

AN INVESTIGATION INTO BUSINESS APPLICATIONS  
OF SENSITIVITY TRAINING

by 1264

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B. A., Kansas State University, 1963

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A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Commerce

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1970

Approved by:

  
Major Professor

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### History

About 22 years ago, the National Training Laboratory in Group Development was organized by Dr. Leland P. Bradford and a group of like-minded individuals. The National Training Laboratories (NTL), as it is now called, was founded to conduct training laboratories under the sponsorship of the National Education Association (and, for a time, the Research Center for Group Dynamics, then located at M.I.T., but later affiliated with the University of Michigan).

NTL's organizers were primarily interested in experimenting with a technique for improving an individual's self-awareness, knowledge of group dynamics, and leadership skills. This technique had its early beginnings in the 1930's, when German-born psychologist Kurt Lewin and a graduate student of his named Ronald Lippitt conducted experiments at the University of Iowa which indicated that democratic work groups were not only more pleasant to participate in, but often were more efficient than authoritarian groups.<sup>1</sup>

Another important step in the evolution of the unstructured training group occurred in the summer of 1946 on the campus of State Teachers College in New Britain, Connecticut. The Connecticut Interracial Commission, the Connecticut Department of Education, and the Research Center for Group Dynamics sponsored a training-research enterprise to develop more effective local leaders in an effort to facilitate understanding of and compliance with

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<sup>1</sup>Spencer Klaw, "Two Weeks in a T-Group," Fortune, 64:117, August, 1961.



the Fair Employment Practices Act. The training leaders were Kenneth D. Benne, Leland P. Bradford and Ronald Lippitt. Present for the purpose of research were Kurt Lewin, Ronald Lippitt and three observers who were graduate students in social psychology at the time.<sup>2</sup>

It was planned that three small groups would discuss "back home" (there-and-then) problems. Research observers and trained staff members were meeting evenings to discuss, analyze, and interpret leader, member, and group behavior as observed in the meetings held during the day. A few at first, then virtually all of the participants started coming to the evening sessions on a voluntary basis. Open discussion of the participants' behavior and its observed consequences had a marked effect on both the participants and the training leaders. Participants indicated that they were gaining important understanding of their own behavior and of the behavior of their group. Thus, without having provided for the analysis of here-and-now behavior as a source of learning, what appeared to be a potentially powerful innovation in re-education had been discovered inadvertently.<sup>3</sup>

NTL was the sole organizer and developer of training laboratories for several years. Since 1952, laboratories have been organized under other auspices as well.<sup>4</sup> Now entering its third decade NTL has established a

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<sup>2</sup>Kenneth D. Benne, "History of the T-Group in the Laboratory Setting," in T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: Innovation in Re-Education, eds. L. P. Bradford, J. R. Gibb, and K. D. Benne (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 81.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 81-83

<sup>4</sup>L. P. Bradford, J. R. Gibb, and K. D. Benne, "Two Educational Innovations," in T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: Innovation in Re-Education, eds. L. P. Bradford, J. R. Gibb, and K. D. Benne (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 3.

secure reputation and is still the leading organizer and sponsor of training laboratories.

### The Problem

In the past few years, hundreds of corporations have sent thousands of executives to workshops and conferences dealing with leadership and group functioning, all of which have at their core the intensive group experience developed by NTL. Because of the rapidly increasing interest in this relatively new training method, the author was stimulated to undertake this report to investigate some of the advantages attributed to sensitivity training and the criticisms leveled at the technique, particularly in the instance of its use as a management development tool. Of interest were such questions as: "What are the effects of the T-group experience on the individual?", "Are some more able to benefit from the experience than others?", and "How does the organization benefit?". To a lesser extent, this report examines some of the related techniques which were either a direct outgrowth of the T-group method or were influenced in some way by the prior development of the T-group approach to individual development and organizational change.

### Definition of Terms

In referring to the intensive group experience, several different names are used interchangeably such as "ST (for sensitivity training) group", "D (for diagnostic) group", and "basic encounter group"; most commonly used are "T (for training) group" and "laboratory training group".

In the written material researched for this paper it was found that the terms "human relations laboratory", "training laboratory", and "workshop" are

used in a more comprehensive sense to refer not only to the intensive group experience, but to formal sessions, lectures, the showing of films, and all of the other activities planned to enhance the T-group experience.

The term "feedback" in this context refers to participants' discussions of one another's behavior, feelings which may underlie that behavior, and personal reactions to that behavior.

The terms "trainer", "educator", and "facilitator" are used to refer to the trained staff member who guides and participates in the intensive group experience.

An "intervention" is a comment offered by the trainer to the group. In order to support the required leadership vacuum these are held to a minimum and usually are for the purpose of protecting weak members or steering the group toward the desired ends.

"Observers" are trained staff members who attend the training groups to aid the trainer.

### Research Approach

Information for this report was gathered through library research, with emphasis on periodicals. Additionally, two mimeographed papers obtained from the Kansas State University Counseling Center were incorporated. While the research was extensive, it was not exhaustive on the general subject of sensitivity training as this report focused on business applications of the technique.

## CHAPTER II

### WHAT IS A T-GROUP?

#### Description

A general human relations T-group of the type originally developed by NTL is ordinarily composed of eight to twelve members, a trainer, and on occasion, an observer or two.<sup>1</sup> NTL T-groups meet twice daily, two hours at a time, for two weeks,<sup>2</sup> but there are a variety of designs in operation now in which the durations of the sensitivity training sessions vary widely. Some groups squeeze twenty or more hours of training into a two and one-half day weekend while others extend to three or four weeks, six to eight hours each day.<sup>3</sup>

Participants for a general human relations T-group may be drawn from one or more of several different populations, depending on the design and intended purpose of the laboratory. Early laboratories worked with occupationally heterogeneous groups of participants. Over the years, several laboratory designs have been developed to deal with different types of populations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>George A. Hoy, "Sensitivity Training," Factory, 122:124, September, 1964; and Ted Johns, "T-Group Traumas," Personnel, (London), 1:36, June, 1968.

<sup>2</sup>Hoy, loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup>Carl R. Rogers, "The Process of the Basic Encounter Group," La Jolla, Calif.: Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, p. 1, [n.d.]. (Mimeographed.)

<sup>4</sup>Kenneth D. Benne, Leland P. Bradford, Ronald Lippitt, "The Laboratory Method," in T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: Innovation in Re-Education, eds. L. P. Bradford, J. R. Gibb, and K. D. Benne (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 19.

Laboratory training, having been tailored for many different situations and populations, cannot be regarded as being a uniform process. Consequently, it is difficult to speak in terms of specific procedures within the designs of all types of groups, collectively, without omitting some important exceptions.

In the material researched for this report, the type of group most often discussed as a management development tool was occupationally homogeneous, with the participants drawn from several different organizations. In this type of group the emphasis is on individual, rather than group or team, development. In the implementation of this design, care is usually taken to not include in the same group any two individuals who have an established hierarchical relationship outside the group, as a leadership vacuum is considered desirable. To reduce to a minimum the feelings of risk associated with exposure of feelings and emotions not generally discussed, NTL labs, like those conducted by many others, are composed of individuals who are strangers to one another.<sup>5</sup> Using this design, a deliberate attempt is made to reduce status differences among the participants. First names are used and the wearing of casual clothing is encouraged.<sup>6</sup>

Laboratory training evolved around an assumption that individual learning through participation in a carefully designed series of social process events could improve the quality of the trainee's membership in various associations and help the trainee to participate in a fuller richer way in

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<sup>5</sup>Ted Johns, "T-Group Traumas," Personnel, (London), 1:38, 1968.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

human affairs in general.<sup>7</sup>

In some situations however, the individual is not the most appropriate unit for achieving action or change. A team, some natural unit already functioning, or even an entire organization may be selected as a target for improvement. In such instances, more vocationally oriented special laboratory programs, often called "family programs," have been designed around the concepts underlying a laboratory approach to learning and change. When this approach is taken, opportunities for personal development and team development are integrated into a laboratory design of slightly different focus.<sup>8</sup>

While it was originally thought that sensitivity training could best be conducted on a "cultural island," such as MTL's site at Bethel, Maine, it is now common for sessions to be convened in all manner of settings. Many still use the off-season resort area, but more and more laboratories are being conducted in universities and even in the client company's meeting rooms. Sessions are conducted from coast to coast in the U.S. and in several foreign countries.<sup>9</sup>

The T-group is designed to offer a permissive, supportive and uninhibiting environment. It is expected that an atmosphere of trust within the group will develop as the group progresses. The function of the group is to allow the trainees to observe at firsthand, the psychological forces that operate in groups, and further, to evaluate experimentally the likely outcome

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<sup>7</sup>Kenneth D. Benne, Leland P. Bradford, Ronald Lippitt, "The Laboratory Method," in *T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: Innovation in Re-Education*, eds. L. P. Bradford, J. R. Gibb, and K. D. Benne. (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), pp. 15-16.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>9</sup>Rogers, *loc. cit.*

of behaving in different ways in different situations.<sup>10</sup> The philosophy behind this approach is that the individual benefits more if he discovers concepts for himself than if they are presented to him, as in a lecture format. Thus, participants teach themselves about behavior.<sup>11</sup>

### Aims of the T-Group

Dr. Bradford wrote the most simple and concise definition of what the technique of sensitivity training has as its goal. The aim of laboratories is "to bring about change and improvement in the way the learner behaves back on the job."<sup>12</sup> In contrast, Dunnette and Campbell extracted the essence of favorable outcomes desired of the method from several sources and composed a rather detailed list as follows:

1. Increased self-insight or self-awareness concerning one's own behavior and its meaning in a social context . . .
2. Increased sensitivity to the behavior of others . . .
3. Increased awareness and understanding of the types of processes that facilitate or inhibit group functioning and the interaction between groups . . .
4. Heightened diagnostic skill in social, interpersonal, and intergroup situations . . .
5. Increased action skill--the ability to intervene successfully in inter- or intra-group situations in order to increase member satisfactions, effectiveness, or productivity. . . .
6. Learning how to learn--this refers not simply to an individual's cognitive approach to the world, but instead, and far more importantly, to his ability to analyze continually his own interpersonal behavior in order to help himself and others achieve more effective and satisfying

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<sup>10</sup>Ted Johns, "T-Group Traumas," Personnel (London), 1:40, June, 1968; Spencer Klaw, "Two Weeks in a T-Group," Fortune, 64:114, August, 1961; and "FTL's New Main Training Center: A Retreat But No Sanctuary," Training in Business and Industry, 6:47-8, May, 1969.

<sup>11</sup>Chris Argyris, "T-Groups for Organizational Effectiveness," Harvard Business Review, 42:62, March, 1964.

