

Purpose and Process in Groups

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WHAT may or may not be accomplished in and by a group? This depends on two kinds of congruence: between what actually happens and what must happen if the convening purposes of the groups are to be met; and between the way of life expected by the group for itself and the way of life already being lived by each person. The actual happenings in the group stand between two sets of demands: the logical demands inherent in purposes and the demands inherent in the life styles of members.

The meeting of the group confronts these two sets of demands with each other; the leadership determines to what extent and how these confrontations will occur; the processes of the group are negotiations to reconcile the two kinds of demands. Self-training and "learning" by members depend on the way the members are involved in these processes, on the relationship between this reality experience and past experience, and on the change potentials and adaptive viability of their life styles. The outcome of the group's work is the changed actual or prospective performances of the members with respect to the problem, each other, and future instances of similar confrontation.

It seems to me that discussions on the nature, care and feeding of groups can be insightfully compared by asking what is assumed and advocated or implied about the kinds of congruence—member

to group, and group to purpose. In short, there are those who would start their thinking with the personalities and backgrounds of the members; and this results in discussion of need to "understand" children, in one kind of rationale for "sensitivity" training, in emphasis on expression of feeling, and, in aggravated cases, the doctrine of withdrawn leader permissiveness no matter what.

Those who start with the group-task congruence make a thing of "communication," inquiry, cognitive process, and organizational policies. In the one case the group is seen as the milieu for each individual's comfort and need-meeting; in the other case the group is seen as a small producing society responsible for certain functions within an interlocking network of functioning groups.

The great trick, of course, is to assign appropriate weights to both orientations. What makes this a trick is that thinking about the milieu requires an interpersonal, psychological frame of reference and thinking about the society requires an objective, logical, legalistic frame of reference. Conflicts arise because the evaluations of any given behavior may be different from the two points of view and because from the two points of view one sees and responds to different behaviors.

To pull off the trick requires one or both of the following: the development of a third, "larger" frame of reference to which the other two are instrumental

parts; or the development of techniques of group operations through which one can tell in the immediate situation which frame of reference (and its associated concerns) to pay attention to. The former theoretical development is being approached in modern systems theory; the latter practical, empirical approach is the distinctive contribution of the "laboratory" method. We need a lot more development of both.

But developments of theory and practice only put instruments into our hands. The outcome depends on how we use these instruments, and that depends on what we are committed to as the purpose of group endeavor. The two partial views discussed here have inherent purposes: the group, responded to as a milieu for each person, is there to facilitate individual self-realization and "personality growth"; the group, responded to as a producing society, is there "to get the job done." The tricky aspect is recognized when one sees that the group always has both facets, and that the outcome depends on whether these aspects reinforce and enrich each other or oppose and inhibit each other.

Further examination of the two purposes shows that without severe qualification, neither is valid. Thus the group as milieu for "personal growth" of each individual is a sound concept only if: (a) the individuals are identical; or (b) the individuals are different but all are effectively able to adapt themselves and the group to each other; or (c) the group can somehow be a pluralistic set of milieus, and each sub-milieu be appropriate for each person. These qualifications are recognized respectively in: (a) efforts to control the composition of the group; (b) encouragement of psychogroup and out-of-group interactions among members; and (c) various efforts

to utilize both formal and informal organizational structures of the group.

The other view, that the group exists "to get the job done," needs considerable clarification with respect to "the job." Is "the job" defined by institutional expectation, leader fiat, majority vote, or personal wish—or all together? In the schools, for example, the alleged need-meeting activities of students are actually for the most part directed to meet the needs of teachers. There is no "the job to be done"; there is instead activity to be participated in and carried out to a conclusion satisfactory to the teacher. The concept of "the job" only indexes a more fundamental concept, that of the authority which governs decisions and policies under and through which the group works. The authority may be the capricious wish or explicit goal of an individual who has recognized power; it may be requirednesses interpreted from the pooled experiences of members; it may be a publicly stated purpose which brought the members together voluntarily in the first place; it may be the expectations of the various offices or role-positions of the members *vis-à-vis* each other within the organization or community. In addition to any of these, there is the authority, usually not recognized and often resisted or resented, of the group's need to deal with its own hidden agendas or focal conflicts.

I think the purpose of the group, in whose service the theoretical and practical instruments are to be developed and utilized, is "to move toward the fulfillment of implicit and explicit purposes held for the group and for themselves by each individual in his capacity as a member of the group." This definition is cast to call our attention to several facts about groups: (a) members have different purposes, hopes, expectations

and wishes, depending on their different ways of life—identifications, loyalties and values; (b) the purposes, wishes, etc., exist in different degrees of awareness in the minds of the members; (c) the purposes of a member respect both the changes he would like to make in himself but also those he thinks others ought to make; (d) within the life-style of each person, only certain of the purposes (or only certain ways of achieving the purposes) are legitimate ingredients in the negotiations of the group; and (e) each person must accept responsibility for defining what being a member or developing membership in the group is to mean to him.

The kind of significance a group will have to its members and to society de-

pends, I think, on the adequacy of the processes instrumental to the understandings just listed. Making wishes known, being encouraged to become aware of what one really seeks, defining one's own place and function *vis-à-vis* others in the action system, recognizing and accepting the parts of one's life involved in the group and subject (in some way) to its jurisdiction, and, finally, reflecting on and assimilating the concerns, insights and purposes of the group within his own style of thought and life—these are the processes on which the creativity, adaptiveness, and significance of group life depend.

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Not So Fast

Norman Cousins

THE ultimate test of education is represented by the ability to think. We are not talking about casual or random thought. We are talking about sequential thought; that is, the process by which one frame of ideas is attached to another in workable order so that they fit together without rattling or falling apart the moment they come in contact with a logical objection or query.

Sequential thought is the most difficult work in the entire range of human effort. Even when undertaken by a highly trained intelligence, it can be enormously fatiguing. When attempted by untrained minds, it can produce total exhaustion within a matter of minutes, sometimes seconds. For it requires an almost limitless number of mental operations. The route must be anticipated between the present location of an idea and where it is supposed to go. Memory must be raked for relevant material. Facts or notions

must be sorted out, put in their proper places, then supplied with connective tissue. Then comes the problem of weighting and emphasis.

Sequential thought, like any other advanced form of human activity, is the result of systematic training. Just sitting in front of television screens watching baseball games for a dozen years or more doesn't automatically qualify a man to throw strikes with blazing speed. Either he has the educated muscles to pitch or he hasn't. The same is true of thought. A man who doesn't know how to use the muscles of his intelligence can hardly be expected to cope with a problem requiring concentration and the ability to think abstractly.

How, then, can a person be taught to

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