

## **COACHING IN GROUPS – A PRACTICAL APPROACH TO LEARNING AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT:** by Tony Warmesley

There is no doubt that as a vehicle for learning and personal development, real live business issues beat case studies any day. Executive coaching builds on this by encouraging people to confront their issues but usually on a 1:1 basis between coach and coachee. An alternative is for the coach to work with a small group, a technique I have been involved with in several organisations over the last few years. It is akin to Action Learning but a bit more flexible.

A group is typically composed of six members from across an organisation or even from several different companies plus a coach whose role is to facilitate individual and group learning. The group meets for anything up to 1-2 days several times a year and members discuss their current business issues, challenges and dilemmas with each other. In this way and with the right guidance from the coach, members learn to act as consultants and coaches to each other.

Experience in the group is shared and people learn to value the non-expert view. Sometimes the effort taken to explain a complex situation in itself clarifies the individual's thoughts. A key is to learn the art of asking rich, open questions of each other rather than moving straight to problem-solving mode. In this way, new ideas and solutions emerge, often from the person who posed the issue in the first place. The group has to learn to work as a team and as trust develops, the issues raised often become more sensitive and personal. With expert assistance from the coach, the group and its members become increasingly adept at identifying behavioural patterns in themselves and providing each other with valuable feedback.

All in all, members not only resolve their particular issues, but their self-awareness improves significantly as they gain a deeper understanding of their behaviour in a group. And finally, members nearly always take the approach back into their own teams and organisations, particularly in relation to discussing, exploring and questioning rather than providing solutions.