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SENSITIVITY TRAINING

by

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Presented to

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for

Special Studies Course

H290-1

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- I. History of the t-Group.
  - A. Organization.
  - B. Function of T-Groups.
  - C. Problems faced by the young program.
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## HISTORY OF THE T GROUP

The National Training Laboratory, a young creation, is the sponsor of the T group. The NTL began in June, 1947, as a part of the NEA's Division of Adult Education Service, and was concerned with the human relations laboratories held each summer in Bethel, Maine, and occasionally other cities during the year. The actual beginnings of the T Group, however, were during a workshop held in 1946, at the State Teachers College in New Britain, Connecticut. It was sponsored by the Connecticut Interracial Commission, The Connecticut Department of Education, and the Research Center for Group Dynamics. The purpose was to develop more effective local leaders in relation with the Fair Employment Practices Act under which the Interracial Commission had been recently created. The training leaders were Kenneth D. Benne, then at Columbia University, Leland P. Bradford, of the National Education Association, and Ronald Lippitt, of the Research Center for Group Dynamics. The researchers were Kurt Lewin, of the Research Center, Ronald Lippitt, and three research observers, then graduate students in social psychology—Morton Deutsch, Murray Horwitz, and Melvin Seeman.

Early in the life of T Group an idea called the Basic Skills Training Group developed to serve several functions:

- (1) Help members interrelate some more or less systematic sets of concepts.
- (2) To provide practice in diagnostic and action skills of the change agent and of the group member and leader.

(3) The expectation that the behavioral content would run the gamut of "human organization" from the interpersonal level and the group level to the intergroup level.

(4) Help its members to plan the application of laboratory learnings to back-home-situations and to plan for continuing growth for themselves and their associates.

(5) Participants would develop a clearer understanding of democratic values.

(6) Members gain a more objective and accurate view of themselves in their relations to other persons in the group and to the developing group as a whole.

(7) Members of the BST Group would not only acquire skills and understandings to help them function more adequately as change agents and as group members but that they would also acquire trainer skills and understandings required for communicating these to others.

As Kenneth D. Benne discusses each of these seven articles in the book, T-Group Theory and Laboratory Methods: An Innovation in Re-education<sup>1</sup>, and makes reference to an embarrassing event correlated with the seventh point previously mentioned. Part of the clause was to include, "practice of skills of group leadership, of training in human relations, and of inducing social change." This spurred on several participants, whose previous

<sup>1</sup>Leland P. Bradford, Jack R. Gibb, and Kenneth D. Benne, T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: An Innovation in Re-education (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1964), 85-87 pp.

education was not adequate. However, feeling qualified they returned home to conduct human relations training in the name of "laboratory training." This first occurred in 1948 but it was not until 1955 NTL was able to develop a special advanced program for the development of trainers.

This was just one of many problems faced by the NTL workers. As the needs grew, new members were added to the team in 1949 and 1950, and their ideas and skills were not always in agreement with the traditional patterns already established by the "old timers" or "inner circle" as the older staff members were often referred to. The beginning staff had been disciples of social psychology, education, and sociology, but seven of the ten new members were from the fields of psychiatry and clinical psychology. Conflicts arose between the Freudian and the Rogerian members of the new staff as well as with the old-timers concerning the processes of staff planning, and the older members found themselves out numbered. Bradford, Benne, and Lippitt were no longer in direct leadership but given tasks of training and research coordination and supervision. Although the general trend of the operation was clear, there was tremendous upheaval in the organization; even the name was changed from the BST Group to the T Group. Emphasis was no longer on improvement of change-agent concepts and skills as training objectives, neither the organizational and community structures in the back home situations of members. Attention was now drawn to the interpersonal events

occurring between trainer and members or between members and group events in the developing experiences of the T Group. Also the interest in here-and-now material became of much more value and of prime importance.

