

Pods, people and professional practice: Developing containing organisations

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Social Work & Social Care

Where are we heading and 'hearting'?

- Understand our current context
- Theorise our experiences
- Identify ways to sustain relationship-based practice
- Able to think and feel

The national and the Brighton and Hove social work context

- To be people focussed not system focussed
 - To be flexible, innovative & creative,
 - To have space & time to reflect
 - To work closely with all professionals involved and create shared outcomes for the child and family
 - To value the relationships Social Workers build up with families to have continuity of social work through the child and family journey
 - To have trust in autonomous, knowledgeable, emotionally aware practitioners
 - To be solution focused
 - To comfortably hold tensions and manage risk
 - To feel valued within the organisation
 - To have the time to support and plan effectively with families
 - To be outcome and impact focussed
 - To engage and involve front line staff in the development of the service through the establishment of a number of Reference Groups
 - To promote reflective practice, coaching and supervision
- (Rethinking of Social Work Practice, Dept of Education)*

Brighton and Hove

children's social work aspirations

Social Work our Story

- We want to ensure that all of our children and young people/SOCIAL WORKERS have the best possible start in their life/JOB, so that they grow up/CAN WORK happy, healthy and safe with the opportunity to fulfil their own potential. This means all children and young people/SOCIAL WORKERS in the city have access to high quality education and the right to a nurturing family, learning and social /WORK environment that will provide them with knowledge, experiences and skills to secure/SUSTAIN employment and be active and responsible citizens/PROFESSIONALS.
- In all that we do with children, families and **staff** we ascribe to the values articulated across the authority which declare the commitment to collaboration, respect openness, efficiency, creativity and , of course citizen/client/customer focus. We are committed to a multiagency approach across all agencies involved in delivering services to children.

Definitions: Pod

- An elongated seed vessel of a leguminous plant such as the pea

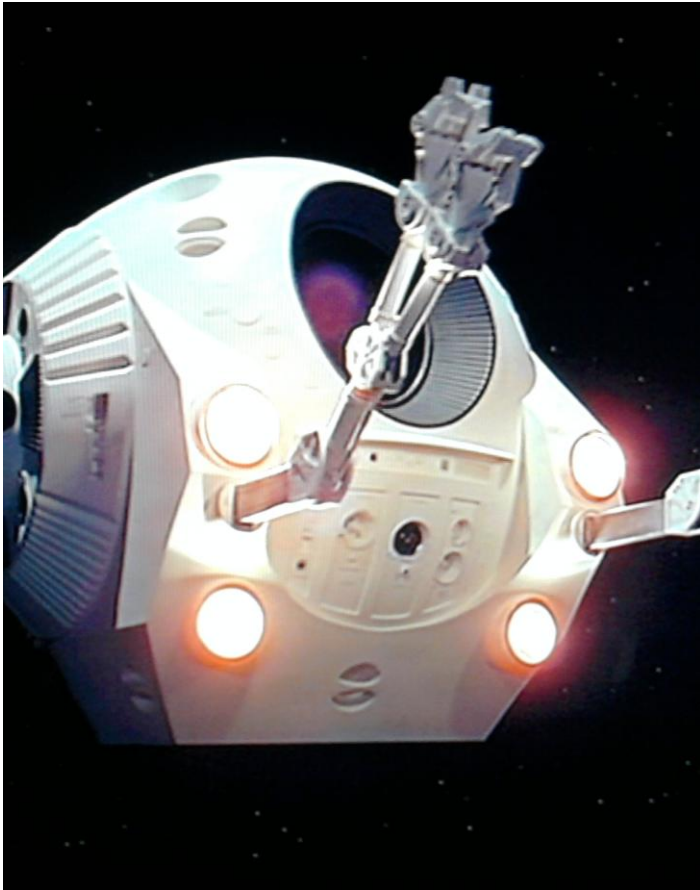
The Brighton Context



Definitions: Pod

- A detachable or self-contained unit on an aircraft, spacecraft, vehicle, or vessel, having a particular function

The Brighton Context



Definitions: Pod

- A small herd or school of marine animals, especially whales: *a pod of 500 dolphins frolicking in the bay*