<sup>12</sup>Spencer Klaw, "Two Weeks in a T-Group," Fortune, 64:160, August, 1961.

interpersonal relationships.<sup>13</sup>

### Nature of Proceedings

As touched upon in the introduction, sensitivity training is at the core of workshops and conferences. As the participant arrives he typically attends a meeting with all other participants wherein a statement of purpose is made. At the end of this general session is usually when the first T-group session occurs. Throughout the conference or workshop, T-group sessions are augmented by lectures, films, and discussions, all designed to help the participants understand what is taking place in the T-group and to aid the individual in relating this learning experience to the situation "back home at the plant."<sup>14</sup>

As a member of an organization involved in conducting a training program, the trainer is committed to achieving the goals established for the group. Therefore, a definition of the trainer's role in the T-group tends to paraphrase the aims of the T-group itself. One source indicated the trainer's function is to provide that assistance necessary to help the members:

- . . . become aware of their present (usually) low potential for establishing authentic relationships,
- . . . become more skillful in providing and receiving nonevaluative feedback,
- . . . minimizing their own and others' defensiveness,
- . . . become increasingly able to experience and own up to their feelings.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Marvin D. Dunnette and John P. Campbell, "Laboratory Education: Impact on People and Organizations," Industrial Relations Journal, 8:6-7, October, 1968.

<sup>14</sup>George A. Hoy, "Sensitivity Training," Factory, 122:125, September, 1964.

<sup>15</sup>Argyris, op. cit., p. 65.



In the group itself, the trainer gives an explanation of the purposes of T-group training and announces that he will try to help the group to learn from its experiences. Usually without explicitly stating that he is doing so, the trainer avoids a leadership role in the group.<sup>16</sup> The trainer's behavior then tends to generate a rather lengthy and uncomfortable silence in the group. This is followed by polite surface interaction, "cocktail party talk," frustration, and a lack of continuity.<sup>17</sup> At this point, the group has no leadership, no agenda, and the members are not acquainted with one another. It is up to the group to recognize that it has no structure and to establish whatever structure it decides is necessary. There are no ground rules with which to begin.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, the questions arise: "Who is the leader?", "Who is responsible?", "Who is a member of the group?", "What is the group expected to do?"<sup>19</sup>

The members expect leadership from the trainer for three reasons: (a) in our culture an educator tends to take this role, (b) participants fear they are incompetent to deal with the situation and cultural conditioning has lead them to expect that a more knowledgeable member of the group (the trainer) will step in with help, and (c) the participants have not at this point developed much trust in each other.<sup>20</sup> The trainer, however, continues to support the leadership vacuum by refusing to act in the conventional role

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<sup>16</sup>Johns, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>17</sup>Carl R. Rogers, "The Process of the Basic Encounter Group," La Jolla, Calif.: Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, p. 3. (mimeographed.); George A. Hoy, "Sensitivity Training," Factory, 122:125, September, 1964; and Ted Johns, "T-Group Traumas," Personnel (London), 1:38, June, 1968.

<sup>18</sup>Argyris, op. cit., p. 63.      <sup>19</sup>Rogers, loc. cit.

<sup>20</sup>Argyris, op. cit., p. 64.

of teacher.<sup>21</sup>

In time, the trainer may intervene to focus the group's attention on the "here and now" by asking questions about behavior or feelings generated by behavior in the group. Other items the trainer might ask about include: the method of selection of an agenda or a leader; how decisions, if any, were made; or patterns of participation. The group is urged to discuss the group as a group and to discuss the various individuals' behavior in the group process.<sup>22</sup>

Intervention by the trainer may be met with stunned silence, defensive retorts, or hostility. Where appropriate, the trainer will indicate that he understands the participants' feelings. The trainer encourages expression of feelings and emotions, and endeavors to help the participants see the effect their behavior is having on him. In the instance of hostility, the trainer reassures the group that he is not callous about their feelings and that his own behavior is not intentionally hostile. He then tries to explore the hostility of the participants, not only toward himself, but toward the other participants as well. Argyris has indicated, ". . . such exploration can provide rich data for the group to diagnose and from which to learn."<sup>23</sup>

As Argyris describes it, the process begins with a dilemma, that being a condition where there is no sound basis for selecting among alternative

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<sup>21</sup>Johns, loc. cit.

<sup>22</sup>Julius E. Eitington, "T-Group Learnings for Group Effectiveness," Training and Development Journal, 23:44, May, 1969; George A. Hoy, "Sensitivity Training," Factory, 122:125, September, 1964; and Ted Johns, "T-Group Traumas," Personnel (London), 1:40, June, 1968.

<sup>23</sup>Chris Argyris, "T-Groups for Organizational Effectiveness," Harvard Business Review, 42:65, March, 1964.

courses of action. As the traditional methods for organizing a group are tried and they fail, conditions become ripe for inventive action. This situation leads to the abandonment of old behavior patterns at a time when new behavior has not been formulated. In response to this crisis, participants experiment with invented behavior. Learning, in the dilemma-invention model, occurs when the participant receives feedback, enabling him to evaluate the effectiveness of his invented behavior; and when the individual, or better still, the group, is able to generalize about the extent to which the new behavior pattern fits situations outside the group or "back home."<sup>24</sup>

Dr. Carl Rogers has formulated from his own experience, the experience of others, and from written material in the field, a list of common elements which occur in the T-group. They occur more or less in order, as presented in the appendix to this report, but may overlap somewhat or occur in slightly different sequences for different groups. The list is a compilation of naturalistic observations rather than an empirical or theoretical description of the group process.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 62-63.

<sup>25</sup>Carl R. Rogers, "The Process of the Basic Encounter Group," La Jolla, Calif.: Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, p. 1, [n.d.]. (Mimeographed.)

## CHAPTER III

### WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF THE T-GROUP EXPERIENCE?

#### Competence and Self-Awareness

In order to make more explicit the benefits which are derived from sensitivity training by the individual, it is necessary first to develop some thoughts on the relationship between individual competence and individual awareness.

The "self" includes all the needs, values and abilities of the person whether conscious or unconscious. The "self-concept," on the other hand, includes only those aspects of the "self" of which the individual is aware. The closer the "self-concept" to the actual self, the better the individual is able to understand and control his own behavior.<sup>1</sup>

If what the individual experiences in his environment is in consonance with his self-concept, he will be biased toward seeing it in an undistorted manner. If there is a significant disagreement between the individual's view of reality and his self-concept, he will have an inclination to regard the discrepancy as a threat. Such threats tend to generate defenses which have the effect of distorting the individual's view of reality. These defenses and their resultant distortions are an effort on the part of the individual to cause his perception of reality to coincide more closely with his conception of reality. When the threat is great enough that the defenses cannot

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<sup>1</sup>Chris Argyris, Integrating the Individual and the Organization (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 23.

Therefore, an authentic self-concept is necessary to accept reality and deal competently with it.<sup>2</sup>

The self-concept can only become more authentic through increased awareness of self. Self-awareness is generated by the individual being able to accurately perceive feedback from others about how they see his self and how his self affects them. In order for the feedback to be effective it must be accepted by the individual with minimum distortion. To accomplish this, the individual must have "self-esteem," that is, he must value himself enough so that possibly threatening messages can be received.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, it would seem possible to draw the inference that a given degree of self-awareness allows a given degree of competence in dealing with reality, which in turn would tend to generate a given degree of self-esteem. Having thus generated additional self-esteem, the change in the individual's defense requirements would permit him to acquire some additional self-awareness. The additional self-awareness would let the individual function with a greater degree of competence.

The significant point in this argument is that the individual's level of competence, other things being equal, appears to be associated with his level of self-awareness. It is expected, intended and claimed that laboratory training gives the participant an opportunity to increase his self-awareness and in so doing, increase his competence in many areas of his existence.

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

### Research Controversy

In October, 1968, a vigorous discussion developed as to whether research had provided a valid measure of the effects of the T-group experience.

Dunnette and Campbell were critical of both the research methods and the conclusions of the studies they reviewed. Their criticisms are summarized below:

1. Control groups were not included in five of the nine studies. . . . The changes occurring could easily be attributable to the passage of time or to the mere act of taking the test a second time. . . .
2. Eight of the nine studies failed to collect data about possible interaction effects between the evaluation questionnaires or tests and the training program. . . merely taking the instrument in the pretest session often serves as kind of an alerting mechanism for trainees to alter their responses to the questionnaires when they take them again later.
3. Finally, the actual magnitudes of changes obtained in these studies (even when control groups weren't used and interaction effects weren't checked) are small, and it would be unwise to argue that these minor attitudinal changes indicate, in any substantial way, the accomplishment of the broad behavioral goals and objectives of laboratory education.<sup>4</sup>

Dunnette and Campbell concluded, by reason of the research methodology utilized in these nine studies, ". . . that research has not yet demonstrated that T-group training and/or laboratory education has any marked effect on one's 'scores' on objective measures of attitude, orientation, outlook, or style."<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in a review of seven studies on the effects of laboratory training on self-awareness or interpersonal sensitivity they concluded

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<sup>4</sup>Marvin D. Dunnette and John P. Campbell, "Laboratory Education: Impact on People and Organizations," Industrial Relations Journal, 9:12, October, 1968.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

that ". . . evidence in favor of any claims that laboratory education can increase or change interpersonal awareness, 'self-insight', or interpersonal sensitivity is very nearly nonexistent. . . ." for much the same reasons.<sup>6</sup> They also arrived at negative conclusions with regard to the research conducted to measure behavior changes of participants back on the job and the research to measure the effect of laboratory education on organizational outcomes.<sup>7</sup>

In rebuttal, Argyris differentiated between pure science research which is an effort to expand total knowledge and descriptive research which attempts only to explain or measure some phenomena about which we already may have some knowledge. It was his contention that the purpose is different and for this reason and because of practical considerations the design for the latter may be less rigorous.<sup>8</sup>

Much of the research related to laboratory training suffers from limitations. The training is, after all, quite expensive and time consuming. Companies that bear the expense and the lost time of their executives, and the organization responsible for the execution of the training program, impose restraints, implied and explicit, on the researcher. Thus, some control measures which would result in additional time in training, or other factors which might have a negative effect on the training process, are discouraged. Limitations may also extend from reluctance to allow outside interference due to fear or cultural conditioning. As Argyris pointed out:

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-16.      <sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-23.

<sup>8</sup>Chris Argyris, "Issues in Evaluating Laboratory Education," Industrial Relations Journal, 8:28, October, 1968.

Fearing that researchers will tend to create difficulties within their organization, some practitioners charge that "now is not the time because there is some sort of crisis" and/or take the position that education is such a good thing that it does not require research! . . .<sup>9</sup>

Dunnette and Campbell criticized the validity of the measurement of the effects of sensitivity training--not the technique itself. Indeed, in response to an article by Chris Argyris which discussed their initial attack on research methodology, they stated explicitly that ". . . the T-group is an interesting and important subject for research. . . ."<sup>10</sup> This controversy then, rather than negating or supporting the value of laboratory training, points to a continuing need for extensive research in this area.