At this time, and years coming many new ideas and programs were added, some proved ineffective and were dropped, while others have become most significant. However, as the value of the T Group has been recognized by many different occupational groups, and many different T Groups have organized over the country; each has its own way of training staff and places stress upon different innovations. Most of the regional laboratories established are part of university programs. This growth of NTL has caused an acute need for professional trainers, since most of these people are employed in university teaching and research, or a clinical or social practice, and can work in T Groups only in a part time basis. In the beginning, NTL depended largely on a system of apprenticeship for increasing their need of qualified trainers. As the program grew, it became clear that qualified trainers needed the equivalent of a doctoral degree, and most of the people attracted by this program met the requirements. They were those who had done graduate work in psychology, sociology or anthropology. Until 1959, the alumni program was in use to train qualified persons to conduct training groups in various nations to help ease the

increasing need for the workers. After this time comparable programs have been done in the regional level.

Now, after many years of "trial and error", NTL has truly come into its own. They are now greatly increased in capability in training, and has expanded to include consultation and organizational development programs, research, publications, and professional development. Year round programs are offered for those interested in increasing their own human relation skills, or those concerned about helping others reach their full potential. NTL now has consultation and organizational development services to assist companies, government agencies, and public and private institutions to increase their effectiveness. Research aims to increase social knowledge and to improve the technologies of change. The several publications of the NTL attempt to distribute the information gained.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>National Training Laboratory Institute for Behavioral Science, Laboratories in Human Relations Training. (Washington D.C.: NTL Institute, 1969), p, 79.



## THE T GROUP AS AN APPROACH TO LEARNING

Before discussing the more formal aspects of sensitivity training, it would be well to explain or define the T Group. First of all, the T Group is different than the therapy groups as T Groups are concerned with considered "healthy" persons who wish to develop skills in their own lives in handling human relations, while the persons in therapy groups are having problems adjusting to everyday situations. T Groups are concerned with the here-and-now situations and conscious behavior rather than preconscious behavior and unconscious motivation. The following conditions expressed in the revised Reading Book for the Laboratories in Human Relations Training<sup>1</sup> make clear the areas involved to help the participants to reach personal goals of improvement and change in insights, understanding, sensitivities, and skills.

(1) Presentation of self: Until the individual has an opportunity to reveal the way he sees things and does things, he has little basis for improvement and change.

(2) Feedback: Individuals do not learn from their experience. They learn from bringing out the essential patterns of purposes, motives, and behavior in a situation where they can receive back clear and accurate information about the relevancy and effectiveness of their behavior.

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<sup>1</sup>National Training Laboratory Institute for Behavioral Science, Laboratories in Human Relations Training. (Washington, D.C.: NTL Institute, 1969), p. 1.

They need a feedback system which continuously operates so that they can change and correct what is inappropriate.

(3) Atmosphere: An atmosphere of trust and non-defensiveness is necessary for people both to be willing to expose their behavior and purposes and to accept feedback.

(4) Cognitive Map: Knowledge from research, theory, and experience is needed and important to enable the individual both to understand his experiences and to generalize from them. But generally information is most effective when it follows experience and feedback.

(5) Experimentation: Unless there is opportunity to try out new patterns of thought and behavior, they never become a part of the individual. Without experimental efforts relevant change is difficult to make.

(6) Practice: Equally important is the need to practice new approaches so that the individual gains security in being different.

(7) Application: Unless learning and change can be applied to backhome situations, they are not likely to be effective or lasting. Attention needs to be given to helping individuals plan application.

(8) Relearning how to learn: Because much of our academic experience has led us to believe that we learn out of listening to authorities, there is frequently need

to learn how to learn from presentation-feedback-experimentation.

The initial TGroup experience provides opportunities to explore traditional patterns of behavior. The trainer refuses however, to carry out his expected role of leadership, agenda, and procedure setting. With this lack of formal leadership and lack of clarity about goals and procedures, the members of the group fill this void. Therefore, the first condition of training is met.