Definitions: Pod

- **in pod:** *informal, dated* [Pregnant](#).
- **verb (pods, podding, podded)**

Core principles of a Relationship-based Approach

- It recognises that each social work encounter is unique
- It understands that human behaviour is complex and multifaceted, i.e. people are not simply rational beings but have affective – conscious and unconscious – dimensions that enrich but simultaneously complicate human relationships
- It focuses on the inseparable nature of the internal and external worlds of individuals and the importance of integrated – psycho-social – as opposed to polarised responses to social problems



Core principles of a Relationship-based Approach

‘As a social worker you have to be capable of thinking simultaneously about:

- the uniqueness of each individual service user
- the relationship of service users to their social circumstances
- your relationship with individual service users
- your relationship with the socio-political context in which you practise.’ (Wilson et al, 2009:3)



Containing professional pod practices (PPPs)



Integrated professional pod practices (PPPs)

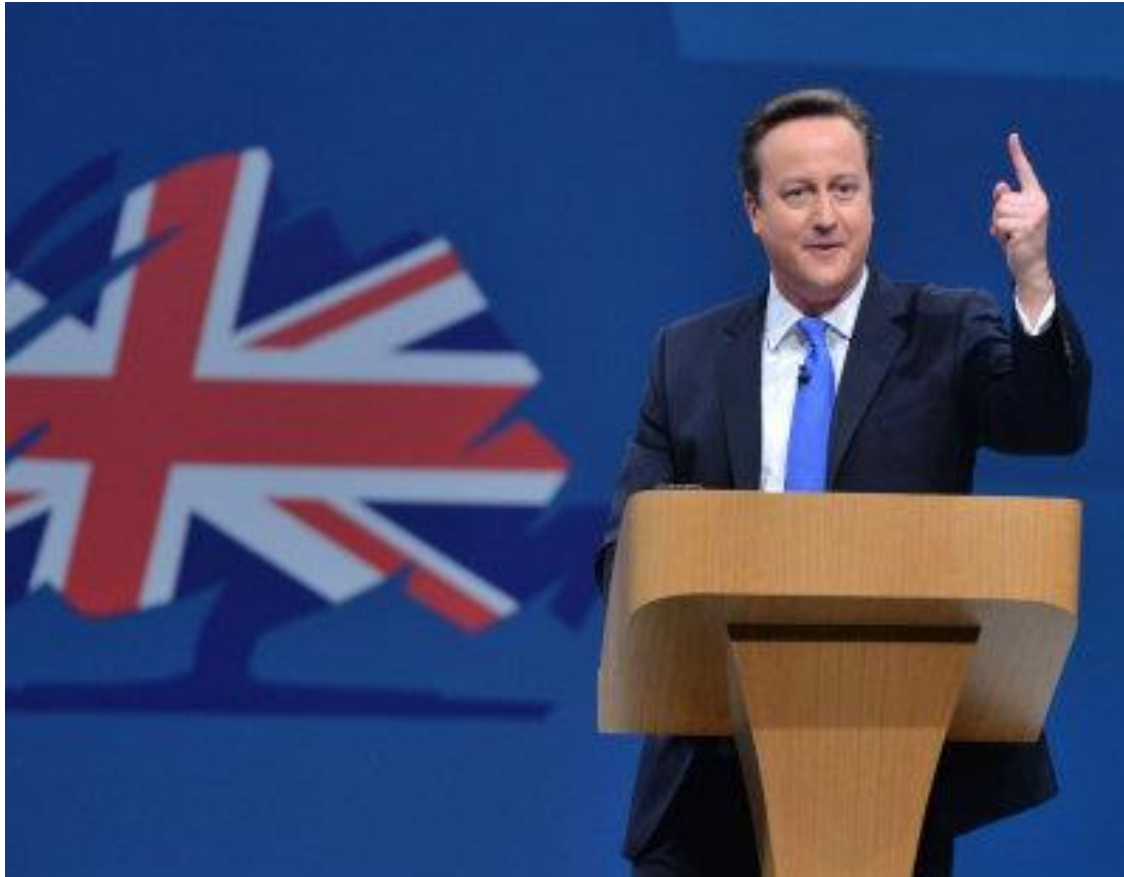


