

than sitting next to you! Or maybe the conversation is hogged by the men (or even by the vicar). It may even be that most people are getting drowsy, not paying attention or looking longingly out of the window.

B2 Hidden Process

The observable is being influenced by the way people are feeling. However, there is no way that anyone else can know about that feeling unless the person concerned shares it with the group, or someone else asks them directly. For example:

- Two people in the group may appear to be sharing in some kind of secret which will seem very mysterious unless the people concerned acknowledge it (e.g. they have talked about the meeting beforehand and are just waiting for a particular issue to come up but aren't going to raise it themselves).
- Everyone is feeling new and helpless, but equally everyone imagines that everyone else is feeling totally confident and in control.

Some of these hidden factors can be brought to the surface by using the questions in the accompanying leaflet on ***Stakeholding in Groups***. The only way of discovering about hidden Process is by sharing or asking.

The skill of being able to participate in a group and at the same time to observe the visible Process and become aware of the hidden Process requires a lot of practice. The more people in the group who acquire that skill the better.

There is always Process in a group.

It always affects the Content.

When it goes unrecognised, the effect can be very disabling.

Material in this leaflet is drawn from *Understanding Groups* by Paul Bates and Lois Smith originally for the St Albans Diocesan Board of Ministry
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Wakefield Ministry Scheme



UNDERSTANDING GROUPS

A Resource Pack for Parish Teams
and Core Groups

2. Content and Process

GR J2

Content and Process

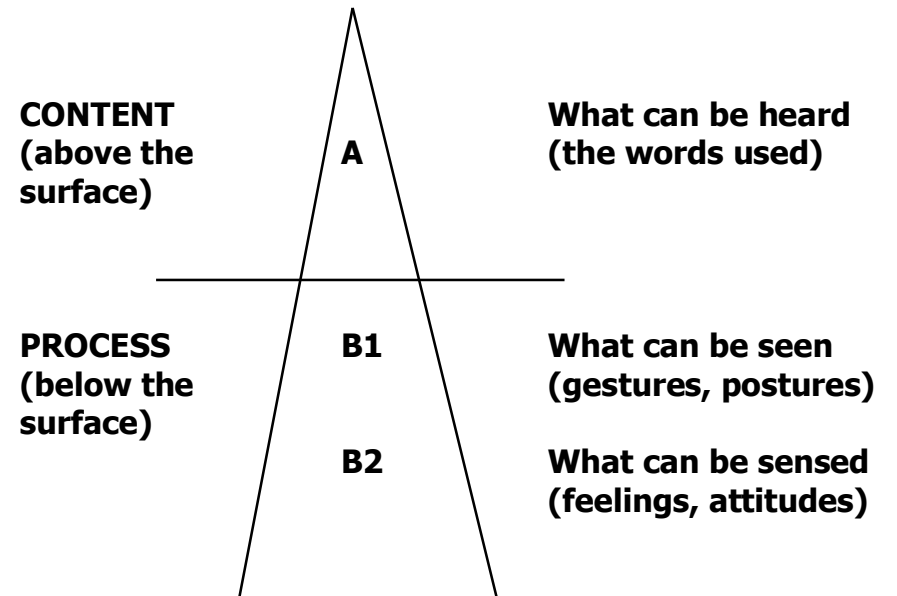
One vital tool for understanding what goes on in groups is that of being able to distinguish between the *Content* of the discussion in a group and the *Process*, i.e. what is going on in the group as the people relate to each other.

Content refers to the actual words spoken. The content might be accurately recorded word for word in writing. On the page you would then have the spoken words, but without any indication of *how* they were spoken or what the person speaking looked like- their facial expression or posture. All of this is *Process*.

For many people the most important part of what is happening in a group is the Content. In fact, however, this is only the tip of the iceberg. Often, group members get so involved in the task of the group, or the content of the discussion, that they do not notice the rest of the iceberg, the Process, beneath the waves. But the process holds the key to why the group is having the particular discussion that it is, and why it is behaving in the particular way it is.

The diagram opposite therefore shows there are two *Levels of Interaction*, through Content and Process, but with a further complication at the Process level, because at that level there are both visible and invisible factors to take into account.

Thus: **A. CONTENT**
B. PROCESS 1. What is observable
2. What can only be sensed:
needs to be checked in order to discover
whether the sensing is accurate.



B1 Observable Process

Where are people sitting?
Who is sitting next to whom, or opposite whom?
Who is doing all the talking?
Who talks after whom?
Where do people look when they are talking?
Who seems to listen?
Who interrupts?
How do people behave?
How are they sitting (their posture)?
What gestures do they use?
What tone of voice do they adopt?

Answers to these questions can give vital clues as to what is going on in the group. For example, it may be that two people always sit opposite each other. Maybe they hold different attitudes. It is easier to fight someone sitting opposite you