#### Anecdotal Evidence

There is a difference of opinion on the value of anecdotal material about the T-group experience. Dunnette and Campbell attacked it as being too subjective, not systematically collected, subject to bias, not easily classified, and difficult from which to draw generalizations.<sup>11</sup> House describes the substantial amount of post-training recall and casual observation as being contradictory and confusing.<sup>12</sup> In support of the rather unscientific collection of such information some authors point to the lack of hard evidence on many aspects of laboratory training.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 30

<sup>10</sup>Marvin D. Dunnette and John P. Campbell, "A Response to Argyris," Industrial Relations Journal, 8:44, October, 1968.

<sup>11</sup>Dunnette, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>12</sup>Robert J. House, "T-Group Education and Leadership Effectiveness: A Review of the Empiric Literature and a Critical Evaluation," Personnel Psychology, 20:3, Spring, 1967.

<sup>13</sup>Spencer Klaw, "Two Weeks in a T-Group," Fortune, 64:160, August, 1961.



It seems entirely appropriate that the collection of anecdotal evidence and other types of naturalistic observation have preceded research efforts and the formation of theory. If anecdotal evidence has not provided benchmarks for research, certainly it has given direction to such efforts.

As for the information conveyed by this type of evidence, the comments below are some attempts to formulate general statements from and about collections of such material.

An NTL survey revealed much enthusiasm and some disappointment. A minority of post-training responses revealed ". . . skepticism and . . . even resentment for having been subjected to unpleasant experiences."<sup>14</sup>

Spencer Klaw stated that participants generally indicated changes for the better in the way they feel. Many say that the important thing for them was not a change in behavior, but that they feel more comfortable with themselves.<sup>15</sup> In a later study, Klaw found that a majority reported changes for the better. However, some participants liked themselves less and were left with a feeling of not knowing what to do about it.<sup>16</sup>

A post-training opinion survey in 1960 indicated that one-third of the participants viewed the program they had undergone as helpful; the other two-

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<sup>14</sup>L. P. Bradford, Exploration in Human Relations Training, Washington, D.C., National Education Association, 1953, cited by Robert J. House, "T-Group Education and Leadership Effectiveness: A Review of the Empiric Literature and a Critical Evaluation," Personnel Psychology, 20:3, Spring, 1967.

<sup>15</sup>Klaw, loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup>Spencer Klaw, "Inside a T-Group," Think, November-December, 1965, cited by Robert J. House, "T-Group Education and Leadership Effectiveness: A Review of the Empiric Literature and Critical Evaluation," Personnel Psychology, 20:4, Spring, 1967.

thirds viewed the program as slightly more helpful than useless.<sup>17</sup>

Johns found that reactions of T-group participants seemed to stress a deep personal significance in a non-specific way. He concluded that obtaining comments about behavioral changes from colleagues, superiors, or subordinates would be a more valid approach.<sup>18</sup>

It is hoped that the representative samples above are sufficiently characteristic to give the reader a feeling for the nature of this evidence. For the most part, individual responses were more detailed and specific. Though no scientific measurement was made, the anecdotal evidence reviewed by this author appeared to occur in a ratio of approximately 60% highly favorable, 20% favorable with reservations and 20% unfavorable.

#### Research Evidence

It should be stated at the outset that a rigorous enumeration and discussion of each applicable study conducted since 1947 would have been quite beyond the scope of this report. The author relied upon generalizations from surveys of research findings.

Many studies tend to support the hypothesis that participants change their behavior after undergoing laboratory training as was indicated by both

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<sup>17</sup>Foundation for Research on Human Behavior, An Action Research Program for Organization Improvement, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1960, cited by Robert J. House, "T-Group Education and Leadership Effectiveness: A Review of the Empiric Literature and Critical Evaluation," Personnel Psychology, 20:4, Spring, 1967.

<sup>18</sup>Ted Johns, "T-Group Traumas," Personnel (London), 1:41, June, 1961.

Stock and Johns in their surveys.<sup>19</sup>

It was Stock's finding that a number of researchers were able to determine that about 60 to 75 percent of the participants realized some degree of improvement from laboratory training. As is usual in research of this nature, the authors of the various papers examined in her survey were quick to point out the inherent difficulties of interpreting such data. In her review of studies, she found that the following aspects of behavior had been shown to be influenced by laboratory training:

. . . various perceptions of the self, affective behavior, congruity between self-percept and ideal self, self-insight, sensitivity to the feelings or behavior of others, role flexibility, sensitivity to group decisions, diagnostic ability, behavioral skill, utilization of laboratory techniques, self-confidence, and approach to diagnosing organizational problems. And this is only a partial list. . . .<sup>20</sup>

After examining studies concerned with events throughout the training, studies concerned with T-group effects, and studies that dealt with the effects of T-groups on behavior, House arrived at the following conclusions. It was his evaluation that laboratory training is capable of inducing an intended anxiety as a function of the training process; that the induced anxiety may result in an unsettled, upset, and frustrated state for the trainee; and that the process may also affect the trainee in such a way that he becomes more considerate of subordinates, less dependent on others, less demanding for subservience from others, and able to communicate better due

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<sup>19</sup>Dorothy Stock, "A survey of Research on T-Groups," in T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: Innovation in Re-Education, eds. L. P. Bradford, J. R. Gibb, and K. D. Benne (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), pp. 434; and Ted Johns, "T-Group Traumas," Personnel (London), 1:41, June, 1968.

<sup>20</sup>Stock, loc. cit., pp. 433-4.

to more adequate and objective listening.<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps the one area of greatest agreement found in the surveys investigated was that much additional research is necessary. There is a phenomenon at work in this and other areas whereby, as one question is asked and answered, other questions become clear, with curiosity about issues outstripping methodological resources. Stock invited each reader to provide his own ending to the incomplete sentence, ". . . Why doesn't someone study

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### "Fade-out" or Slippage

Dr. Bradford of NTL suggested to trainees at the close of a Management Work Conference that they:

. . . could now act, with due modesty and caution, as "change agents." That is, he said, they could try to create "a climate of learning in the back-home situation" that would help others to learn some of the things they themselves had learned . . .<sup>23</sup>

But, can the trainee successfully carry his new-found behavior patterns back into his parent organization? Argyris indicates that the formal values inherent in most organizations give rise to an organizational norm that tends to coerce individuals to suppress their feelings or disguise them in the form of rational, technical or intellectual problems.<sup>24</sup> He has enumerated the debilitating pyramidal values thusly:

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<sup>21</sup>Robert J. House, "T-Group Education and Leadership Effectiveness: A Review of the Empiric Literature and a Critical Evaluation," Personnel Psychology, 20:23, Spring, 1967.

<sup>22</sup>Stock, op. cit., p. 437.

<sup>23</sup>Spencer Klaw, "Two Weeks in a T-Group," Fortune, 64:160, August, 1961.

<sup>24</sup>Chris Argyris, Interpersonal Competence and Organizational Effectiveness (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, 1962), p. 40.

1. The important human relationships . . . are those which are related to achieving the organization's objective, i.e., getting the job done . . .

2. Effectiveness in human relationships increases as behavior becomes more rational, logical, and clearly communicated; but effectiveness decreases as behavior becomes more emotional. . . .

3. Human relationships are most effectively motivated by carefully defined direction, authority, and control, as well as appropriate rewards and penalties that emphasize rational behavior and achievement of the objective.<sup>25</sup>

For the trainee to maintain improvements in interpersonal competence achieved in the laboratory, the pyramidal values existing in most organizations must be altered so that the organization can accept the changes in the individual.<sup>26</sup>

Regardless of whether the organization is receptive to change, it is easier for the trainee to reassume the unemotional role than to do the work necessary to open relationships. Also, some participants attend laboratories with the attitude that the experience will provide a point of reference, giving comforting and useful perspectives on normal routines. That is, they lack the intention or the motivation to instigate change upon their return to the parent organization.<sup>27</sup>

Argyris conducted a study of 20 top executives of a corporate division which indicated a significant shift toward a set of values that encouraged the executives to handle feelings and emotions, deal with problems of group

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<sup>25</sup>Chris Argyris, "T-Groups for Organization Effectiveness," Harvard Business Review, 42:61, March, 1964.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>27</sup>Carl R. Rogers, "The Process of the Basic Encounter Group," La Jolla, California: Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, p. 19, [n.d.], (Mimeographed.)

maintenance, and develop greater feelings of responsibility on the part of subordinates for the effectiveness of the organization. His study indicated that the effects of their laboratory education, continued on a high level for a period in excess of six months. During the tenth month a fade-out began to appear.<sup>28</sup> A study by Roger Harrison tended to support Argyris' conclusion that the executives failure to apply their learning in the back-home situation was due to organizational counterpressures.<sup>29</sup>

A study by Dr. Carl Rogers, in which 425 participants were questioned within a year of their training experience, was a little more optimistic in its results. Sixty-five percent felt the laboratory training had made a continuing positive difference in their behavior. Of the number, a few reported that they believed it had caused some negative changes along with the positive. Two participants reported only negative changes. Fifteen percent reported no changes. But, 16% reported change which did not last and left only a small residual positive effect.<sup>30</sup>

Organizational family-group training seems to offer a solution to the problem of fade-out. For several years, training organizations avoided this approach because of the additional risk the individual understandably feels about opening up in the presence of his boss, his peers, and his subordinates. This risk is not present to the same extent in a group composed of strangers.

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<sup>28</sup> Argyris, op. cit., pp. 70-71.

<sup>29</sup> Chris Argyris, Interpersonal Competence and Organizational Effectiveness (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, 1962), p. 268-269.

<sup>30</sup> Rogers, op. cit., p. 20.

Stranger-group training was more widely used under the assumption that it would offer the trainee an opportunity to gain sufficient skill and confidence to open relations upon returning to the parent organization. Unfortunately, the same feelings of risk which were considered to be unacceptable in the supportive atmosphere of the laboratory were even more difficult for the trainee to overcome in the back-home situation. The prevailing organizational norms often discouraged the trainee from doing the work necessary to open relationships.

Therefore, in the logical progression of events the natural group, or work team, has been brought into the supportive atmosphere of the laboratory in an effort to open their relationships to examination and revision. Unlike stranger-group training, where the participant returned to the organization unsupported, the promising aspect of this approach is that the group continues to function as a group after the training is completed.<sup>31</sup>

Since successful organizational change is dependent upon factors such as structure, policies, practices, and controls, all of which are governed by upper echelon executives, it would seem appropriate that a change effort involving a large segment or all of an organization would begin at the top and work its way down through the hierarchical relationships. This approach would give top management and opportunity to become familiar with the concepts of change, to assess the desirability of change, and, if accepted, to lead the organization through the transition. Instead of a struggle by lower and middle managers

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<sup>31</sup>Herbert A. Shepard, "Explorations in Observant Participation," in T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: Innovation in Re-Education, eds. L. P. Bradford, J. R. Gibb, and K. D. Benne (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 389.



to push the necessary concepts up the chain of command they could be filtered downward (the natural direction of flow). Instead of having to buck hostile traditional values and organizational norms, middle and lower level managers could more easily step into new roles and assume new management styles, aided by a progressive top management. Such an approach should lessen the problem of fade-out or slippage.<sup>32</sup>

### Organizational Applications

The T-group is not intended as a model for group action in the back-home situation. Yet, it can be a useful source from which individuals or groups may discover management learnings which have on-the-job applicability.

