaknesses. It is the fourth volume in the sub-series of NILGA concerned with the study of organizations, which are not groups as such, but very special kinds of groupings which are managed in the service of achieving the most effective and efficient completion of primary and secondary tasks, as well as providing rewards for doing so. This will always require an appreciation of the dynamics of power as well as the dynamics of personal charisma and relational creativity.

I am sure that all readers of this book will enjoy the conversations of which it is comprised and be tempted to engage in them. They are likely to become aware of a body of knowledge and experience from which they can draw and to which they can contribute.

Earl Hopper,  
Series Editor

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# Preface and acknowledgments

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When my book on *Group and team coaching* (2010, 2016) was met with such interest and appreciation, the seed for this book began to form in my mind. My ideas, how group analytic insights help organizational leaders and team consultants, are developed here but now they sit alongside the ideas of other highly skilled and experienced colleagues. Group analysis is a discipline based in the value of diverse perspectives in any system, and therefore this book is itself a group analytic offering. On 9 December 2017, most of us contributors met together for a day's conversation. In the book are fragments of the conversation from that day, illustrating the rich, non-linear nature of group analytic dialogue.

The book is informed by innumerable relationships and interactions, mine and those of the other contributors, too many to list here, but for which we are nevertheless grateful. I wish to distinguish one person in particular. In 2014, I met and began to work with Gerhard Wilke, whom I am honored to count as a professional friend. As we talked, we discovered considerable overlap in our thinking about organizations, rooted both in our group analytic training, and a shared pragmatism in praxis based in long experience: a nuanced understanding of boundaries, central to effective organizational work.

Gerhard has been a staunch supporter and diligent colleague in the development of the book, and has made a substantial contribution himself, particularly in the final two sections of the book. Our jointly written chapters (22, 23, and 24) are the fruit of our conversations, particularly about 'translucent boundaries' and the necessary flexibility of the organizational consultant, and leader, in working with them.

Finally, I should like to thank Gabrielle Rowan for her careful work on the graphic on the next page.

Christine Thornton  
March 2019



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# Contributors

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**Gwen Adshead** FRCPsych is a group analyst and consultant forensic psychiatrist, for many years at Broadmoor Hospital. Qualified in medicine in 1983, she holds two masters' degrees reflecting her interests, one in medical law and ethics, and the other in mindfulness-based cognitive therapy. She is Visiting Professor of Psychiatry at Gresham College, previously Visiting Professor at Yale School of Law and Psychiatry and was the castaway on Desert Island Discs on 1 July 2010. Gwen has written more than a hundred academic papers; in 2012 she received a Jerwood Award to write *A Short Book About Evil*, published 2015.

**Dick Blackwell** is a group analyst, family therapist, and organizational consultant in private practice, an Associate Editor of *Group Analysis*, Director of the Centre for Psychotherapy and Human Rights, and former Chair of the IGA. With a background in business management, education, and alternative community work, he has supervised and taught at the Institute of Family Therapy, London Marriage Guidance, Westminster Pastoral Foundation, and the IGA. His family work combines systemic and psychoanalytic thinking in a human rights context, with clients predominantly from the 'third world'. He is particularly interested in power, culture, and communication in the context of trauma.

**Farideh Dizadji** M. Inst. G.A., MSc is a group analyst, psychotherapist, and organizational consultant, formerly clinical director of Kids Company's principal London Centre and NAFSIYAT, with previous posts at the Women's Therapy Centre, Hertfordshire University, and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. Farideh holds a BA in Political Science from Tehran University and an MBA from UCLA. While a systems analyst in Iran, she trained as a lawyer and was involved in international socio-political/feminist movements. After 1979 she was forced to leave Iran as a political refugee, living in Berlin before settling in London.

**Clare Gerada** trained in psychiatry and general practice, with a special interest in linking mental health, addiction, and primary care. She has held numerous senior national policy roles with the Department of Health and Royal College of General Physicians (RCGP), becoming the high profile second female Chair of the RCGP between 2011–2013. Clare, an avid tweeter, is often called upon by mainstream media to make sense of current health news. She established and leads the award-winning Practitioner Health Service and is proud still to do the ‘day job’ as a South London GP, in the same surgery since 1992.