Spoiler alert

- **PODS ARE NOT PERFECT**

- **MODELS ARE NOT MAGIC**

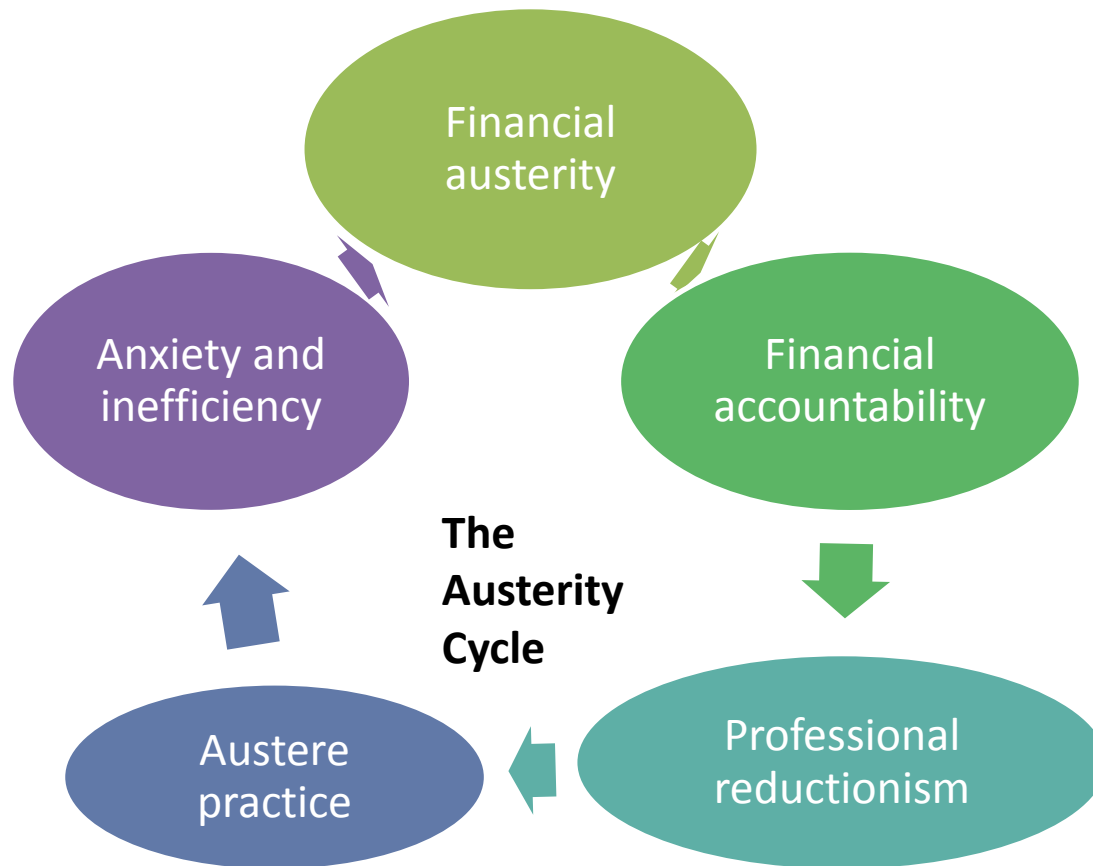
Social workers to face five years in prison for failing to protect children from sexual abuse, warns Cameron



Nothing New under the Sun.... and holding realistic expectations

'It is with great pleasure that I am writing a foreword for this new edition (????) of Janet Mattinson's classic monograph on the Reflection Process in Casework Supervision. I find that most of what I wrote in ???? still holds true... ..she explores ideas about the desirable distance between worker and client and states clearly and unequivocally that to help another person one has to be involved. This is perhaps even more important today than when the monograph was first written. There is a real danger that a combination of larger organisations, increasingly stressful work, a hostile media and staff shortages are resulting in a flight by social workers from their users. They can find refuge from involvement in procedures and bureaucratic structures and blame this upon their managers, and with considerable justification' (Parsloe, Foreword in Mattinson, ???? , pp. 7).