On the organizational level of the individual, many executives receive little feedback about the effects of their own behavior, except in the laboratory where everybody is giving and receiving. An executive's success depends, to one degree or another, on the approval and cooperation of subordinates and associates. It can, therefore, improve an executive's effectiveness if he learns, through the T-group experience, that he should alter an inappropriate behavior pattern. New behavior, acquired in the laboratory, can help the trainee make more efficient, effective, and meaningful contributions toward achieving organizational goals.<sup>33</sup>

Awareness of the subtle signals being transmitted to him by others may allow the sensitive manager to avoid unnecessary human problems.<sup>34</sup> Exhibit-

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<sup>32</sup>Chris Argyris, Interpersonal Competence and Organizational Effectiveness (Homewood, Ill.: Richard D. Irwin, 1962), pp. 281-2.

<sup>33</sup>George A. Hoy, "Sensitivity Training," Factory, 122:125, September, 1964.

<sup>34</sup>H. B. Rogers and Buck Milakovich, "Do It Yourself Sensitivity Training Improves Performance," Factory, 124:82, June, 1966.



ing a pattern of awareness of the needs of others tends to blunt the edge of unavoidable problems; subordinates and associates will know that the sensitive manager has made an effort to cope with the situation.<sup>35</sup>

Klaw advanced the hypothesis:

. . . members of a T-group may . . . gain some notion as to why many people are not [italics in the original] sensitive and modest and group-minded--and thereby become more ready to listen to the arrogant boor who nevertheless, happens to know what he's talking about.<sup>36</sup>

Likewise, he inferred that the trainee, through learning about group process, becomes more able to resist group pressures than the individual who has not had the T-group experience.<sup>37</sup>

On the group level in the parent organization there is often a handicap due to a lack of openness. Organizational norms preclude the discussion of emotional factors in the decision-making process. This reluctance to "open up" or "level" in group discussions reduces the effectiveness of the group in two important ways. It serves to foster the continued existence of a "hidden agenda," consisting of the personal needs and fears of the group members,<sup>38</sup> and it tends to deny a pattern of full participation.<sup>39</sup>

The hidden agenda in a group may include an item (or items) for every member of the group. Or, several members may have a common unexpressed need, such as a need for status, which they are working to fulfill. Items on this agenda may also include such things as a fear of being demoted or a fear of being laid off. Personal interests of this nature can stand in the way of rational group processes. The ability to recognize and deal effectively with

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<sup>35</sup>Hoy, loc. cit.    <sup>36</sup>Klaw, loc. cit.    <sup>37</sup>Ibid.    <sup>38</sup>Hoy, op. cit., p. 122.

<sup>39</sup>Julius E. Eitington, "T-Group Learnings for Group Effectiveness," Training and Development Journal, 23:47, May, 1969.

these unexpected personal interests allows the group ". . . to get the hidden agenda out on the table, where it can be dealt with. . . ." and progress toward the accomplishment of organizational goals through better solutions to the rational, intellectual, and technical problems with which the group must deal.<sup>40</sup>

In the task oriented group, the importance of participation is frequently overlooked. The potential benefits of a pattern of full participation include: tapping the total resources of the group; aiding the growth of both the more verbal and the recessive members; securing a consensus and a commitment to support group decisions; building an atmosphere of trust and a feeling of freedom in the group to speak out on controversial topics, express emotions or give feedback to another group member; and causing the work group experience to be an intimate, meaningful, and satisfying experience.<sup>41</sup>

Bringing the work group into the laboratory in the form of a family group may offer a method for arriving at a more effective and cohesive work group which can overcome the problems of hidden agendas and limited participation.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Hoy, op cit., pp. 122-123.

<sup>41</sup>Eitington, op. cit., pp. 44-47.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

## CHAPTER IV

### ARE SOME MORE ABLE TO BENEFIT FROM THE T-GROUP EXPERIENCE THAN OTHERS?

Hard evidence or even agreement on the answer to the question posed is difficult, if not impossible to find. There has been a fair amount of speculation by several authors on the applicability and acceptance of such training as applied to individuals and organizations.

#### The Restrictive Opinion

The restrictive or more negative view as espoused by Johns, Argyris, and Glueck, is that some individuals and organizations are more suited to achieve beneficial change through sensitivity training.

For instance, Ted Johns made two observations about change in regard to the organization:

. . . Research into the effectiveness of the T Group system in British companies bears out the findings obtained in other countries, namely, that considerable benefits can result if T Groups are employed in the promotion of organization change, but that these benefits are considerably enhanced if the organizational climate is favourable to change.

. . . because company structures in different technological and sociological areas are quite different, one can only speak of the right way to manage within the context of a specific situation. Thus it is quite feasible that in some organizations training in centralized decision making would be quite appropriate, while others would benefit from training in participative techniques.<sup>1</sup>

In so far as the individual is concerned, three attributes in particular, have been said to characterize those individuals best able to learn from the

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<sup>1</sup>Ted Johns, "T-Group Traumas," Personnel (London), 1:41, June, 1968.

### T-group experience:

1. A relatively strong ego that is not overwhelmed by internal conflicts.
2. Defenses which are sufficiently low to allow the individual to hear what others say to him (accurately and with minimal threat to his self), without the aid of a professional scanning and filtering system (that is, the therapist, the educator).
3. The ability to communicate thoughts and feelings with minimal threat is that the individual does not tend to distort greatly what he or others say, nor does he tend to condemn others or himself.<sup>2</sup>

Glueck, after firsthand experience in a T-group, indicated that in addition to willingness or ability to expose one's personality to others, ". . . the degrees of interpersonal effectiveness necessary for successful performance on the job . . ." should be considered in the selection of participants. Thus, in Glueck's estimation, ". . . The most likely executive for a T-Group . . . is one who is open about himself, knows little about the importance of interpersonal relations on a job, and who job requires interpersonal expertise."<sup>3</sup>

### The Expansive Opinion

Bradford, Gibb, Benne, and Lippitt, for instance, take the viewpoint that laboratory training has value in a wide variety of applications.

Benne indicated:

. . . the T Group has been found to be a more robust and resilient medium for a wide range of re-educative effects than would have been considered possible during the period of its relative segregation with laboratory designs. . . .<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Chris Argyris, "T-Groups for Organization Effectiveness," Harvard Business Review, 42:87, October, 1968.

<sup>3</sup>William F. Glueck, "Reflections on a T-Group Experience," Personnel Journal, 47:504, July, 1968.

<sup>4</sup>Kenneth D. Benne, "History of the T Group in the Laboratory Setting," in T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: Innovation in Re-Education, eds. L. P. Bradford, J. R. Gibb, and K. D. Benne (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 124.

While the T-group was originally considered as a means of increasing the potential of normal adults, its application has extended to use with children and even abnormal participants. Dr. Carl R. Rogers made mention of the use of this technique in the rehabilitation of drug addicts by Synanon, a West Coast organization.<sup>5</sup>

A fairly concise statement of opinion was coauthored by Bradford, Benne, and Lippitt:

Experience thus far indicates that the laboratory design for learning can make a significant contribution to many populations, ranging from children to cross cultural groups concerned with international relations. Experience shows further that the basic ingredients of the learning process are the same, although some of the specific learning outcomes receive different emphasis. The laboratory method of education is based on the conviction that there are generic characteristics of learning experiences that are common for all clients.<sup>6</sup>

This view then assumes that among the individuals to be trained, universal characteristics cause laboratory training to be a valuable and viable approach for all.

### Summary

There is disagreement as to whether some can benefit more than others. The divergence in viewpoints does not appear to be so great that it cannot be somewhat reconciled.

The restrictive view might be of some value if we were corporation finance officers trying to maximize the return on our investment. By care-

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<sup>5</sup>Carl R. Rogers, "The Process of the Basic Encounter Group," La Jolla, Calif.: Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, p. 1. [n.d.] . (Mimeographed.)

<sup>6</sup>Kenneth D. Benne, Leland P. Bradford, Ronald Lippitt, "The Laboratory Method," in T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: Innovation in Re-Education, eds. L. P. Bradford, J. R. Gibb, and K. D. Benne (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 21.

fully choosing those individuals who match characteristics with Argyris' list, cited above, and insuring an organizational climate favorable to change, it would seem reasonable to expect a greater degree of benefit for each man-hour or dollar invested than if these measures were not followed.

The case for the restrictive view seems to hinge on what degree of benefit can be derived and which type of individual can benefit more. If we could combine the two positions we might contend that some do benefit more than others--but, most can derive some benefit. Argyris has said that it is rare for a participant not to learn something in the extended time frame usually occupied by laboratory training sessions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Chris Argyris, "T-Groups for Organization Effectiveness," Harvard Business Review, 42:63, March, 1964.

## CHAPTER V

### CRITICISMS OF SENSITIVITY TRAINING

#### The Danger of Participation

Perhaps the major criticism of sensitivity training is that the stresses generated by the intense discussion of feelings and emotions in the T-group can cause participants to suffer emotional disturbances which occasionally lead to the need for professional assistance.

In contrast to this view, Argyris contended that the tensions, disillusionments, and emotional jostlings of everyday work relationships are greater than those of laboratory training; in the laboratory the individual is more able to exercise control over how much he wishes to learn and what he is willing to pay for it. It was his opinion that even though laboratory training must focus on feelings, it does not have to be dangerous.<sup>1</sup>

While Dr. Carl Rogers recognized the fact that psychological damage to a participant would be a serious matter, it was his opinion that critics of the intensive group experience had not viewed this problem in the proper perspective. His experience indicated that damage of this nature was a rare occurrence.<sup>2</sup>

At the NTL training site in Bethel, Maine, during the 1968 summer sessions, there were about 1,000 participants. Dr. L. P. Bradford estimated that of that number only 30 trainees found their meetings emotionally disturbing

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<sup>1</sup>Chris Argyris, "Issues in Evaluating Laboratory Education," Industrial Relations Journal, 8:69, October, 1968.