There are ten to fifteen individuals in a group, who really make up a miniature society. In this environment, these people, in a small amount of time, create, develop, and maintain a small social organization, that by the use of feedback, tell the members about some of their feelings that are more apparent to the other members than themselves. We do not always see things as they really are, because during our lives emotional threats have motivated us toward certain behavior, and thus we sometimes develop certain behavior that remains throughout a lifetime, though it may seem inexplicable to us—we develop defenses against it. So in the sensitivity training laboratory ones defenses return to protect from the supposed threat, and because people use their defenses most when they feel under pressure, the T Group tries to create relationships of mutual support, respect, and trust. Then, in this kind of atmosphere, they begin to learn from each other.

Although there must be this feeling of respect, there must be honesty as well, which is usually coated over during the typical "honeymoon" period, of sweetness and self-congratulation. During this period, members who are considered a threat to the equilibrium are looked upon as troublemakers. This comfortableness, however, is to the advantage of the learning experience because it denies the negative affect on the part of the members toward themselves, the other members, and the group. The negativeness is present and it must find its way to open expression. Then, and only then, can the group hope to establish new and better patterns of relationships.

Matthew B. Miles uses a spiral design to illustrate the learning experience through training.<sup>1</sup> He uses six steps to show the process. A-1 in the spiral is dissatisfaction, a problem; B-1 is selecting new behaviors; C-1 is practicing new behavior; D-1 is getting evidence on results; E-1 is generalizing, applying, and integrating; finally A-2 begins a new circle as it represents finding new dissatisfactions and problems. Over a period of time, the learning cycle would be repeated many times, each step bringing a better behavior in groups. Thus, the here-and-now experiences within the group have helped the members to improve his "social" self, and see the results

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth D. Benne, Warren G. Bennis, and Robert Chin (Eds.), The Planning of Change (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1961), pp. 718-719.

of the "new" pattern of behavior.

Now the brief view of the desired outcome of sensitivity training has been explained, let us discuss more about the learning process. Remembering the social creativity given by means of the T Group; this presents a learning experience rarely found outside the group. By the same way the members learn to question situations and examples within their group, they also learn to test effectively social patterns of the "real" world situation. He learns how to break away from the fear of upsetting ideals and ill-placed social strains that have kept him tied down to impression making rather than a true desire to serve his community. It is in the supportive climate of the group that he is able to openly explore his motivations and feelings. By exposing his needs, values, and behavior patterns, the perceptions of the group can be utilized. Through these assumptions of the group the member learns to consider or correct behavior. The group soon learns that the barriers to learning (defensiveness, withdrawal, fear, and distrust) can be reduced so that problems of interrelationships can be dealt with on deeper and more realistic levels.

This giving back and forth, or transactional nature, of the group is used most effectively when as the members use the process of feedback about their own behavior, they help others in the same process. Observing others with the same, or similar problems assists for improving his own behavior.

It cannot be stressed enough how important is the development of membership skills are. They must be able to develop diagnostic sensitivity to aid in the difficulties facing the group, and learn to behave in ways the group moves forward. Also very important is the development of the membership ability because each member needs to feel the satisfaction of participating with others and of being accepted by them. In the group, they learn that behavior that is apathetic, irresponsible, or ineffective not only affects them and their needs, but the groups progress as a whole.

## DESIGNING A T-GROUP LABORATORY

Every laboratory design is an almost unique invention, each fluidly moving toward its particular needs. This paper will however, give a general outline which is basically followed in preparing, and formulating the T Group.

The length of the training sessions vary according to the situation, but it is generally more successful if they can be done consecutively and for more than a weeks time. Though week-end laboratories are sometimes held, one, two, and three week sessions are more frequent. Universities sometimes offer T Groups on a regular basis, for students and faculty.

The staff team if conducting three or four groups simultaneously, would be fifteen or more members, but for the usual single group of ten or twelve members only one or two staff members would be necessary.