Challenges to containing and integrated practice (even in pods): Anxiety, risk and austerity



Austerity, Anxiety and Compassion

- So not just financial austerity but **relational** austerity
- Dysfunction and distress - anxiety - defensive practice
- Compounded by contemporary trends (Cain, 2012; Sandel, 2012; Turkle, 2010)









- Wellbeing
- the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy.
- synonyms: welfare, health, good health, happiness, comfort, security, safety, protection, prosperity, profit, good, success, fortune, good fortune, advantage, interest, prosperousness, successfulness

Characteristics of Professionally Austere Practice

- Certain
- Simple
- Risk-free and averse
- Doing
- Cognitive/Rational
- Objective
- Outcome-driven
- Techno-bureaucratic compet.
- Uncertain
- Complex
- Risk-ridden and tolerant
- Being
- Affective/Irrational
- Subjective
- Relationship-based
- Emotional intelligence



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Austere Anxious Avoidance

What is it, at root, that is being avoided?... Of particular relevance are frequent examples of “turning a blind eye” – that is failing to see what is before one’s eyes because to do so would cause too much psychic disturbance – and of various forms of “attacks on linking” – that is systematic disconnection between things which logically belong together, again a defence which is employed because to make the link would be a source of painful anxiety (Rustin, 2005:12)



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Theorising our experiences

- Social systems as defences against anxiety - Menzies-Lyth (1988)
- Contemporary adaptations - Armstrong and Rustin (2014), Lees *et al* (2012), Whittaker (2011) and Taylor *et al* (2008)



Contemporary examples of social systems as defences against anxiety

- Bureaucratisation of practice- proliferation of policies and procedures, performance indicators and audits
- IT systems – ‘from the relational to the informational’ (Parton, 2008)
- Case management supervision
- Diminished professional responsibility and delegated decision-making

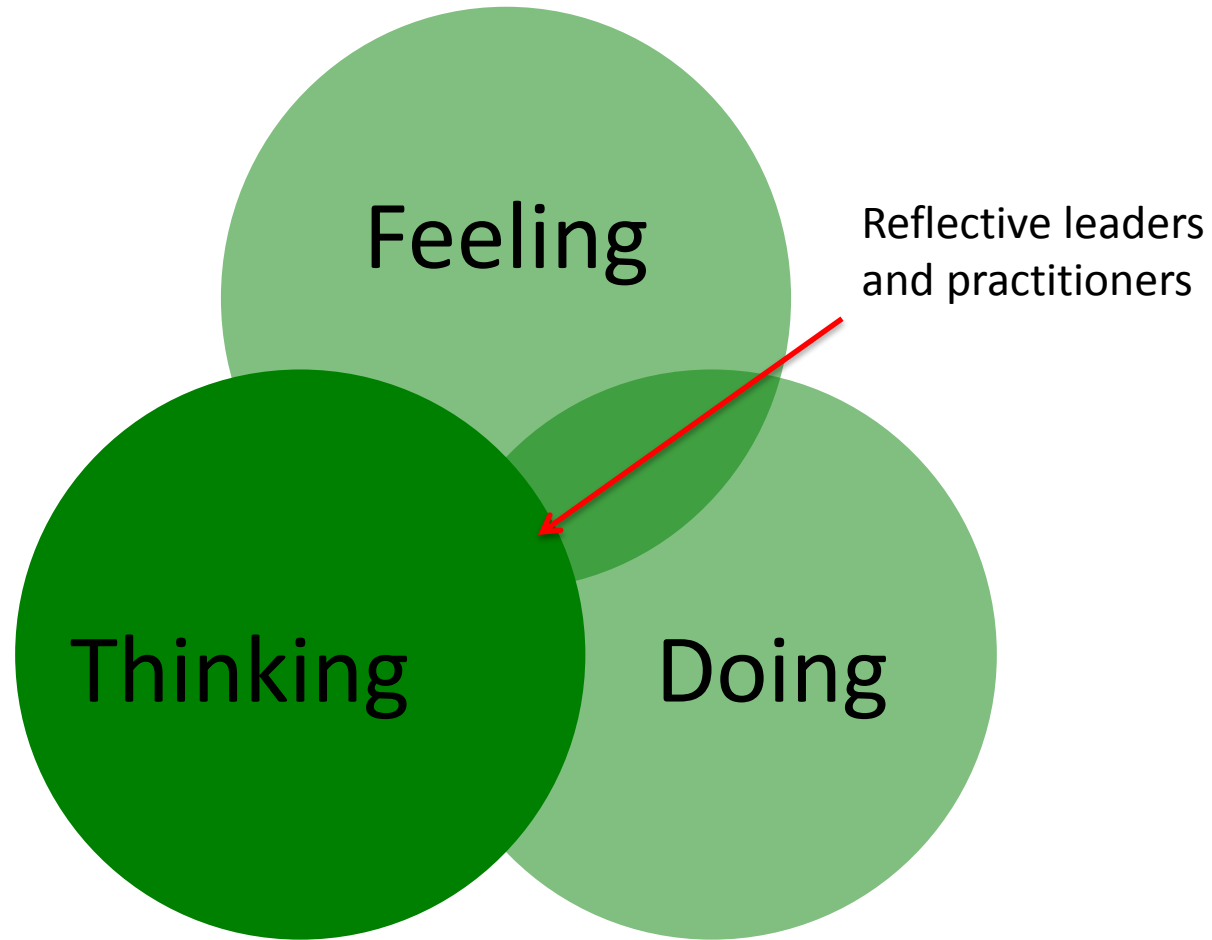
Contemporary examples of social systems as defences against anxiety