<sup>2</sup>Carl R. Rogers, "The Process of the Basic Encounter Group," La Jolla, Calif.: Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, p. 20, [n.d.]. (Mimeographed.)

enough to cause them to approach the resident psychiatrist for support. About one person in 1,000 becomes sufficiently disturbed to cause them to withdraw from laboratory training. Dr. Bradford reasoned that, ". . . The participants we get at NTL usually have a role in society and such persons usually have enough ego strength to get along. . . ." However, in recognition of the potential for emotional disturbance inherent in the technique, NTL maintains a resident psychiatrist at their Bethel, Maine training site when there are groups in session.<sup>3</sup>

Ethical and reputable sensitivity training leaders have recognized that there is some danger to the participants. Steps taken to overcome this particular problem include the study of past laboratory sessions to develop concepts and techniques for dealing with particularly stressful incidents which occur in such groups and the careful screening of participants to exclude individuals who are likely to be harmed by the training experience.<sup>4</sup>

A related charge suggests that the danger of sensitivity training lies in the fact that it is a sort of disguised psychotherapy presided over or conducted by inadequately trained leaders. This misconception is fostered by the fact that sensitivity training, like psychotherapy, is fostered by the fact that sensitivity training, like psychotherapy, requires intense discussions of feelings and emotions. There are, however, more dissimilarities than similarities between the two procedures. The function of psychotherapy is to heal individuals who have exhibited significant symptoms of illness. Sensiti-

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<sup>3</sup>"NTL's New Maine Training Center: A Retreat But No Sanctuary," Training in Business and Industry, 6:49, May, 1969.

<sup>4</sup>Thomas C. Greening, "Sensitivity Training: Cult or Contribution," Personnel, 41:22, May-June, 1968.



vity training, on the other hand, is designed to expand the potential of individuals who are already functioning in a relatively normal and usually productive way in society. Thus, the purposes, expectations, and type of participants found in the two techniques are quite different.<sup>5</sup>

Perhaps it would be advantageous in some respects if every trainer were a social or clinical psychologist or a psychiatrist. Certainly, some training is required of the individual who functions as a leader or trainer for a T-group. There has been a cooperative effort to establish standards for professional sensitivity trainers and to develop staff training programs.<sup>6</sup> This effort has come about in response to the criticism offered above and to reduce the use of this technique by the few unethical profiteers who have gravitated into this lucrative field.

Yet, it is intended that the discussion with the group deal with the current behavior in the group, and do so in laymen's terms. The expectation is that the focus of group discussions will develop on a "there-and-then" content and gradually evolve to a "here-and-now" content. Discussions of childhood traumas, unconscious motivations, or personal histories are not considered to be desirable or of value in the T-group.<sup>7</sup>

The feedback received from other participants, the feelings of risk associated with opening up in the presence of strangers (or even more, opening up in the presence of the boss, peers, and subordinates) may generate considerable anxiety. But Dr. Carl Rogers has observed that the ability to help

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<sup>5</sup>Ted Johns, "T-Group Traumas," Personnel (London), 1:40-41, June, 1968.

<sup>6</sup>Greening, loc.cit.

<sup>7</sup>Chris Argyris, "Issues in Evaluating Laboratory Education," Industrial Relations Journal, 8:69, October, 1968.

others in stressful situations is found widely distributed in the population of participants. The realization of a "caring" attitude on the part of the group members and the "helping" experience gained by the individuals in the T-group are valuable parts of the training process.<sup>8</sup> The presence of a trained psychiatrist or psychologist might reasonably lead the group to expect him, as a more knowledgeable member of the group, to take the initiative in a stressful situation. Such action, or the expectation of such action, could cause the group to miss this valuable aspect of the laboratory experience.

Thus, in terms of the training process it does not appear necessary or even desirable that the leaders all be psychologists or psychiatrists. In practical terms, it is doubtful that there are enough psychologists and psychiatrists to meet the growing demand for this type of training. Trained (and perhaps one day licensed) leaders can perform the more mundane group direction and intervention, freeing the highly trained psychiatrists and psychologists for tasks more relevant to their capabilities.

The presence of a "resident psychiatrist," as is the practice during NTL's sessions at Bethel, Maine, is an admirable safeguard against untreated damage. It would seem a desirable practice which might advantageously be emulated by all who conduct sensitivity training. Playing the percentages (even when they appear as small as 3%) with something as serious as the emotional disturbance of a trainee appears to be unacceptable.

#### Hidden Manipulation

Critics have speculated that the laboratory approach to training consists

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<sup>8</sup>Rogers, loc. cit.

of a system of covert controls and manipulative processes which are used to "brainwash" participants. The inherent openness and flexibility of the laboratory process causes this criticism to be groundless. The participant actually develops skills in the laboratory which increase his ability to question, to examine, and to modify.<sup>9</sup> The laboratory process obviously cannot enhance the trainee's ability to be aware of himself and others by pulling the wool over his eyes.

An example of how wide of the mark this criticism can be, is the instance of a company undertaking a sensitivity training program to win its executive corps' approval of a set of policies (either established or new). Often, the executives will return to the organization with greater disillusionment or perhaps even new reasons for disagreement with the organizational policies.

#### Weak Leaders

It has been suggested that some managers, when subjected to sensitivity training, become so sensitive that they cannot carry out the responsibilities of their jobs. That is, they tend to get so involved in considering all the possible consequences of potential alternatives that they fail to arrive at timely and realistic decisions<sup>10</sup> or, they tend to become unable or unwilling to discipline, demote or fire subordinates when such action is appropriate.<sup>11</sup>

Hoy contends that this is not the case, that sensitivity training is

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<sup>9</sup>Argyris, op. cit., p. 68.      <sup>10</sup>Johns, op. cit., p. 41.

<sup>11</sup>George A. Hoy, "Sensitivity Training," Factory, 122:123, September, 1964.

designed to expand the potential of successfully functioning individuals, and that sensitivity thrives in an atmosphere of success, and vice versa.<sup>12</sup>

Argyris states:

. . . leaders who learn at a laboratory do not tend to throw away their directive skills. Rather, they seem to use directive leadership where and when it is appropriate. . . . The most laboratory education can do is help the individual see certain unintended consequences and costs of his leadership, and help him to develop other leadership styles if [*italics in original*] he wishes.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, if there are major faults in a given manager's leadership style following laboratory training, it would appear that the manager probably had weaknesses in his leadership style before undertaking the training and elected to make no significant changes during the training period.

#### Other Criticisms

A phenomenon as potent as sensitivity training attracts critical comment from many sources. Because the sources are subject to varying degrees of bias and qualification, the criticisms vary somewhat in quality. They appear to fall in a continuum extending from the significant to the insignificant. What seemed to be the more important of the criticisms have been dealt with separately in this chapter. A sampling of the others, along with a brief rebuttal for each, is presented below.

1. Social order and personal stability are based on propriety, realistic defenses and some degree of facade. Stripping them away is inappropriate.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>William F. Glueck, "Reflections on a T-Group Experience," Personnel Journal, 47:23, July, 1968.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas C. Greening, "Sensitivity Training: Cult or Contribution," Personnel, 41:23, May-June, 1964.

This statement is in error because people with truly untenable and transparent facades tend to have difficulty in their social and work relationships. They expend much of their available energy and time in the maintenance of defenses. The reduction of facades and defense mechanisms lets the individual acknowledge his self, acknowledge the subterfuges in his behavior, and function in a more competent and natural way.

2. Openness degenerates into destructive criticism, hostility, and hurt feelings.<sup>15</sup>

Quite to the contrary, Dr. Carl Rogers has observed that feedback, openness, and the consequent authenticity of group members engendered feelings of trust and cohesiveness in training groups.<sup>16</sup> Hostility or hurt feelings incidental to the initial attempts at openness and feedback do not tend to persist as the training group progresses toward feelings of trust and cohesiveness.

3. Laboratory education teaches people to be callous, disrespectful of society and to dislike those who live a less open life.<sup>17</sup>

Argyris' comment on this idea was particularly to the point:

If one truly begins to accept himself, he will be less inclined to condemn nongenuineness in others, but to see it for what it is, a way of coping with a nongenuine world by a person who is (understandably) a nongenuine individual.<sup>18</sup>

4. Sensitivity training is an amoral invasion of privacy.<sup>19</sup>

Intuitively, it would appear that the greatest benefit could be derived

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid.    <sup>16</sup>Rogers, op. cit., p. 17.    <sup>17</sup>Argyris, loc. cit.    <sup>18</sup>Ibid.

<sup>19</sup>"Executive Group Therapy is Scored," The Iron Age, 196:23, June 29, 1969.

from full and complete exposure of the self. There is no explicit requirement, however, for a participant to make full and complete disclosure of his innermost private thoughts or for him to reveal personal matters. The individual is given a choice as to whether or not he will become a trainee and in the group he still has a choice as to his degree of participation. Any "invasion" occurs only with the agreement and cooperation of the participant.

### Real Deficiencies

Ironically, sensitivity training is not as often criticized for its actual deficiencies as it is for imagined menaces spawned in the minds of the fearful, the ignorant or the uninformed. Unfortunate characteristics of sensitivity training include:

Expense. The organizer usually charges a sizable amount per person for the training plus a generous amount for the expenses of meals, lodging, etc.

Time. Many programs are organized for a two-week period. Some are even longer. Recently there has been a move toward marathon, long weekend sessions. At least in the short run, training time represents a loss of productive effort for the parent organization.

Effectiveness. Studies seem to indicate that only about 60 to 75 percent of all participants benefit in a significant way.

Slippage. There seems to be a tendency for the effects of sensitivity training to fade after about 6-10 months. Often this appears to be caused by an organizational climate or atmosphere which is not favorable to change.

The fact that there will be expense and time involved in the use of this training technique appears to be relatively unalterable. The loss or investment involved might well be considered justifiable at this point but,

certainly the cost-effectiveness ratio will become more favorable when the continuing efforts of NTL and others result in increases in effectiveness and decreases in slippage. The material researched seemed to indicate: modifications in laboratory designs for a closer fit to the requirements of the trainee populations; selective screening of participants; and altered approaches to organizational change with an awareness of the slippage problem, are leading toward gains in effectiveness and reductions of fade-out.

## CHAPTER VI

### SPINOFF -- COMPLIMENTS TO THE BASIC CONCEPT

The success and widespread acceptance of the intensive group experience as developed by NTL has given rise to the development of several related techniques. The complimentary techniques to be discussed in this chapter are in some cases adaptations or modifications of the initial idea. Others are closely related yet significantly different techniques. These related concepts have evolved to satisfy a variety of needs.

#### The Managerial Grid

Managerial Grid is one of the newest approaches to achieving more effective organizational development. This program was conceived and developed by Drs. Robert Blake and Jane Mouton of Scientific Methods, Inc., Austin, Texas. The Grid is a multiphased program involving six steps and extending over a three-to-five year period.<sup>1</sup>

The Grid program derives its name from a reference frame which figures prominently in the training. This reference frame<sup>2</sup> is based on two key variables found in organizations. The horizontal variable reflects concern for production. The vertical values represent degrees of concern for people. Each is expressed on a scale ranging from 1 (minimal) to 9 (maximal). Using

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<sup>1</sup>Georgette Foster, "The Managerial Grid in Action at Wards," Stores, 48:42, December, 1966.

