

day. Start with this one to influence the group toward more interesting and productive meetings. Begin to mold a group consciousness for selectivity concerning the topic or content, to

build a renewed interest in the dynamics of group interaction to promote a vital enthusiasm for results, for accomplishment. Capture the thrill that results from enthusiastic meetings!

Group Leaders Look at Frustration—

HERBERT A. THELEN

That any group becomes more or less frustrated from time to time by its problems of functioning seems to be a common observation. In this recorded discussion, edited by Herbert A. Thelen, associate professor of education at The University of Chicago, five group leaders analyze the sources of frustration in group situations and define the rôle of the leader in meeting problems of frustration when they arise.

IS FRUSTRATION necessary to group progress? How much frustration. What kinds of frustration? Under what conditions? What is the psychological significance of frustration in groups? What are its values? What can the group leader or leadership do to minimize its costs?

Following the second summer session of the National Training Laboratory of Group Development,¹ held at Bethel, Maine, we find five of the leaders of the Basic Skill Training groups (the primary curriculum division) meeting together for the purpose of exploring the problem of frustration. You are invited to join them as they discuss what group frustration is, what some of its implications are, and how it may be conceptualized.

Dimensions of Frustration

Earlier in the day, the group had been given a listing of six "dimensions" of frustration. This list, which was prepared by one of the members as an aid to discussion of the subject, is:

1. Feeling of inability to overcome identified barriers or obstacles.
2. Feeling of inadequate space of free movement, particularly with regard to individual need-meeting in the group.
3. Feeling of being held in a strong powerfield: leader domination, group expectancy for itself, rigidly institutionalized procedures or values.
4. Feeling of lack of direction toward goal.
5. Feeling of threat or fear in objectively recognizing and verbalizing forces which create impasse.

¹This analysis was carried out as part of the program of the Second Summer Session of The National Training Laboratory in Group Development held at Gould Academy in Bethel, Maine. The National Training Laboratory is a training and research enterprise in exploring the processes and the skills of effective group action.

6. Feeling of lack of correspondence between verbal and action levels in the group.

Discussion of Five Participants

The groups to which the discussion refers primarily are the Basic Skill Training Groups which met for three hours each day, over the three-week period of the National Training Laboratory. These groups each contained about fifteen people from industry, social agencies, universities, public offices, and many other types of organizations. The group followed no set curriculum. Their general purposes were: self-training in the skills of group membership; personal growth toward effectiveness in influencing others; and acquisition of skills in training others to solve their human relations problems within their organizations.

The participants in this discussion, here reproduced from a sound recording, are Leland Bradford, Ronald Lippitt, Alvin Zander, John R. P. French, Jr., and Herbert Thelen.

Bradford: Some of us have the feeling that the frustration may very well have come from too many goals. I have about decided what I'd like to do is to forget about back-home problems during the first of the three weeks and in this time strive to attain the goal of becoming a group member. The whole week could be spent in setting up the goals: what kind of a group member do I want to become and what kind do I think I can become? And then the frustration will lie very clearly between what I think, what the group thinks; what I can do, and what I can learn to do.

French: It seems to me there are two kinds of things involved here, Lee (Bradford). One is decision frustration, in which there are so many goals they can't make satisfactory decisions. Any decision is bound to frustrate five goals if they can only pick one. That's a little different situation than what you are talking about. What you are suggesting, Lee, is to lower the level of aspiration by looking at fewer goals.

Zander: There is interesting evidence of the relationship between the "satisfactoriness" with which the meeting is rated by a group member and his estimate of the extent to which the various people are working toward different goals. In general our lowest rated meetings were also ones with the greatest differences among individual goals of the members. Conversely, the group rates the meetings as satisfactory even if they are not getting anywhere, provided the goals of the various individuals are in agreement.

Thelen: I think Lee's suggestion not only deals with the level of aspiration and decision frustration but also recognized phases in growth of groups. Certainly this year we all had the strong impression that the groups spent their time during the first week developing groupness, and until that is done nothing else is going to be successful. Lee's suggestion seems empirically sound in selecting groupness as the first major developmental task.

Lippitt: Of course, some people are actually able to keep in mind many goals at one time and to see the same phenomenon through the eyes of a person being trained in group skills, a person who is in the leader role, a person who is in the trainer role.

Bradford: To me there is this thing that needs answering: maybe the chaos of frustration is the thing that makes the BST group as important as it is. If so, we don't want to tamper with it. Maybe the way we stumble along with seventeen goals at once is what really does the job, although I don't think so. If that isn't true, then we have to ask the question: how and when is frustration to the group's advantage?

French: I think we ought to examine the basic assumption that frustration is a virtue in bringing about group growth.

Lippitt: So do I, but I do think frustration of various types is inevitable.

Zander: In achieving the various changes required of an individual to learn to cooperate, he is under stresses and strains. A question, however, is: how much frustration is important? Under what conditions is it useful?