**Earl Hopper** is a psychoanalyst, group analyst, training analyst, and organizational consultant based in London. A Fellow of the British Psychoanalytical Society and a Distinguished Fellow of the American Group Psychotherapy Association, he is a former President of the International Association for Group Psychotherapy, and a former Chair of the Association of Independent Psychoanalysts of the British Psychoanalytical Society. Earl is particularly well-known for his theory of the fourth basic assumption, ‘Incohesion: Massification/Aggregation or (ba) I:A/M’, especially relevant to trauma and organizations. He edited *Trauma and Organisations* in the New International Library of Group Analysis (NILGA) of which he is the General Editor.

**Raman Kapur** is Chief Executive and Consultant Clinical Psychologist with Threshold, running therapeutic communities/atmospheres for people with severe mental illness within Northern Ireland. He was Course Director of the Masters in Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy at Queens University Belfast, previously working in the NHS in Blackburn and London. He was awarded an MBE in 2012 for his work in Northern Ireland and regularly contributes to television and radio programs. With over 35 papers on psychotherapy, mental health, and trauma and books on ‘The Troubled Mind of Northern Ireland’, and his recently published ‘Psychiatric Rehabilitation: A Psychoanalytic Approach to Recovery’.

**Vincent Leahy** MA, MSc, Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and Trustee of the Institute of Group Analysis. An independent analytic team coach and organization development facilitator working with individuals and teams in education and various business sectors in the Middle East, North Africa, and the UK. Associate lecturer with the Open University Faculty of Business and Law and Winchester University Faculty of Education, Health and Social Care. Academic focus is on ways of helping groups to work together through complex change and facilitating them in sustaining communication and relationships.

**Abdullah Mia** is a Principal Clinical Psychologist and Clinical Lead for a partnership service between the NHS and Her Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) working with complex trauma and persistent offending in young male adults. He also works in private practice as a therapist, trainer, and facilitator within teams and organizations focusing on equality, diversity, and inclusion. He has written about the individual and group experiences of difference and the impact this has on the mental health of people within their communities. Abdullah has an interest in men's mental health and the impact of social discourses on communities.

**Morris Nitsun** is a consultant psychologist in group psychotherapy in Camden and Islington NHS Mental Health Trust: a training group analyst at IGA London, and founder member of the Fitzrovia Group Analytic Practice. His publications include 'The Anti-group: destructive forces in the group and their creative potential' (1996) and 'Beyond the Anti-group: survival and transformation' (2015).

**Christine Oliver** PhD is Consultant Family Therapist and Group Analyst for East London Foundation Trust and a psychotherapist, supervisor, and organizational consultant in private practice. She is especially interested in methodologies for structuring dialogue to engender reflexive practice at work. She co-directs the Diploma in Systemic Leadership and Consulting Practice, accredited by the Institute of Group Analysis, and provides systemic leadership training and consultancy locally and globally. She has contributed to the development of systemic theory and practice through many published papers and two books: *Reflexive Inquiry*, Karnac, London (2005) and *Complexity, Relationships and Strange Loops*, MHA Institute, Canada (2003).

**Chris Powell** is a group analyst and organizational consultant. Formerly Head of Psychological Therapies at The Retreat, York he now works independently in Leeds. He has extensive experience as a psychotherapist in NHS and independent services, and as a consultant to national organizations, university departments, boards of charities, NHS teams, GP partnerships, and businesses. He practises as a clinician, runs organizational consultation and supervision groups, and mentors senior staff. He is the founder of Café Psychologique which takes psychological thinking out of consulting rooms and into public spaces. His Room to Breathe group does the same in the outdoors.

**Christopher Rance** is a group analyst who started his consultancy career with what is now PwC and has been running his own Project Management firm for the last 40 years. He is a senior member of the British Computer Society, specializing in Artificial Intelligence. He has been a senior lecturer and group conductor on the Judge Institute of

Management's MBA course at Cambridge University and on the Complexity Faculty of Hertfordshire University's IGA-sponsored MA and Doctorate of Management programs. Active in both the IGA and GASI over the years, he has written and taught extensively on Group Analytic Organizational Consultancy.