<sup>2</sup>Robert K. Blake and Jane S. Mouton, The Managerial Grid (Houston, Texas: Gulf Publishing Company, 1963), p. 10.



this 9 by 9 frame of reference it is possible to represent 81 mixtures of the two variables. For simplicity, discussion of the managerial styles usually starts with five "pure" styles represented by the extremes at the four corners of the grid and the moderate style at the center of the grid.

At the lower left is the 1,1 style. This style is a mixture of minimum concern for people and production. At the upper left is the 1,9 style, reflecting a minimum concern for production coupled with a maximum concern for people. At the lower right is the 9,1 style which has a maximum concern for production and minimum concern for people. At the center of the reference grid is the 5,5 style which is a mixture of an intermediate amount of both kinds of concerns. At the upper right is the 9,9 style, where concern for both people and production reaches a maximum.<sup>3</sup>

The grid program attempts to familiarize managers with the fact that there is a range of alternative approaches which can be used in supervising people to accomplish organizational goals. That is, the 81 mixtures in the 9 by 9 grid represent a continuum of possible sets of assumptions which can be used by the manager to integrate people and production functions.<sup>4</sup>

There appears to be room for some dissention in the Grid Theory. With 81 mixtures of concern for people and concern for production from which to choose for a given situation, convincing arguments could be supplied for the maintenance of some flexibility in the choice of managerial style. A given situation, because of urgency or because of lack of apparent connection with actual production, might seem to indicate a need for more or less concern for one of the two variables. Yet, it is expected that a realization of the

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

continuum of possible managerial styles will lead inevitably to the choice of the 9,9 managerial style. As Blake and Mouton put it:

Managerial styles based on 9,1 direction with compliance, or 5,5 conformity with compromise, or on 1,9 security and comfort through convenience, or on 1,1 acquiescence and complacency, or the "clever" but corrupt relationships produced by facades or by debilitating paternalism, are, at best, second best. Actually they are quite unacceptable, long-term. In comparison with performance contributed under 9,9 with its condition of candid communication based on conviction and commitment which results in creativity, other bases for work relationships seem to fall short. . . .<sup>5</sup>

The six phases of the Grid can be thought of as being in two major parts. The first part, phases #1 and #2, deals with management development. The second part, phases #3 through #6, deals with organizational development.<sup>6</sup>

Phase #1 is a management seminar conducted over a one-week period. All management personnel of a participating organization undergo this phase. Preparation for the Grid week takes place over a six-week period. There is a textbook and a set of 60 questions which require about 50 hours of homework. The basic work team in phase #1 is a cross section of the organization. Existing hierarchical relationships are not included. The emphasis is on individual development.<sup>7</sup>

Phase #2 deals with the existing work teams in the organization. In this phase the boss-subordinate confrontations start to produce the results the program is reaching for.<sup>8</sup> The emphasis shifts from individual development to team development.

Phase #3 deals with intergroup relations.<sup>9</sup> This phase examines the interests and relations of groups on several levels. Such group relationships

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 318.    <sup>6</sup>Foster, loc. cit.    <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 42-3.    <sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

include: work groups with other work groups; divisions with other divisions; headquarters-plant relationships; union-management; and management-wage earner relationships.

Phase #4 is long range planning and phase #5 is carrying out those plans. Phase #6 involves stabilizing the entire program.<sup>10</sup>

This is a comprehensive development program, designed to help both the individual and the organization to function more effectively. In this way, Grid training differs from sensitivity training in its scope.

The Managerial Grid also differs from sensitivity training in its focus. Grid training provides the trainee with a frame of reference and a vocabulary which clearly steers the trainees away from personal evaluations. Rather, discussions tend to center more on the styles of management employed by group members in an impersonal way.<sup>11</sup> It is expected that by using this approach the members can be relatively candid with one another without arousing undue anxiety.

#### Team Improvement Laboratory

The Team Improvement Laboratory (T.I.L.) was an outgrowth of the Managerial Grid and Work Simplification concepts. This program was developed by Steinberg's Limited of Montreal, Canada to meet the needs of their organization.<sup>12</sup>

After more than 1,200 middle and senior managers had participated in the Managerial Grid, it was decided that a less expensive and altered form of

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid.    <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>12</sup>Irving Borwick, "Team Improvement Laboratory," Personnel Journal, 48:18-19, January, 1969.

training should be devised to train the more than 9,000 regular and 8,000 part-time non-managerial employees of the organization. Thus, the T.I.L. was developed.<sup>13</sup>

It is a 38-hour program, including preparatory reading, four lectures (which occupy only 2 hours of the total), three films, plus general and team meetings.<sup>14</sup> Approximately one-third of the program is devoted to learning the concepts of management and management styles; two-thirds of the program is devoted to problem solving and managerial training.<sup>15</sup>

Early in the program a list of 9 assumptions is introduced. Acceptance of these assumptions is the foundation for the employees assuming managerial responsibility in their jobs.<sup>16</sup> They are:

1. People don't resist change; they resist being changed.
2. Every job is capable of being improved.
3. Every employee has the basic ability to improve his job.
4. People like to improve their work.
5. People like to participate in groups.
6. Improvements are best made by those who perform the job.
7. Employees should be provided with the basic skills for job improvement through an educational program.
8. The role of the supervisor is one of advisor, consultant, and coordinator.
9. The role of the employee is manager of his own area of responsibility.<sup>17</sup>

Also introduced early in the program is the 5-step pattern, a simplified problem solving technique. This technique is offered as a set of procedures for use in the analysis and improvement of existing job methods.<sup>18</sup> The steps

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid.    <sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-20.    <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>16</sup>Irving Borwick, "Team Improvement Laboratory," Personnel Journal, 48:20, January, 1969.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 24.    <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

in the pattern are:

1. Select a job to improve.
2. Get all the facts.
3. Challenge every detail.
4. Develop the preferred method.
5. Install it -- check results.<sup>19</sup>

After the 38-hour laboratory training is completed, participants continue to meet in the same group in their work areas. Also, they are given additional managerial responsibility within their own work areas on their return from the training. These two factors tend to reinforce the concept that this program is a continuing effort rather than a one-shot affair.<sup>20</sup>

As for the effectiveness of the program, Irving Borwick, Director of Personnel at Steinberg's states:

. . . in terms of the human objectives, i.e., changing attitudes, educating employees, developing managerial skills and introducing control of change, . . . the program has been successful. In terms of Team Improvement Laboratory effecting great cost savings on increased sales, no adequate measures have been developed to give ample proof that this is the case.<sup>21</sup>

### Confrontation Design

This technique might be termed a short-cut, family type, intergroup conflict resolution program. It is an attempt to capitalize on the learning potential associated with T-groups without becoming involved with the expense, lost time, and intense individual interactions which are also characteristic of the T-group process.<sup>22</sup>

A change agent or human relations consultant might consider instituting this type program when there appears to be minimal problems within groups

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 24.    <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 23.    <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>22</sup>Robert T. Golembiewski and Arthur Blumberg, "The Laboratory Approach to Organizational Change: Confrontation Design," Academy of Management Journal, 11:200-1, June, 1968.

accompanied by a lack of openness and understanding or the presence of debilitating frictions between groups.

The Confrontation Design involves two or more organizational entities whose members have unresolved issues. Each of the work teams is instructed to select organizational units with which more effective relations would be considered advantageous to the execution of their own jobs. Participants are then told to develop "3-dimensional images" based on these questions:

1. How do we see ourselves in relation to the other work team?
2. How does the other work team see us?
3. How do we see the other work team?

Each work team prepares its images in isolation. Willing work teams confront one another and share their prepared images in time periods scheduled by the consultant.<sup>23</sup>

This design assumes that problems in the organization are frequently caused by blockages in communications. This design is an effort to encourage authentic interaction and thereby bring into effect some problem solving behavior on the part of the participants.<sup>24</sup>

The confrontation design reported in the Golembiewski and Blumberg paper required only 12 scheduled hours.<sup>25</sup> Stranger-group sensitivity training, which typically has a lesser degree of relevance to the immediate solution of specific organizational problems, usually lasts two weeks. The Confrontation Design thus represents a considerable savings in time and constitutes a much more direct attack on the problems of the organization.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., pp. 202-3.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

Because of the brief duration of the confrontation design it does not usually result in the complete and permanent solution to all organizational problems. Rather it is regarded as a reference point and springboard for future action. Areas of agreement, accommodation and compromise reached in the confrontations are used as a basis for continued action on organizational issues. Usually groups continue to meet after the confrontations have taken place.

The intent of the confrontation design is to bring out into the open unacknowledged problems which the organization must resolve. Also, it is expected that the experience will induce a greater commitment and effort toward the development of behavior which will minimize or eliminate the development of such problems.

Golembiewski and Blumberg concluded that data collected supported the effectiveness of the Confrontation Design. Qualifications of their conclusion included:

1. The data probably understated the potency of the design.
2. Additional and more refined research will be necessary to measure the implied behavioral and attitudinal changes suggested by the data collected for their paper.
3. Some organizations are probably not culturally prepared for the confrontation design. But, if a consultant provided this experience for an unprepared organization, the most likely result would be ". . . the loss of a useful opportunity for development. . . ." <sup>26</sup>
4. No special skills are necessary on the part of the participants.

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 209.



Skilled consultants should, however, be present for the scheduled confrontations. In the planning stage it was thought that the presence of consultants would be necessary to protect weak organizational units from harsh attacks in the confrontation. Virtually the opposite was found in the execution of the design. The consultant's value was found to lie ". . . in encouraging the participants to confront one another at 'deeper levels.'". . .<sup>27</sup>

### Do-It-Yourself Feedback Analysis

This method of self-analysis resulted from a recognition of the fact that there is value in becoming more aware or tuned in on the environment and those with which one comes in contact. At the same time, it was recognized that formal sensitivity training is costly and time consuming. The suggested do-it-yourself program can be virtually costless and much of it can be executed in odd moments which might otherwise be relatively valueless.<sup>28</sup>

There are four steps to the self-sensitizing program as described by Rogers and Milakovich:

1. Study and chart the characteristics of persons whose lives affect yours at the plant.
2. Ask their candid opinions of you, and analyze these. Don't argue - listen aggressively.
3. Probe for hidden factors that might color their opinions making them regard you as they do.
4. Reconsider your self-image -- and take action.<sup>29</sup>

In the preparation of charts for those who will be asked for evaluations, items of interest include: ". . . performance standards, nobbies, habits, likes, and dislikes. . . ." Other significant details are: their family members and

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 209-10.