- Formality of court procedures and process creating false illusion of certainty, control and infallibility
- Repeat assessments
 - ‘an unrealistic hope that assessment would somehow deliver certainty if only it went on long enough’ (Taylor et al, 2008, p.29).*
- Endless search for an ‘expert witness’

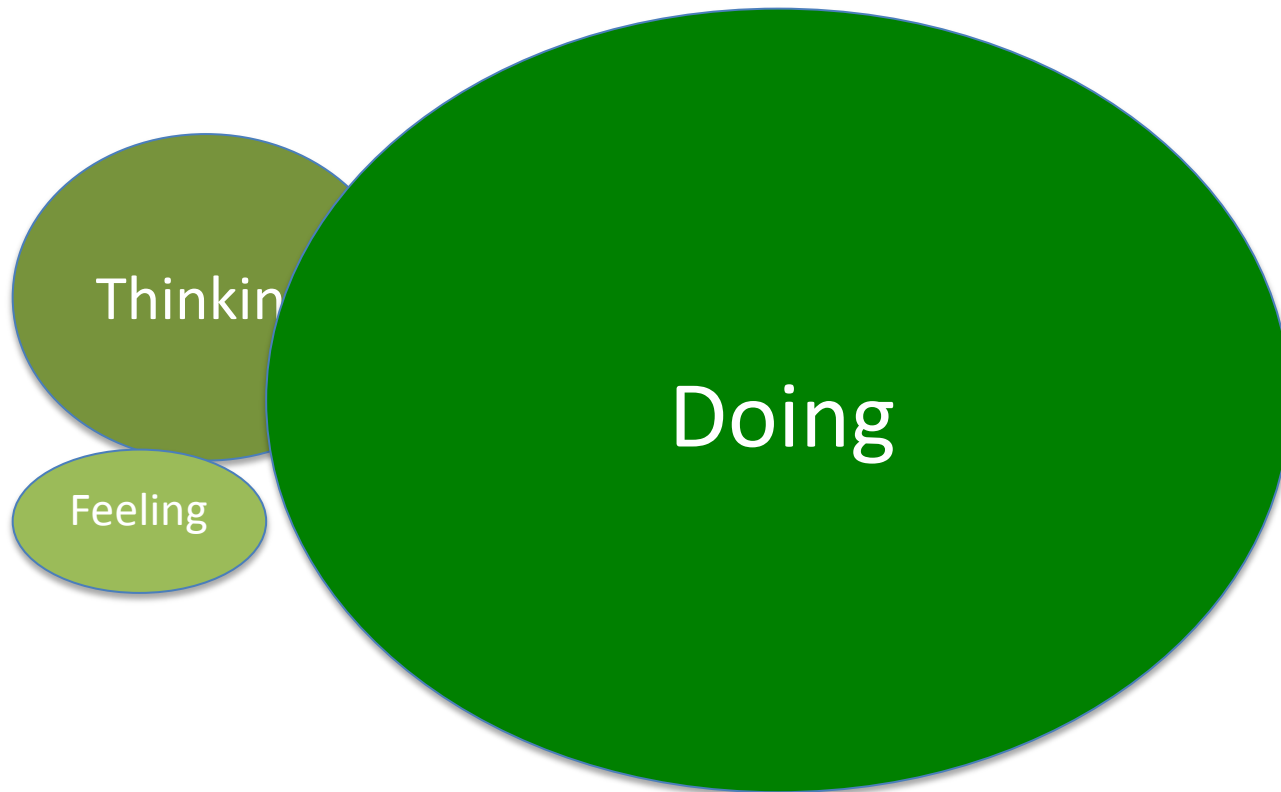
Developing and sustaining containing and integrated PPPs