**Cynthia Rogers** explores how Group Analytic theory and practice can inform work with institutional and colleague relationships. She is an experienced group analyst, supervisor, researcher, organizational consultant, and company director. Her organizational work is informed by her research interest in professional identity, published as 'Psychotherapy and Counselling a Professional Business'. Wiley (2004). Cynthia has a particular interest in the contribution of median dialogue groups to organizational consultancy and was a key speaker at the first international congress on Median Groups in Bolzano, Italy. She has consulted to the voluntary and public services, the business community, and individuals.

**Christopher Scanlon** DPhil is an Independent Psycho-socialist Researcher and Consultant, Training Analyst at the Institute of Group Analysis (London), member of the Irish Group Analytic Society, Associate at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, and Founder member of the Association for Psychosocial Studies (APS). Previously a Consultant Adult and Forensic Psychotherapist and Reflective Practice Team Development (RPTD) Consultant he worked in a range of health, social care, and social justice settings, has published widely in the field, has acted as expert adviser to various Government Departments and NGOs and currently sits of the NHS *Social Care Research Ethics Committee*.

**Ian Simpson** is a group analyst and was Head of Psychotherapy Services at a major London teaching hospital for 20 years. He retired from the NHS five years ago and continues to have a small private practice offering individual and group psychotherapy, supervision, and reflective practice for staff teams. He has written several papers and book chapters on group dynamics, containment and contextual safety in the workplace.

**Margaret Smith** is a Psychodynamic Psychotherapist, Supervisor, Group Analyst and role consultant. Her background is work with young people with emotional and behavioral difficulties, first in London then in Liverpool. She set up and managed a Staff Support Service for NHS Staff in Liverpool, including staff counseling, group psychotherapy, post trauma support, workplace mediation, training, supervision, and organizational consultancy. She led and taught on the Liverpool University Diploma in Psychotherapy, was a visiting lecturer at the

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Tavistock Institute, teaching on D10, and co-led the IGA supervision training, 'Using the Group as the Medium for Supervision' between 2008 and 2017.

**Marlene Spero** PhD (contributors' dialogue pieces only) is a group analyst, psychoanalytic psychotherapist, and organizational consultant. She has consulted to private and public organizations in diverse fields including retail, insurance, security, banking, education, social services, the NHS, and the religious, and has published in the field. Founding Chair of the IGA Organisational Section, she formerly developed courses facilitating understanding of group analysis and organizations. Vice-President of EATGA, she has directed and staffed group analytic and leadership courses in Europe; she continues as a tutor and teacher at the IGA. Her particular interest is in transitions, change, leadership development, and coaching.

**Christine Thornton** is a group analyst, supervisor, and consultant, author of the best-selling *Group and team coaching* [Routledge 2010, 2016], and many other books and papers. Christine works with leaders and coaches enabling better understanding of complex unconscious dynamics in organizational relationships. She has applied group analysis in organizational consultation, team coaching, large groups, action learning, supervision, and professional development groups, in thirty years' consulting; she has been honored for her contributions to coaching. As a senior leader, most recently she was national clinical director at icap. Christine was Founding Director of the IGA organizational training, *Reflective Practice in Organisations*.

**Gerhard Wilke** studied anthropology at King's College, Cambridge before training as a group analyst. For 25 years he has consulted across Europe in many industries and public sector organizations, combining group analytic insights with ethnographic ways of studying and working with clients, and building up an international reputation as a Large Group conductor. An Associate of Ashridge Business School, he has developed leadership skills for ten years with the UK National Institute of Health Research; he teaches group analysis in the UK and Germany. Gerhard is widely published in English and German, including *Living Leadership* and *Breaking free of Bonkers*.

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## Section I

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# Editor's introduction

## What group analysis can offer in organizational work

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Section I gives my editor's introduction to group analytic praxis. The material in these chapters has been expanded from two papers originally published in *Group Analysis*, in vols 50(4) and 51(1), December 2017 and March 2018, entitled *Towards a group analytic praxis for working with teams in organizations I and II*. The reprinted material is by permission of SAGE Publications, Ltd.

Chapter one gives an account of what drew me, as an organizational practitioner, to group analysis; shares a fragment of conversation which sheds light on what brought some of the other contributors; reviews group analytic organizational literature; and gives a brief introduction to each chapter.