<sup>28</sup>H. B. Rogers and Buck Milakovich, "Do It Yourself Sensitivity Training Improves Performance," Factory, 124:82, June, 1966.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.



and ages; their sports interests; and memberships in religious, social, or fraternal organizations. Days or even weeks spent in accumulating this information through conversations is time well used because it is necessary to understand these people well before their evaluations can be interpreted in a meaningful way.<sup>30</sup>

The suggested method of image evaluation involves preparation of a questionnaire with 15 items to be evaluated: ". . . 1) This never describes him; 2) This seldom describes him; 3) This describes him about 50% of the time; 4) This usually describes him; 5) This always describes him. . . ." <sup>31</sup>

Items to be rated in the example shown were:

1. He's cheerful.
2. I would like to work with him.
3. He's truthful.
4. He's objective.
5. I would like to work for him.
6. He's loyal.
7. He's ambitious.
8. He's aggressive.
9. I would like him to work for me.
10. He's creative.
11. He's selfish.
12. He's fairminded.
13. He's unyielding.
14. He's too easily pushed around.
15. I don't know enough about him. <sup>32</sup>

It is proposed in the paper that an anonymous and candid evaluation be solicited from each of 5 or 6 individuals. The group from which evaluations are to be obtained would typically include the individual's immediate superior, one or more peers, a close friend or perhaps the individual's wife, and one or more subordinates. When the "image evaluations" have been filled out, compu-

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

ting an average score for each of the 15 items and comparing that average with a self-rating, allows the individual to determine how others' concept of his self and his own concept of his self match up. Where the average of opinions and the self-rating differ by two or more points, further analysis is suggested. These represent areas in which the individual is weak or misunderstood.<sup>33</sup>

Four avenues of further analysis are suggested. First, the individual might discuss, as objectively as possible, the average opinions expressed with a close friend or his wife. Second, the individual might turn to his plant colleagues, perhaps as a group, to gain insights on differences indicated in the evaluation. Third, the catalogue of information prepared on the group of evaluators might be searched for indications of motives or interests which, through past actions could have inadvertently put the individual at odds with members of the group. Finally, after utilizing the three methods described above to gain additional insights, it is suggested that the individual approach his superior for an objective discussion about the evaluation and the individual's potential for improvement.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, there are three possible outcomes for each of the items on the evaluation sheet. In comparison to the average of opinions solicited from the group, the individual's self-evaluation can be more positive, the same (or approximately the same), or less positive. Rogers and Milakovich found that many people lacked self-confidence and therefore tended to evaluate themselves less positively than the group did. In such cases, the

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

elimination or reduction of the discrepancy is simplified. It is only necessary for the individual to allow his self-confidence and self-concept to expand to more closely fit the evaluation of the group.<sup>35</sup>

It is suggested that this self-sensitizing program be used in conjunction with a well-defined and carefully thought out "master plan" which extends from the present into retirement. The authors also indicated that for maximum benefit the process of self-evaluation should be repeated annually.

In June of 1966, about 300 supervisors at Lockheed had used the do-it-yourself sensitivity training plan. Eighty percent reported increased efficiency, more rewarding people relations, and increased motivation. Management reported that middle manager's attitudes shifted from an employee perspective to a management perspective and that turnover in the sensitized group decreased. Despite the more optimistic self-reports, the fade-out in this program was high with only 35 to 40% of the trainees retaining their new behavior patterns.<sup>36</sup>

#### The Microlab

The Microlab is a series of exercises designed to help a stranger-group in the beginnings of a small group relationship. It is intended to be only the initial experience of an on-going program and, as such, there is no expectation that the Microlab will replace other group development techniques. Rather, the Microlab would ideally be used in conjunction with such programs,

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

to facilitate the establishment of a rapport, openness, and cohesiveness between members of a group prior to the undertaking of one of the established designs for group development.<sup>37</sup>

Microlabs have been conducted for as few as one group of 5 participants each and as many as sixty groups of 8 participants each. These labs have taken place in a variety of settings. Low levels of illumination seem less inhibiting to participants and for this reason much or all of the Microlab is frequently executed under this condition.<sup>38</sup>

The list of exercises employed in the Microlab is limited only by the imagination of the director or leader. Many are drawn from research or theoretical literature on group processes. There are three basic categories into which the exercises might be sorted: introductory exercises, exercises in becoming more open, and exercises in sharing.<sup>39</sup>

The first type, the introductory exercises are relatively safe exercises which lead to minimal interaction and sharing of the natural apprehension present in such groups. Introductory exercises are, as the name implies, simply a way to begin. The leader decides when the group relationships have developed sufficiently to let it progress to the next category of exercises.<sup>40</sup>

The second group of exercises deals with self-revelation and self-presentation. These exercises tend toward here-and-now discussion of feelings with feedback from one or more of the group. When the leader feels that required levels of trust and adequate feelings of safety have been reached, the groups

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<sup>37</sup>Sheldon K. Edelman, Bert R. Biles and the Microlab Group, "The Microlab in Communications: Theory and Technique," (Manhattan, Kansas: The University for Man, Kansas State University, 1968), p. 1. (Mimeographed.)

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-9.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 2-4.

move on into exercises in sharing.<sup>41</sup>

The sharing exercises require participants to give and receive more openly than in the first two categories. This third group consists of exercises involving feedback, non-verbal trust, non-verbal belonging, exercises in self-direction, attempts to learn more about others in the group, and exercises in feeling close.<sup>42</sup>

Unlike the trainer in a T-group, the leader in a Microlab makes it clear at the beginning that he is in charge. The leader, aided by an observer or observers when several groups are involved, watches the progress of the participants with a view toward the selection of appropriate exercises. Exercises are introduced by the leader and he offers comments to help the participants understand what has taken place in the exercises when they are completed. Here, as in other techniques, the leader assumes responsibility for the safety of the participants during and after the laboratory experience.<sup>43</sup>

### Summary

Having restricted this discussion to business applications of sensitivity training, there are numerous spin-off techniques which are not appropriately covered here. It should be noted that the examples cited in this chapter are by no means the only directions taken by creative innovators in the field.

Of the five techniques described in this chapter, the best known and most widely used is the Managerial Grid. The reason for this is that it is a comprehensive and well thought out program designed for more or less universal application. Each of the others evolved for rather specialized application and

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-9.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

have not, therefore, been promoted with the same vigor or attention as was the case with the "Grid."

Although there was undoubtedly some careful thought and planning involved in the do-it-yourself program, approaching one's colleagues, and especially one's subordinates for an "image evaluation" outside the supportive atmosphere of the training group would appear to be an act requiring some degree of courage. Such activities could lead to, at best, raised eyebrows.

There is probably more value to the Microlab than might be recognized on cursory examination. The opening sessions of sensitivity training are usually described as being anxiety ridden, fraught with confusion, and largely a waste of time. Exercises, as used in the Microlab, might advantageously be used to reduce this period of floundering to a minimum.

It would appear that spin-off techniques, both for universal and specific application will be developed on a continuing basis. Even within the ranks of the established sensitivity training organizations there are persistent efforts to refine and improve the approaches used, so that the applications are more effective, efficient, and lasting. It is perhaps in the area of complementary techniques that answers to the problems of cost, effectiveness, and fade-out will be developed.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

There is a substantial amount of criticism and controversy surrounding the concept of sensitivity training and even more centering on the measurement of the effects of this technique by researchers.

There is a considerable amount of evidence that 60-75% of all participants derive improvements from sensitivity training. There is a like amount of evidence that many of the apparent improvements are lost 6-10 months after the trainee returns to his parent organization. Persistent efforts to improve the percentage of trainees deriving benefits and to decrease slippage are continuing programs being carried out by NTL and others.

Most of the individuals who write on the subject appear to agree that sensitivity training is a potent technique--worthy of continued research. And, there are more questions, by far, than answers.

Demand for sensitivity training by organizations has increased greatly in recent years. The organizational need for management development programs like sensitivity training and the Managerial Grid might be explained somewhat by Maslow's hierarchy. Maslow's generally accepted hierarchy of needs suggests that man's highest need is self-actualization, "the full expression of the individual's present potential and the striving to expand it." Maslow has also stated that man does not tend to work toward the fulfillment of higher needs until the lower level requirements are fulfilled. And, a satisfied need is not a motivator.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, at this point in time, to the extent that

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<sup>1</sup>A. H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, Harper, New York, 1954, cited by Chris Argyris, *Integrating the Individual and the Organization* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 32.

the lower level needs have been relatively satisfied, organizations should be attempting to provide motivation for their members through stimulation of the individual's need for self-actualization.<sup>2</sup> As sensitivity training techniques have come to be recognized as a method of bringing about increased participation, competence, creativity, and other forms of personal development, organizations are becoming interested in the concept of reeducating their executives.

There is demand for sensitivity training by individuals, as well. In an age when conversation is fast becoming a lost art due to the influence of television and the increasingly fast pace of our daily lives, in a culture which reduces the individual to a group of multi-digitized telephone, license, credit card, zip code, social security, armed service identification and checking account numbers, sensitivity training appears to be an important force in opposition to the contemporary dehumanization and isolation of the individual. Or, perhaps it is simply an intuitive dislike of phoniness which causes large numbers of people to not only accept but desire sensitivity training. The author, in working on this paper, was impressed by the number of friends and acquaintances who indicated a desire to undergo sensitivity training.

Ernest Havemann quotes Charles Seasore, a psychologist with NTL, as having stated that 85 to 95 percent of all individuals feel that they are not as close to people as they would like to be, or that they're not as open and honest about feelings as they'd like to be, or that they have an anxiety over submitting to or exercising authority or that their lives are too boxed in and narrowly

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<sup>2</sup>Chris Argyris, Integrating the Individual and the Organization (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1964), p. 32.



predictable from day to day. Charles Seashore also said, "Since the group encourages intimacy, honesty, and adventure, it's a great experience even if its effects are only temporary."<sup>3</sup>

One could generalize that having become sated in our desires for the material things, many people are ready to turn toward human values for personal satisfaction. Sensitivity training offers some hope of rehumanizing our work and social contacts with others.

Stranger-group training, the design most often discussed in the material researched and in this paper, is oriented toward individual development. The major drawback of this training design appears to be fade-out. HTL, once willing to accept one person from a business organization, now tried to get two or more trainees from each firm so that they will have benefit of mutual support upon their return to the back-home situation.<sup>4</sup>

It would appear that the training of work teams, or family group training offers greater risks and greater potential for lasting effects.<sup>5</sup> With stranger-group training being oriented toward individual development, and family group training effecting beneficial changes in an entire work team as well as seeming to have a beneficial effect on the duration of the improvements gained through training, it appears to be desirable that a combination of these two designs be used. A comprehensive organizational development program should probably be designed to effect change in several steps including: (1) the development of the individual; (2) the development of the work

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<sup>3</sup>Ernest Havemann, "Alternatives to Analysis," Playboy, 16(11):216, November, 1969.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

<sup>5</sup>Chris Argyris, "T-Groups for Organization Effectiveness," Harvard Business Review, 42:74, March, 1964.

team and; (3) the development of relationships between work teams.