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Developing and sustaining containing and integrated PPPs



Organisational 'doing' containment



Psychodynamic &
systemic approaches
Agile working
80/20 split
Reflective supervision

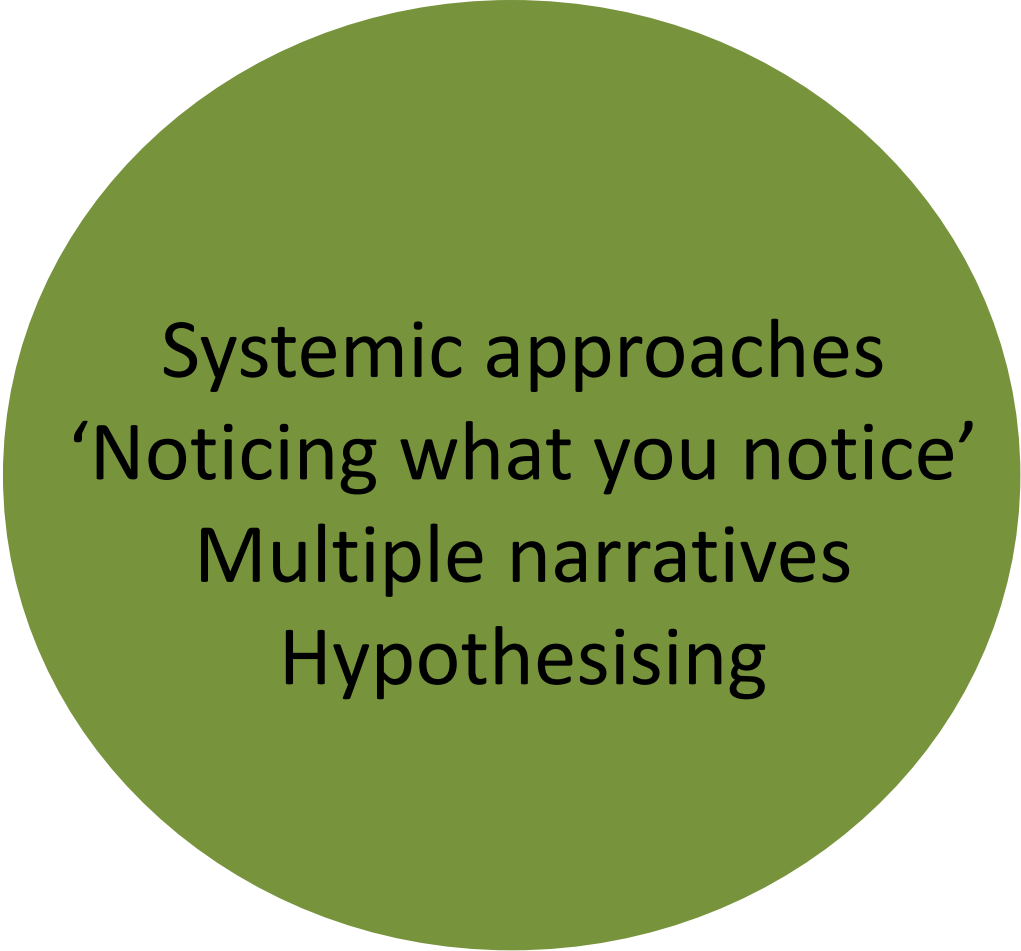
Agile working