French: I think we are using our concepts pretty loosely here. I think we have to recognize first of all that frustration is not an all-or-none thing. It is something that is always present in some degree. If we define frustration as a blocking of goal-directed activity, there are all kinds of goals that people have that are always being blocked to some extent. Then I think we need to distinguish between frustration and failure, which is one of the things involved here; and between frustration and insecurity, which is another kind of thing—possibly frustration of certain ego-goals.

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Here the group seems to be suggesting that:

1. Frustration may result if the specific

goals of the group are perceived as conflicting—skill is needed in patterning a variety of specific goals harmoniously.

2. Two types of goal frustration are recognized:
 - a. progress toward one goal may be seen as a moving away from other goals
 - b. to strive for a number of goals simultaneously may be unrealistic when judged by the skill and energy and motivation that can be mustered for the job.
3. People are inclined to regard a meeting as unsatisfactory if they perceive that there is not a common goal direction among the members of the group.
4. Some frustration due to goals which are perceived as unattainable may be lessened by planning a strategy of progress through a sequence of specific sub-goals.
5. The psychological readiness of the group at each stage of its development may suggest the nature of the appropriate sub-goals in the sequence; e. g., developing groupness may be the first major subgoal toward developing an effective social-action group.
6. Some degree of frustration is probably inevitable because group and individual growth require change, and change is likely to be threatening. Moreover, the fact that the change has not occurred indicates that there is some obstacle in the way of change.
7. Depending on the individual's reaction to the particular threat involved, there may be frustration which results in defensive, emotional, non-objective responses, or there may be frustration which results in objective problem-solving and the employment of problem solving techniques. It is probable that the former must be dealt with as emotional, interpersonal conflict, whereas the latter can be dealt with as a problem of applying research methodology.

Zander: How can we get our discussion down to a more functional level? What specific questions should we ask?

Lippitt: It seems to me that our discussion could very well center around three kinds of questions: (1) What are legitimate and what are illegitimate sources of frustration in the training group? (2) What are healthy and unhealthy reaction patterns to frustration? (3) What shall be our methodology of handling and, at times, creating healthy frustration situations as training?

Thelen: I recognize the validity of these questions but I think in the time we have we might do well to stick with just the first. Let's clear some space on the blackboard and see what kind of a listing of legitimate and illegitimate sources of group frustration we can make. I feel, however, some need to see a definition of what we mean by legitimate and illegitimate.

Bradford: I would see an illegitimate source as something that is not contributing to any conceivable training goal as we define the curriculum of the BST. As an example of a source of legitimate frustration we might cite finding one's position as a good group member.

French: And a closely related notion that I would see as a desirable kind of frustration is the frustrating of individualistic needs such as the need to dominate the group and to use the group as a means of building up my own ego.

Bradford: Those illustrations are in terms of behaviors in response to psychological needs. There is also the ideological level going along with it

and expressed in the concept that it is all right to dominate the group or exploit it.

French: I think the problem is that anybody who has to change his beliefs or ideas is, by our definition, going to be frustrated. And that's much too broad a definition to be useful.

Thelen: But it seems to me that we can identify situations in which one's expectancy of how a leader should function might cause considerable frustration. That is, because of my expectancy I can be frustrated at every turn. My frustration is in the desire to have the leader operate in a given way, or to have the group behave in a way that it doesn't. My expectancy is different from what reality is.

French: I agree, only I prefer to call the result insecurity rather than frustration.

Lippitt: I think another legitimate source of frustration is the frustration over lack of ability to behave in line with one's ideals—a type of frustration resulting either in feelings of guilt or in motivation to change.

French: It is the frustration of certain rather specific goals of the way I want to behave or the way I ought to behave when I don't have the skill to do it.

Lippitt: It leads to intrapunitiveness, which, taken seriously, I suppose, leads to much jumping out of third story windows.

Thelen: You better put my group in the basement. What about simple lack of skill to communicate my ideas?

French: That would be one. Another is the lack of skill in the group to make something out of my communication, the feeling that we are not

the type of group we want to be.

Zander: Where goes the problem of the lack of knowledge of content? That is, lack of ability to really understand everything that is going on because I can't think in terms of multi-causes; it might be illustrated in the case of my beliefs being opposite to the group's beliefs so that I can't understand what is going on. A glossary of terms by itself is no help.

Thelen: (Writing at board) Shall we put it down as "unable to conceptualize adequately in order to understand what is going on"?

Bradford: Then there is the situation when my direction is totally different from the group's. This seems to be usually an illegitimate source of frustration. I sincerely believe that the group ought to go in a certain direction but I am wrong, so I ought to be frustrated; or at least I don't agree with the group's direction, therefore, I am frustrated.

Thelen: What if you are the one group-centered person there; you can see that the group "has" to go in a certain direction, but the group will not do it and you are frustrated. Isn't one of the functions of leadership to "protect" such a group-centered person? Everyone else should be frustrated, not he. But it does imply though that the leader has to know whether he is group-centered or not. This is part of the training problem.