Chapter two sets out six aspects of group analysis that render it a valuable basis for organizational work: attention to the individual in the group, nuanced understanding of interpersonal communication, attention to context, tolerance and value of multiple perspectives, creative incorporation of difference, and a flexible developmental approach to managing anxiety and leadership projections. It also highlights key differences between clinical and organizational group analysis and ends with a focus on two group analytic concepts, *communication* and *translation*, including a fragment of group analytic conversation on these themes among the book's contributors.

Chapter three, *Persecutor, victim, rescuer: imperfect consulting in an imperfect world* offers an extended vignette in illustration, explored through the use of 'five questions' I have developed as an aid to making praxis decisions; Margaret Smith takes this analysis further from a systemic perspective in chapter 15.

Chapter four analyzes the vignette from the perspective of the six characteristics set out in chapter two.



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# Coming to group analysis and this book

*Christine Thornton*

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*Adapted from Thornton, C. Towards a group analytic praxis for working with teams in organizations. Group Analysis 50(4), pp. 519–536. Copyright © 2017 by the Author. Reprinted by permission of SAGE Publications, Ltd.*

Group analysis is above all the art of conversation, or ‘dialogue’ (De Mare, Piper and Thompson, 1991). Dialogue, the sharing of differing perspectives through conversation, is central. I feel profound gratitude for the time, care, and thought invested by the group analytic colleagues who have shared their perspectives in this volume. We have very different routes to and uses of group analysis, and yet share common threads in the way we think and practice that go beyond work in organizations; they reflect a desire and commitment to using our discipline to increase dialogue and so humane behavior in the world. We hope that this book will bring group analytic principles to a wider audience.

In this introductory chapter I give an account of what drew me, as an organizational practitioner, to group analysis; share a fragment of conversation which sheds light on what brought some of the other contributors; review group analytic organizational literature; and give a brief introduction to each chapter.

## **Background: coming to group analysis**

In the late 1980s, I began working with organizations and teams. I was usually hired to improve strategic thinking and/or the ability to work together. There were several ‘models’ purporting to help with these undertakings, but they were almost all rational, addressed to conscious, relatively controllable aspects of people’s experience at work. However, most teams’ difficulties, especially the intractable ones, lay in the realm of the *irrational*. Psychoanalytic and systems

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theories seemed to offer more useful perspectives, and so I attended a number of experiential educational events; these helped me help clients understand and change a broader range of problems.

A little later, sitting in a group in the Tavistock Institute, London, I heard that there was an Institute of Group Analysis (IGA) next door. Intrigued, in 1993 I joined the IGA Foundation Course and engaged a group analyst, Dick Blackwell, as a supervisor. I enjoyed Dick's insights and his engagement with the contexts and politics of organizations. I liked the strong emphasis in the Course on experience and praxis, and the theory, more like a framework than a blueprint. I particularly enjoyed the large groups, dialogue among many people, and the experienced validity of many different views of a single topic. I experienced 'koinonia' – the 'impersonal fellowship . . . in which people can speak, hear, see and think freely, a form of togetherness and amity that brings a pooling of resources' (De Mare, Piper and Thompson, 1991). I particularly remember profoundly shared mourning for John Smith<sup>1</sup> in May 1994.

Group analysis had been developed as a psychotherapy, and I chose to train, qualifying as a therapist. I became excited by what I observed in my now bifurcated practice: that the processes in my therapeutic groups were identical to those in the organizational groups with which I had worked for over a decade. I hoped to integrate group analytic principles in my 'day job' as an organizational consultant, or coach, as we were by then beginning to be called. Since then this has been my work, and this book ultimately results from the greater realization of that ambition.

**Fragment of contributors' dialogue: what drew us to group analysis?**

CHRISTINET – *We practice in the way that we are. You practice as an anthropologist, Gerhard. We use the experience that we've had because we are using our selves.*

CYNTHIA – *I always feel at disadvantage being a scientist. It's just such a different paradigm.*

CHRISTINET – *I didn't know that. It explains to me how you teach and write so clearly, because you are breaking it down.*

GERHARD – *Explain?*

CYNTHIA – *Ask me about DNA, enzymes and I'm away. Particle theory versus wave theory. Complexity theory – fractals. That was the first time I understood group analysis. Once I understood it as a mathematical thing I could understand why you just let it flow and I could explain it to people. If I am doing some work, a large part of it will be teaching and explaining.*