Organisational 'doing' containment

<https://healthylifeexperiment.com/tag/peapods/>

Epistemological 'thinking' containment

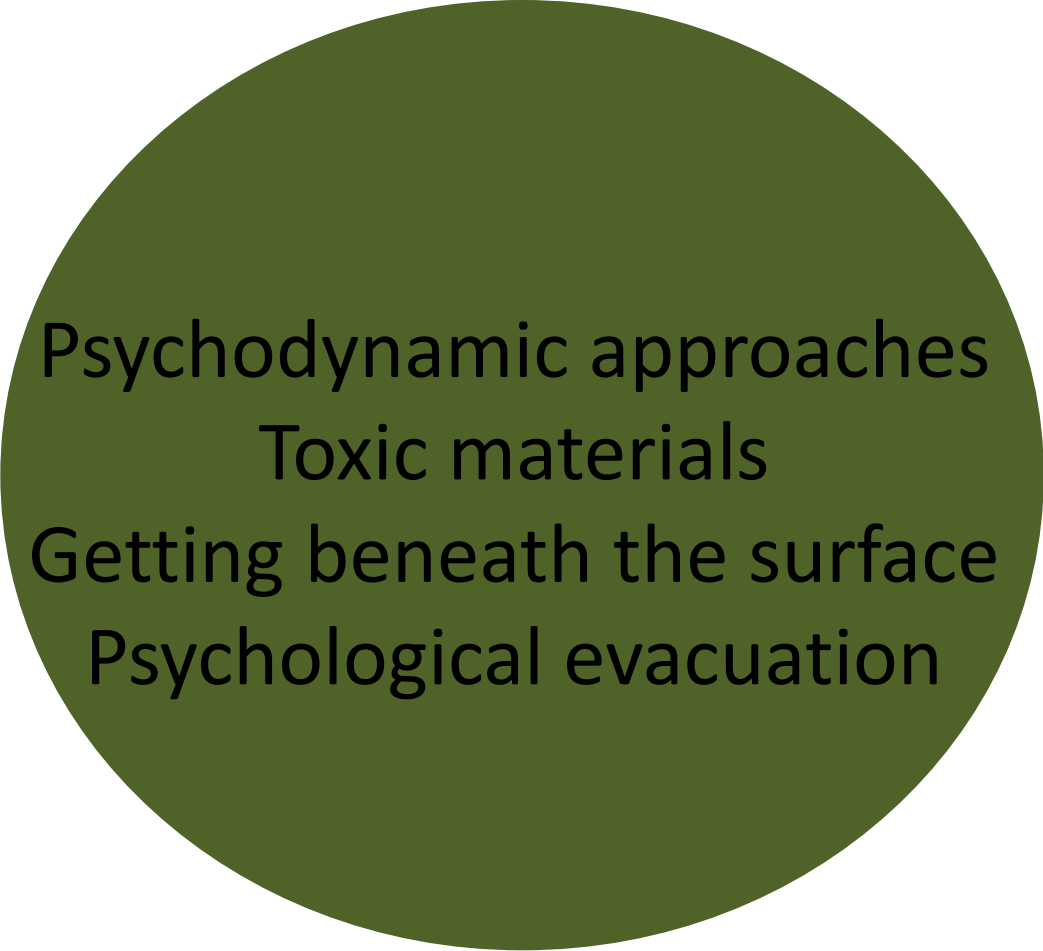


Systemic approaches
'Noticing what you notice'
Multiple narratives
Hypothesising

Thinking outside the box: Noticing what we notice....