Lippitt: Another one might be the frustration of not finding as much of a dependent relationship on the group leader as I would like; this is before there has been a transference of dependency from the leader to the group as a whole. There is also the whole

problem of excessive demand for structure.

Zander: I think we ought to be careful and realize that some of these sources of frustration are legitimate at one phase of the group's growth and illegitimate at another phase; and, moreover, that they do not apply equally to all people in the group.

Bradford: That is certainly true. For contrast, let's look at some of the sources of frustration that would generally be considered illegitimate in terms of our training goals. Would this be an example: the group floundering around with no sense of direction?

Thelen: Perhaps it is the withdrawal of the leader; he gets frustrated and defensive and so he withdraws, letting the group flounder around. This is a case of withdrawal of the leader from appropriate responsibility for structuring or supporting the situation.

Zander: Of course, it is usually not as fancy as actual withdrawal. He rationalizes it as a democratic situation in which the group must make its decisions.

Lippitt: Well, what are some of the dimensions of structuring responsibility? Let's break this down a little. Specifically, there are the questions of finding goals and defining boundaries. The character of the structuring job probably depends on the stage of group growth. The amount of leader structuring will be different as the group grows up. We need to know under what condition the leader has the major responsibility for structuring.

Zander: Too many goals might be another structuring problem—that is, allowing the group to be lost in too many goals at once. In its simplest

form, this might be the posing of three questions at once so that the group doesn't know what it is trying to decide on.

Lippitt: Wouldn't another one be allowing the group to flounder in the swells of frustration too long without calling for feedback, interpretation, or evaluation of group process?

Thelen: Isn't our thinking at this point that all of those types of frustration which we have called legitimate can become aggravated illegitimately by the leader's own lack of skill or responsibility? Or for that matter, by his training strategy? It seems there is the question of values and costs—that the legitimate source of frustration in fact does not have value in our training. But if aggravated too long or under inappropriate conditions, their cost may exceed their value.

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At this point the group has written the following points on the blackboard: Legitimate and illegitimate sources of frustration in BST learning situation.

1. Legitimate:

- a. finding one's position as a good group member
- b. frustrating individualistic needs (i. e. status needs) to exploit the group
- c. finding that one's expectancy of leader behavior is unsound; that is, does not fit the situation
- d. feeling guilty because one can't behave the way he wants to or thinks he ought to in the group
- e. discovering that one has lack of sufficient skill or the group has lack of sufficient skill for the individual to make the contribution he thinks he can make

- f. feeling of lack of skill in the group to make progress
- g. developing insecurity because ability to conceptualize what is going on in the group is inadequate
- h. feeling that one is a group-centered person who has necessary and right answers which are rejected by other members of the group
- i. feeling that one's desire for dependence on the leader is blocked at every turn.

2. Illegitimate:

- a. withdrawal of leader from appropriate leadership activity such as defining goals, boundaries, behavior, etc.
- b. allowing too many goals to be present without pressing for establishment of priority
- c. allowing too much frustration to result from frustration without suggesting evaluation or some other remedy
- d. allowing individuals, including the leader, to present undue obstacles to progress toward group goals
- e. leader failing to do his part in dealing with frustration from legitimate sources listed above.

Bradford: It seems to me that this list on the blackboard gives support to the thesis on which our work is based: that there is terrific need for the development of skill in human relations. We cannot expect every leader to be or to become so skillful that he does not needlessly introduce into the group some types of frustration which are not helpful. But the productivity of

the group, that is, its efficiency of locomotion towards its own goals, should not be kept at a level lower than necessary by the failure of people to recognize the need for practice and understanding of democratic group skills.

Thelen: I agree with what you say,

Lee, and it seems to me that you are underscoring the importance of our own leadership self-training in going on to consider much more carefully the mechanisms of frustration, and their relationship to group health and to problems of training.

Group Study Procedures— A Selected Bibliography

GEORGE V. GUY

This selected bibliography includes recent publications dealing with categories of group study procedures: staff technique, classroom technique, and the teacher's role. George V. Guy is a graduate assistant at the College of Education, University of Illinois.

GROUP WORK is a comparatively recent development in the field of education. Strang (10) notes that in 1936 very little, if any, attention was given to the group work process by means of which individual students were being helped to develop their best potentialities. Before the end of 1936, however, first investigations into the dynamics of group action had begun to appear.

Since 1936, group work has been introduced and utilized in almost every phase of school and school-community life (10). It has been within the last few years, however, that group process in education has gained its impetus. It has been used most widely in two aspects of the educational program: as a methodology for achieving more efficient and effective staff and staff-com-

munity planning, and as a classroom technique for more functional pupil learning. A consideration of these two areas in which group work is functioning should serve to indicate both its value as a methodology and its points of difficulty in action.

A STAFF TECHNIQUE

Lippitt and Bradford (6) see group methods of working as contributing to the in-service education and growth of both teachers and administrators. The regular fall staff institute in one local community was used as an opportunity for airing and discussing common problems. In attendance at the institute were teachers, supervisors, administrators, and parents in the community. This cooperative effort resulted in improved staff relationships

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