MARLENE – *I never thought group analysis was enough because it never dealt with roles, structure, authority, the task is always internal to the group rather than external. The wider context is not just politics or culture but legal systems and accountancy impacting on a particular group within the firm that may be going wrong. If we don't hold the task in mind, we tend to get caught up with the process and perhaps individual members.*

SOMEONE – *When I talk about transitional thinking it's Winnicott pure and simple.*

GERHARD – *What other experience do you carry inside that helps you do the work?*

MARLENE – *The people I've worked with have been in different roles, structures, and contexts, in transition and change. I suppose I hold a lot in my mind, both theoretically and practically – that is what is group analytical – it is sitting back and thinking about what is going on.*

CHRISTINE T – *You are holding so many different perspectives in your mind and I think that is group analysis.*

MARLENE – *I disagree. For me group analysis was always about clinical practice. If we start introducing too many different perspectives we might dilute it.*

CHRISTINE T – *That's the fear.*

CYNTHIA – *But Group analysis started off in so many different fields, sociology like Elias for example. Because psychiatry was the most prestigious it got located there but it must be relocated.*

MARLENE – *Foulkes' understanding of culture and its impact, and his links with the Frankfurt School of sociology, as well as the holistic approach of Goldstein influenced his thinking.*

GERHARD – *I come from a society where science is not only created by natural science. Science is systematic study in a university. From ancient tombs to DNA.*

CHRISTINE O – *Group analysis is both a model and way of thinking. For me, it is a way of thinking.*

ABDULLAH – *I am confused in this in discussion – are we talking about ownership of knowledge? Is it ours to own? Can we draw on multiple knowledges? When I do reflexive practice, it is not just my neuro-scientific or psychological background, it's my life experience. I like to share my knowledge. Not own it.*

MARLENE – *Something is linked to experience. You don't learn things unless you experience it.*

IAN – *Developing a psychotherapy service in the NHS needed a group analytic understanding – enormously helpful because it took into account what happened to the individual as well as what happened to the group. The whole thing seen as community based on group. The problem for me in that was how it fitted into the wider organizational structure. I don't know how it would apply in a business – I am talking about a social care organization.*

MARLENE – *You cannot talk about what an organization is in the way that you used to. They are too big and too interconnected with wider systems, both internal and external.*

CHRISTINE O – *Can we not think of group analysis as a living community?*

GERHARD – *I think it is a generational thing. Things have changed. Things have to change, be adapted and handed on with each generational shift.*

CHRISTINET – *I'm seeking to change something. I came to group analysis as someone who had worked with organizations then learned to be a clinician . . . . I found that it was the most coherent intellectual framework for what I was doing with organizations, because it could take in so many perspectives. I don't think that's at odds with there being many ways of practising group analysis. There is no one group analysis, it's a very catholic institution. If we manage to make a contribution to group analytic organizational theory in this book, it will likely also turn out to be catholic.*

VINCE – *My background is human resources. Talking to people I work closely with in HR – they do use group analytic concepts. They don't all know that but they do use them. I've never worked in a clinical setting but in FMCGs such as dairy companies and also schools, going in and talking about community – not gatekeeping group analysis as a little self-referencing group. Applicability is so vast and so profound. Gatekeeping/owning does not do it justice.*

GERHARD – *How do you talk to people using these group analytic ideas without the language?*

VINCE – *You translate. Using different perspectives to look at an organization. If you go in with particular perspective you will see different things – new science – group analysis or HR will see different things.*

EARL – *What you just said is the very essence of the group analytic perspective – that it is a matter of abstraction and perception. Perception and the need to translate from one to the other is a highly political undertaking.*

VINCE – *Organizations are highly political.*

CHRISTINET – *And value-led.*

VINCE – *I suspect that is what people like us to do – to take a deeper perspective on what they are already doing but aren't confident to give a name to. . . . using group analysis to understand what people are already doing and making deeper connections. But there is a danger of being a self-referential community – when I first went to the IGA, it felt like a dentist's in the 1960's. (Laughter)*

CHRISTINE O – *But practice can also develop theory, that's something I am very interested in.*

CHRISTINET – *That's also what Lewin said – nothing so practical as a good theory.*

GWEN – *The idea of process is important and drew me to group analysis. The training has allowed me to occupy both positions – to be there as a person, and to see people in context. The group analytic view is essential for people who have offended – without figure and ground of context you cannot think about offenders. Is deviance individual or broader than individual? I wouldn't have been able to work in a secure institution without this perspective. This*