Let us first examine the T Group in its simplest form; a one time-four hour session. I attended such a group in the Spring of 1969, at Southern Baptist College, Walnut Ridge, Ark. There were present six members of the Student Government and six members of the faculty of SBC. Our group leader was Dr. Phil Summers of Vincennes University. We were instructed to look about the room and select the person we felt we least knew; a student selecting a faculty member. Then each of us were told to draw a circle on the sheet of paper we had been

given. Then we were told to pair off with our partner, each of the six pairs going to a different part of the room. Dr. Summers then requested us to draw spokes in our circle, and when all had finished, he asked that we sit facing our partner and write into the spokes the ideas we thought about his personality. We were given about five minutes to complete the task, and then told we would have ten minutes to discuss with our partner the things that we had written down about him. After this time passed, Dr. Summers instructed us to leave the room with our partner and discuss what we feared most when with a group. This discussion lasted five to ten minutes and then the conversation was carried on in groups of fours. After this we all gathered in the original room and drew our chairs into a small circle. Dr. Summers told us we would discuss whatever we wished, but we should only be concerned with here-and-now, anything relating to that time rather than a personal episode of some time past. There was a long silence before one of the faculty members mentioned a certain reaction people seemed to have of him--that was the last silence for the next two to two-and-a-half hours. Dr. Summers spoke very rarely in that time, always letting the members of the group give forth their ideas on the particular item of conversation. At the close of the group discussion he asked that each member keep the things previously spoken of within our group. Next we were handed fifteen completion sentences such as, "tonight....",



"I've learned in this group to....", or "the leader...". Each of us were to remain seated after completing these. We then were told we could leave as soon as we had spoken a few words to each person there.

In a two or three week T Group there are of course many ideas and methods available to the leader but these to be briefly discussed seem to be generally included.

First of all, it is very important to have a method of collecting data. Often each participant, before he enters into any group experience in the laboratory, is given a list which he can check off what areas he would like to see changes in himself and exactly how much change would be desired. Later he checks back to the list to see the changes in his original perception of himself, and later perceptions. Tape recorders are also used to record entire session and sometimes played back to the group at a later time for discussion.

There are several activities during the week other than the T Groups. Members meet at certain times each day to discuss areas of their T Group. This fifteen or twenty minute conversation is called, paired interview. Also part of the planned activities are lectures designed to help the members better understand what is really being said in group discussions. Such topics as "What To Observe in a Group" are heard.

"Skill exercises" are used and one T Group will observe and make notes on the other, taking notice of might have

been done to have made the session more effective. Noticing the adequacy of communication, how well people listened to each other, and the expressions of emotion.

As the series of meetings progress, the members are involved in another group, called the N Group. The N (New) Group does not meet as many times as the T Group, and the member still is an active part of his original T Group. Generally, the leader and members are different than those in the T Group, and this causes a little tenseness usually, but the N Group is faster moving, and there is more participation on the part of the leader.

During the week each group are to be involved in a "real work" task. This is to involve the members in real work and thereby producing spontaneously natural work behavior more likely to promote a basis for using their recently gained knowledge. Roger Harrison and Barry Oshry, in discussing the simulation of work Pressure have used the following chart to show the general rules for the work sessions for the group, relating to the three terms; product, time, and evaluation.<sup>1</sup>

	<u>T-Group</u> <u>Work Norms</u>	<u>Exercise</u> <u>Work Norms</u>
<u>Product</u>	Differences in ideas and feelings are encouraged. There is relatively little external pressure to resolve differences.	Ideas and feeling must be coordinated into a single agreed-upon group product (e.g., written report or group presentation). Differences among ideas and feelings must be resolved.

<sup>1</sup>Roger Harrison and Barry Oshry, Building an Integrated One-Week Laboratory. (Washington D.C.: NTL Laboratories, 1964), p. 9.

T-Group  
Work Norms

Exercises  
Work Norms

<u>Time</u>	Time is limited only by the length of the laboratory.	Product must be completed within specified time.
<u>Evaluation</u>	Members evaluate the quality of their own individual and group action.	Group performance is evaluated against some external criteria (e.g., judges, comparison with the products of other groups).

A task such as this is completed shortly before going home. The last session usually is devoted to the problems of returning home, and improving work situations.

### The Trainer

The trainer is not the usual authority figure. He is not primarily a teacher or a discussion leader. The leader of a T-Group comes closer to being a full member than resembling a teacher. He will participate in the learning experience with the members of the group.