Emotional 'feeling' containment

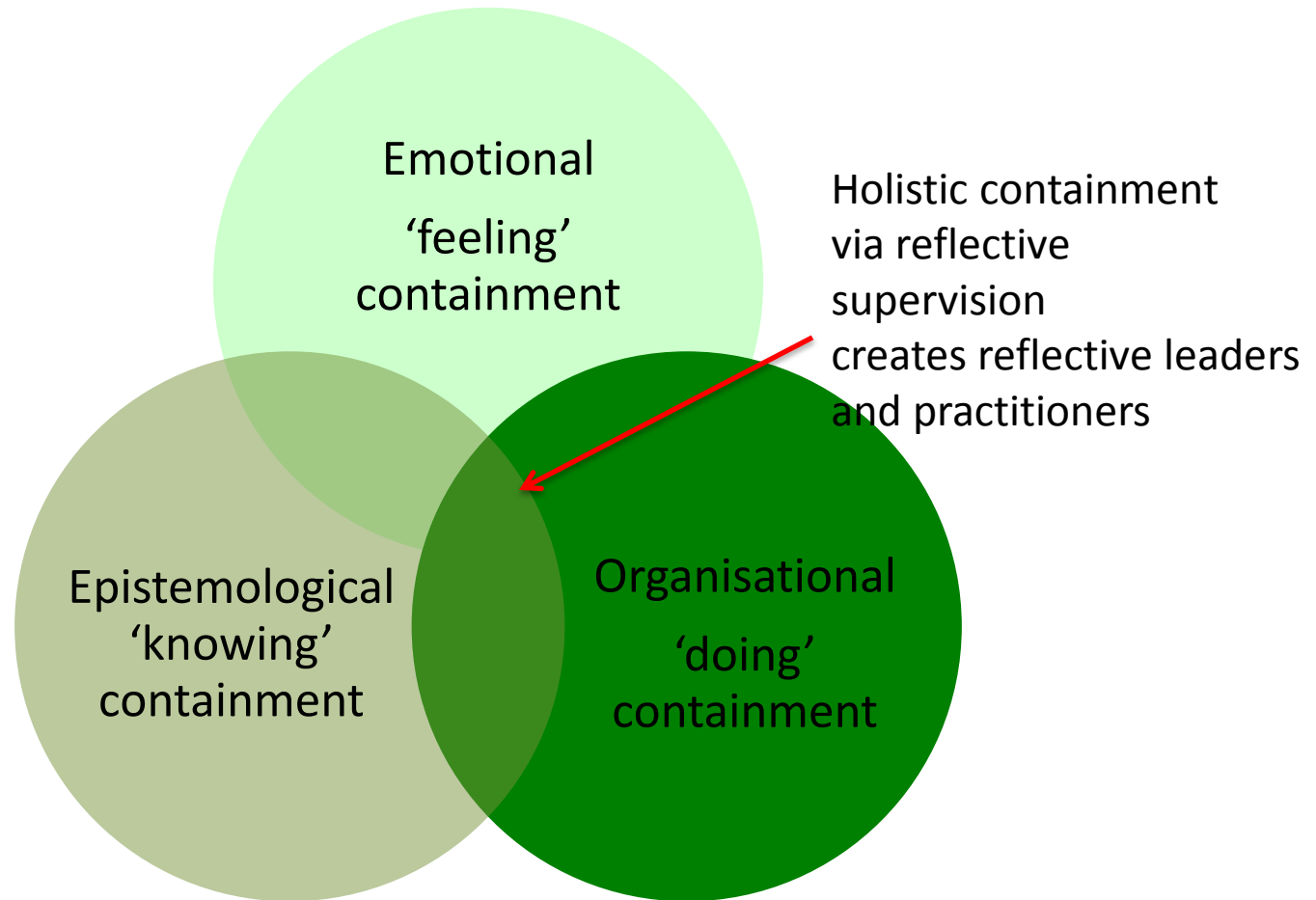


Psychodynamic approaches
Toxic materials
Getting beneath the surface
Psychological evacuation

Is this your pod?



Developing and sustaining containing and integrated professional pod practices



A containing, integrated and podful organisation



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Resources

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