*notion of personhood and a person who is continually constructed but also has a personal story, narrative. This is fundamental. It doesn't make much difference whether persons come together in a group to try to understand why they have done something wrong, or to understand how to do a good job.*

## **The matrix: core of group analytic thinking and praxis**

The group processes articulated first by Foulkes<sup>2</sup> seem to be universal, no matter how different the people, purposes, or depth of those groups. This observation was the kernel around which *Group and team coaching* (2010, 2016) formed, and the response to that book confirmed my sense that here was a discipline with much to offer the organizational practitioner in complex modern environments.

Group analysis is not a single theory. Foulkes (1948, 1990b) sketched profound principles, but theory has been and still is being developed. It is deeply rooted in praxis and in group experience, both as members and 'conductors' (Foulkes' musical metaphor for facilitators, still the term we use today).

Foulkes' concept of the 'matrix' is central, describing the interpenetration of person, group, and society, the radical proposition that people are fundamentally social beings, and that the lived experience of being a person is dynamic, that is, changing all the time:

In group analytic theory we do not orient ourselves by discerning "intrapsychic", "interpersonal" and "group dynamic" processes. We believe and can show they are the same processes which can and must be described from different standpoints according to the task which we pursue. "Society" is *inside* the individual, just as well as outside him, and what is "intrapsychic" is at the same time shared by the group, unconsciously most of the time in either sphere, except in the group-analytic group. The borderline of what is "in" or "outside" is constantly moving, and the experience of these changes is of particular significance

Foulkes (1990a)

This mind-blowing proposition allows the organizational practitioner to re-position her/his perspective as the task requires. Based on Foulkes, Bhurruth (2008) proposed the 'tripartite matrix', and this area of theory is still being elaborated, for example by Nitzgen and Hopper (2017):

The matrix should be conceptualized in terms of multi-relational processes. From the Foulkesian group analytical point of view, the matrix of any group can be analyzed in terms of patterns of relations, values

and norms, verbal and non-verbal communication, styles of thinking and feeling, etc., depending on what is taken as problematic  
(Hopper and Weinberg, 2017)

The matrix is thus the foundation for becoming aware of many perspectives on/in a given situation, together building a rich picture. It focuses on patterns of relating, occurring through conversation, a process in which we co-construct experience and learning. Conversation is the group analytic method (Stacey, 2005). This applies in praxis, between the people we are working with, in the way we conceptualize the organization as a whole, and simultaneously in the mind of the practitioner, who is considering many possible explanations (theories) about 'what is happening now'. It has profound implications for leaders and for working with relationships between divisions within organizations, see further chapters 22 and 23. Conversation is the goal, the method, and if things go well, the substantive outcome of our work.

The matrix makes group analysis a highly advantageous mindset for work with complex modern organizations. It derives from the same mid-twentieth century intellectual paradigm as quantum theory in physics and systems theory in biology (Bohm, 1951; Von Bertalanffy, 1951), advances emphasizing the interconnectedness of everything, ultimately bearing fruit in contingency, complexity, and chaos thinking. Sociology is central: the sociologist Norbert Elias (2000), an 'elder' of group analysis, shows how context is fundamental. Foulkes' concept of the matrix, with its emphasis on multiple perspectives, meshes readily with systems and complexity theories so that group analysis offers a coherent intellectual framework for understanding and working with interplaying processes from individual, through team, departmental and organizational, to societal and global levels.

Theory and praxis in group analysis are continuously intertwined. While for the average practitioner<sup>3</sup> the concept 'matrix' is quite enough to be thinking about, further down the page the ever practice-oriented Foulkes adds 'Ours is a creative task. The group analyst should be flexible, natural, spontaneous, follow the group's lead and learn from them'. The key praxis message is to adapt one's practice and interventions to the needs of the specific group; to 'translate' (see chapters two, three and 18) the perspectives into the right language for these particular people. 'Putting it into words' (Rogers, 1987) is an art as well as a science. Group-analytic conversation (or 'free-floating discussion') reflects the complexity of reality.

### **Group analytic organizational literature**

Group analysts have developed a sophisticated literature for the clinical applications of group analysis, but a relatively sparse analysis of its