The leader does not know what the curriculum content of the meetings will be, as they will come each time from the problems of the group. Especially in the beginning meetings the members want to lean upon the leader to tell them what they should discuss, as it is idea in society to have a leader or superior in all matters. There are several reasons the leader should not take part in the decision of the discussion. The trainers participation would enable the members to know his areas of interest; causing the members to either move the discussions in that direction to please the trainer, or to punish or frustrate him. Also, he often finds it necessary to take a partisan point of view, and this would place a difficulty on the leader if the topic had been of his choosing. Perhaps the most important reason is that as he becomes so involved as to discuss topical issues, it becomes even more difficult to remain alert to the occurring group events and their causes.

Probably one of the greatest problems the inexperienced trainer has to deal with is that of interventions. In contrast to the leader in group therapy, he rarely ever uses the names of certain individuals in making group interpretations. Instead he tries

to make generalized remarks which could have importance to several members of the group. Occasionally a member creates a situation causing the others to criticize or attack, the trainer then asks a question such as, "Is this behavior appropriate to a T-Group?" and "If so, are the reactions that are being given constructive for the person whose behavior is under consideration and for the group as a whole?"

These interventions by the trainer can cause negative feelings toward him if they are poorly timed or fail to deal with the underlying problems. The trainer must be willing to be used by the members of the group, realizing sometimes this will be painful to him, but necessary if the group is to really be effective. He must let the group or individuals in the group find insight; to let them fail or succeed without his help. Realities must be recognized and analyzed and cannot be ignored or denied. He must believe that he and others, through genuinely common efforts, can gain better insights and working assumptions than if they depend on their own unchecked perceptions alone.

In order to properly serve his position, the trainer must be able to build acceptance by the group. With experience in T-Groups, with greater acceptance of himself and others, the trainer can learn to reduce fears and distrusts to a minimum.

He must be careful himself not to show evidence of fear and distrust, such as only letting a group go so far before he bails them out. Sometimes he shows a tendency to protect the

weaker members of the group.

A trainer must be as trusting and loving as he can. As he becomes more trusting, he can free himself to become more spontaneous, more interdependent, and more freedom giving. It may be noted here that being open and spontaneous is perhaps the most difficult problem for the new trainer.

In summing up the interventions of the trainer, there are three roles in which he may make these interventions: as an observer, interpreter, and as his member role.

There are generally four levels of group behavior which the trainer attends to:<sup>1</sup>

- (1) The content.
- (2) The behavior.
- (3) The defenses members characteristically play in relation to interpersonal threat (these can be called roles).
- (4) The anxieties.

If the trainer is aware of the four levels simultaneously, he has to select the level appropriate at a particular point in time for the group. He must be able to know the level at which the group is ready to assimilate and use the material in relation to making clear the interpersonal problems. Interventions on the content level are more acceptable at the beginning of the

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<sup>1</sup>Leland P. Bradford, Jack R. Gibb, and Kenneth D. Benne, T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: An Innovation in Re-education (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1964), p. 276.

group experience than are statements about anxieties. As the group continues it is possible for greater understanding to take place at level four, the anxieties, but it remains to be seen whether a two week period ( the usual time period is long enough for adequate understanding at this level.

Leland P. Bradford<sup>1</sup> summarized the trainers purpose as follows:

- (1) To help to develop a group whose purpose is to learn about the sensitivities, understandings, and skills necessary for membership in social situations.
- (2) To help to remove blocks to learning about self, about others, and about the group.
- (3) To help to develop a group climate in which learning can take place.
- (4) To help the group to discover and utilize methods of inquiry, action, observation, feedback, analysis, and experimentation as ways of group development and individual growth.
- (5) To help the group to learn how to internalize, to generalize, and to apply learning to other situations.

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<sup>1</sup>Leland P. Bradford, Jack R. Gibb, and Kenneth D. Benne, T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method: An Innovation in Re-education (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 1964), P. 210.

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