Caution and careful consideration are called for in the selection of an individual or organization to be employed for the purpose of conducting a management development program of the type discussed in this paper. While it appears to be generally accepted that sensitivity training is not therapy, some of the methods used in the T-groups are quite similar in character to those used in therapeutic processes. It is unfortunate that not all T-group leaders are qualified to recognize and deal with the complex psychological and sociological variables brought into play within the T-group.

When sensitivity training is to be used as a part of a management development program, it is suggested that a reliable source, such as the American Management Association or the National Training Laboratories, be contacted for information about reputable training organizations.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### A List of Elements Common to Most T-Groups

Formulated by Dr. Carl Rogers<sup>1</sup>

1. Milling around. As the leader or facilitator makes clear that this is a group with unusual freedom, that it is not one for which he will take directional responsibility, there tends to develop a period of initial confusion . . . In this situation, confusion and frustration is natural. Particularly striking to the observer is the lack of continuity between personal expressions. . . .

2. Resistance to personal expression or exploration. During the milling period some individuals are likely to reveal some rather personal attitudes. This tends to develop a very ambivalent reaction among other members of the group.

. . . . .

3. Description of past feelings. In spite of ambivalence about the trustworthiness of the group, and the risk of exposing oneself, expression of feelings does begin to assume a larger proportion of the discussion. The executive tells how frustrated he feels by certain situations in his industry, the housewife relates problems she has experienced with her children.

. . . . .

4. Expression of negative feelings. Curiously enough, the first expression of genuinely significant "here and now" feelings is apt to come out in negative attitudes toward other group members or toward the group leader. . . .

Frequently the leader is attacked for his failure to give proper guidance to the group. . . .

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What are the reasons that negatively toned expressions are the first current feelings to be expressed? Some speculative answers might be the following. This is one of the best ways to test the freedom and trustworthiness of the group. Is it really [underlined in the original] a

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<sup>1</sup>Carl R. Rogers, "The Process of the Basic Encounter Group," La Jolla, Calif.: Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, pp. 3-19, [n.d.]. (Mimeographed.)

place where I can be and express myself, positively and negatively? Is this really a safe place, or will I be punished? Another quite different reason is that deeply positive feelings are much more difficult and dangerous to express than negative ones. If I say I love you, I am vulnerable and open to the most awful rejection. If I say I hate you, I am at best liable to attack, against which I can defend. Whatever the reasons, such negatively tone feelings tend to be the first "here and now" material to appear.

5. Expression and exploration of personally meaningful material. . . . the event most likely to occur next is for some individual to reveal himself to the group in a significant way. The reason for this no doubt is that the individual member has come to realize that this is in part his group [underlined in the original]. He can help to make of it what he wishes. He has also experienced the fact that negative feelings have been expressed and have usually been accepted or assimilated without any catastrophic results. He realizes there is freedom here, albeit a risky freedom. A climate of trust (Gibb 1964)<sup>2</sup> is beginning to develop. So he begins to take the chance and the gamble of letting the group know some deeper facet of himself. . . .

6. The expression of immediate interpersonal feelings in the group. Entering into the process sometimes earlier, sometimes later, is the bringing explicitly into the open of the feelings experienced in the immediate moment, by one member toward another. These are sometimes positive, sometimes negative. Examples would be: "I feel threatened by your silence." "You remind me of my mother, with whom I had a tough time." "I took an instant dislike to you the first moment I saw you." "To me you're like a breath of fresh air in the group." "I like your warmth and your smile." "I dislike you more every time you speak up." Each of these attitudes can be, and usually is, explored in the increasing climate of trust.

7. The development of a healing capacity in the group. One of the most fascinating aspects of any intensive group experience is to observe the manner in which a number of the group members show a natural and spontaneous capacity for dealing in a helpful, facilitative and therapeutic fashion with the pain and suffering of others. . . . This kind of ability shows up so commonly in groups that it has led me to feel that the ability to be healing or therapeutic is far more common in human life than we might suppose. Often it needs only the permission granted by a free flowing

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<sup>2</sup>J. R. Gibb, "Climate for Trust Formation," In Bradford, Gibb, Banne, (eds.), T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method, Ch. 10 (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1964), pp. 279-309, cited by Carl R. Rogers, "The Process of the Basic Encounter Group," La Jolla, Calif.: Western Behavioral Sciences Institute, p. 6, [n.d.]. (Mimeographed.)



group experience to become evident.

8. Self acceptance and the beginning of change. Many people feel that self acceptance must stand in the way of change. Actually, in these group experiences, as in psychotherapy, it is the beginning of change.

Some examples of the kind of attitudes expressed would be these. "I am a dominating person who likes to control others. I do want to mold these individuals into the proper shape."

"I really have a hurt and overburdened little boy inside of me who feels very sorry for himself. I am [underlined in the original] that little boy, in addition to being a competent and responsible manager."

... another person reporting shortly after his workshop experience says, "I came away from the workshop feeling much more deeply that 'It is all right to be me with all my strengths and weaknesses.' My wife has told me that I appear to be more authentic, more real, more genuine."

This feeling of greater realness and authenticity is a very common experience. It would appear that the individual is learning to accept and to be himself and thus is laying the foundation for change. He is closer to his own feelings and hence they are no longer so rigidly organized, are more open to change.

9. The cracking of facades. . . . As time goes on the group finds it unbearable that any member should live behind a mask or a front. The polite words, the intellectual understanding of each other and of relationships, the smooth coin of tact and coverup--amply satisfactory for interactions outside--are just not good enough. The expression of self by some members of the group has made it very clear that a deeper and more basic encounter is possible [underlined in the original], and the group appears to strive intuitively and unconsciously, toward this goal. Gently at times, almost savagely at others, the group demands [underlined in the original] that the individual be himself, that his current feelings not be hidden, that he remove the mask of ordinary social intercourse. . . .

10. The individual receives feedback. In the process of this freely expressive interaction, the individual rapidly acquires a great deal of data as to how he appears to others. The "hail fellow well met" discovers that others resent his exaggerated friendliness. The executive who weighs his words carefully and speaks with heavy precision may find that others regard him as stuffy. A woman who shows a somewhat excessive desire to be

of help to others is told in no uncertain terms that some group members do not want her for a mother. All this can be decidedly upsetting, but so long as these various bits of information are fed back in the context of caring which is developing in the group, they seem highly constructive.

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11. Confrontation. There are times when the term feedback is far too mild to describe the interactions which take place, when it is better said that one individual confronts [underlined in the original] another, directly "leveling" with him. Such confrontations can be positive but frequently they are decidedly negative . . .

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12. The helping relationship outside the group sessions. No account of the group process would, in my experience, be adequate if it did not make mention of the many ways in which group members are of assistance to each other. No infrequently, one member of a group will spend hours listening to and talking to another member who is undergoing a painful new perception of himself. Sometimes it is merely the offering of help which is therapeutic. . . .

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13. The basic encounter. Running through some of the trends I have just been describing is the fact that individuals come into much closer and more direct contact with each other than is customary in ordinary life. This appears to be one of the most central, intense and change-producing aspects of such a group experience. To illustrate what I mean I would like to draw an example from a recent workshop group. A man tells, through his tears, of the very tragic loss of his child, a grief which he is experiencing fully [underlined in the original], for the first time, not holding back his feelings in any way. Another says to him, also with tears in his eyes, "I've never felt so close to another human being. I've never before felt a real physical hurt in me from the pain of another. I feel completely with you." This is a basic encounter.

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14. The expression of positive feelings and closeness. . . . as the sessions proceed there is an increasing feeling of warmth and group spirit and trust built, not out of positive attitudes only, but out of a realness which includes both positive and negative feeling. . . .

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15. Behavior changes in the group. It would seem from observation that many changes in behavior occur in the group itself. Gestures change.

The tone of voice changes, becoming sometimes stronger, sometimes softer, usually more spontaneous, less artificial, more feelingful. Individuals show an astonishing amount of thoughtfulness and helpfulness toward each other.

Our major concern, however, is with the behavior changes which occur following the group experience. It is this which constitutes the most significant question and on which we need much more study and research. . . .

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author acknowledges with gratitude the guidance and advice of Dr. A. Dale Allen, Associate Professor of Management and Labor Relations, College of Commerce; Dr. Sheldon K. Edelman, Assistant Director, Counseling Center; and Dr. Eugene J. Laughlin, Associate Dean, College of Commerce, all of Kansas State University.

For their encouragement and support, the author wishes to express his appreciation to his parents. The author is particularly indebted to his wife, Mary Louise Lingerfelt, whose help contributed so greatly to the completion of this paper.

AN INVESTIGATION INTO BUSINESS APPLICATIONS  
OF SENSITIVITY TRAINING

by

LARRY DON LINGERFELT

B. A., Kansas State University, 1963

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AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF SCIENCE

College of Commerce

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

1970

## ABSTRACT

In the past few years, hundreds of corporations have sent thousands of executives to workshops and conferences dealing with leadership and group functioning, all of which have had at their core the intensive group experience developed by National Training Laboratories (NTL). Because of the rapidly increasing interest in this relatively new training method, this report was undertaken to investigate the advantages attributed to sensitivity training and the criticisms leveled at the technique, particularly in the instance of its use as a management development tool. To a lesser extent, this report examines related techniques which were either a direct outgrowth of the T-group method or were influenced in some way by the prior development of the T-group approach to individual development and organizational change.

Information for this report was gathered through library research, with emphasis on periodicals. Additionally, two mimeographed papers obtained from the Kansas State University Counseling Center were incorporated. While the research was extensive, it was not exhaustive on the general subject of sensitivity training as this report focused on business applications of the technique.

It was found that there is a substantial amount of criticism and controversy surrounding the concept of sensitivity training. Most individuals who write on the subject appear to agree that the intensive group experience is a potent technique, worthy of continued research. Evidence seems to indicate that 60-75% of all participants derive improvements from sensitivity training. Unfortunately, many of the apparent improvements are lost 6-10 months after the trainee returns to his parent organization. Participants in

stranger-group training seem to be subject to the problem of fade-out to a greater degree than participants in family-group training. It would appear that family-group training, the training of existing work teams, offers greater risks and greater potential for lasting effects. Persistent efforts to improve the percentage of trainees deriving benefits and to decrease slippage or fade-out are continuing programs being carried out by NTL and others.

It was found that the criticisms usually voiced against sensitivity training are for the most part untrue. Ironically, there are shortcomings in terms of effectiveness, fade-out, expense, and time which are rarely mentioned by critics of the technique.

Since approximately 3% of the trainees find the intensive group experience to be emotionally disturbing, caution and careful consideration are called for in the selection of an individual or an organization for the purpose of conducting a management development program of the type discussed in this paper.