

## NOTES ON STUDYING LARGE GROUP WORKSHOPS\*

***John Keith Wood, Ph.D.***

**ABSTRACT.** *Human beings often inflict pain on one another for the flimsiest of reasons, including "trying to do good." Under such pretenses, we continue to destroy others and even ourselves. But, we can also care for (even love) one another. We can create beauty, better ourselves and life in general. Were this not so, we would have no thoughts to consider today. These notes pose questions and observations that, at best, might lead to informing our constructive side and lead to improving our understanding of ourselves, our relationships, our groups.*

In January 1982, for the second issue of the first volume of the publication *Journey*, I wrote an article entitled, "Isn't a group supposed to make you feel good?"

The gist of that paper was that in so-called "community meetings" or plenary sessions of large group workshops, one frequently feels uncomfortable. For a conscientious person, it is inevitable.

Frustration may persist right up to the most creative moments when a group session may end in a constructive resolution of a conflict between individuals or sub-groups, when integration occurs from the collision of opposing values, when the group reaches a delicately formed consensus that is satisfactory both to individuals and to the group as a whole, when a serious crisis has been resolved.

Feeling relieved and satisfied with the final outcome, participants frequently forget their previous frustration in trying to accommodate their own conflicting feelings, thoughts and values with those of others.

Disagreeable (as well as agreeable) feelings are an important part of group participation. When everyone is falsely nice to each other and wishes to say only positive things to avoid this fact, the group is likely headed for an explosion of negative feelings.

After all these years, many group participants (in a workshop, a conference, annual gathering of an association, a so-called forum) still feel disappointed that meetings do not function like ideal family therapy sessions. They seem surprised that harmony cannot come about by following a trusted formula, that it requires not only imagination, but also measured respiration and considerable perspiration.

Constructive large group workshop experiences cannot be brought about solely through the use of political correct speech, the latest communication theory thought to be facilitative, "active listening" or "focusing" advice (in fact, any of these may even be counterproductive or harmful at times). They depend on a conjunction of many factors. The following discussion is intended to identify for study some of these factors.

## **WHAT NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS CONSTITUTES A LARGE GROUP?**

I remember what Jack Gibb (who was a pioneer in the development of groups for personal and interpersonal learning for normal people) told me about NTL groups in the 1940's and 50's. He said that 10 or 12 participants would meet together and very soon someone would suggest, "Let's break into smaller groups. I am freer to discuss and express myself with just two or three others." (Bradford, Gibb & Benne, 1964 )

When I lived in California in the late 1960's, the La Jolla Program was organizing its annual training programs, of some 100 participants, for encounter group facilitators. There were one or two brief large group meetings of all participants after which the organizers divided the population into small encounter groups of 10 or 12 where "real encounter" could take place.

In 1977, at a workshop with some 800 participants in Rio de Janeiro, several participants expressed the desire to break into smaller groups where they would be able to speak more intimately. Thus, our large group was divided into 5 groups of some 160 or so persons each. My own feeling, looking around at the people in my "small" group, was definitely more relaxed and more trusting. The group began an encounter whose characteristics resembled those of groups of 10 or 12.

Thus, a large group was considered to number 10 or 12 to some people at a certain time and place. This figure was thought of as small to other people in another time and place who felt 100 or so to constitute a large group. Later, this amount seemed small to another group of people in another time and place for whom 800 or so was large.

Perhaps a rough, working definition would be: a large group in an application of the person-centered approach is one that provokes a desire on the part of the majority of its members to divide into smaller groupings in order to converse more freely. By not dividing, participants may experience frustration as well as significant learning.

From recent experiences in North and South America and Europe, I would put (for sake of discussion) the number of participants that would generally constitute a large group at around 30 and above. In groups which are applications of the person-centered approach the number is more likely between 100 and 300, perhaps the size of a small-town community meeting.

For the question of what is the maximum number of participants in a large group for the experience to be relevant for the community, constructive for the individual and for the collective, to be creative in self-government and resolving difficulties, I take Plato's advice: "I would allow the state to increase so far as is consistent with unity; that, I think, is the proper limit."

## **WHAT IS A LARGE GROUP WORKSHOP?**

A workshop is an activity that involves a number of people for several days. Participants are residents in a semi-secluded setting (a resort hotel, university residence hall during school holidays, etc.). They take meals together and are involved in sportive and other social events as well as a number of gatherings that may feature sharing personal concerns as well as professional discussions.

One of the activities of a workshop is a plenary session involving all of the participants. This is called a large group meeting or, frequently, a "community meeting." It is important to distinguish between "a large group meeting" and a "large group workshop."

The large group meetings, inasmuch as they are conceived of as "doing something," such as "facilitating personal meaning" or "improving cross-cultural communications," are concentrated on production. The workshop, on the other hand is more like nature. Since it provides a variety

of opportunities for learning from personal, interpersonal and transpersonal perspective, it may be said to be *preserving human potential*.

Many participants who do not immediately feel integrated in the large group meetings eventually have significant learning experiences and make important contributions to the workshop by virtue of participation in other activities. Although the larger group meeting usually attracts more attention, it is not necessarily more important than any of several other factors which contribute to a participant's experience.

Since the large group meeting can only be sensibly evaluated in the context of the large group workshop, in this paper, the more inclusive large group workshop is what is under consideration. Nevertheless, it will be obvious that many observations also apply to the large group meeting itself.

### **PERSPECTIVES FROM WHICH TO STUDY AND EVALUATE LARGE GROUP WORKSHOPS**

Even if the large group workshop is a phenomenon that is not easily approached from any well-established framework (such as counseling, clinical psychology, psychoanalysis, sociology, anthropology, etc.), one must still assume a perspective or perspectives upon which to base a study.

Three basic perspectives come to mind: the *personal*, the *interpersonal* (or social), and the *transpersonal* (beyond the personal, including group-as-a-whole).

#### ***The personal perspective***

Individuals may be intelligent, courageous, self-directive. Nevertheless, their group meetings are frequently dull, chaotic, unsatisfying, ineffective. Should one be surprised? Or is this natural?

Current concepts of the person do not seem to take into account Gustav LeBon's (1895) observation, in his 19th century book on large groups, that, "The decisions affecting matters of general interest come to by an assembly of men of distinction, but specialists in different walks of life, are not sensibly superior to the decisions that would be adopted by a gathering of imbeciles." (For a surprising, but telling recent example, read the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's (1995) account of squabbles between world-renowned scientists at the Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies.)

*What is a person?*

How does a person subjectively experience a group?

What emotions, feelings, thoughts are provoked by what situations?

In evaluating a large group workshop or a large group meeting, one could ask:

Have the person's goals been satisfied by the experience? If not, why?

It would be wrong to say that therapy always occurs in large group meetings. Likewise, it would be wrong to say that it never occurs.

Did the individual experience any therapeutic change from participation in the workshop? From the perspective of client-centered therapy this question might be phrased, "Was the discrepancy between the participant's self-concept and his or her organismic experience reduced significantly by the workshop (or large group) experience?"

Did individuals feel both autonomous and cooperative in the group?

Afterwards, how did participants relate to Freud's question: Did they enjoy work, love and play more?

What changes in the participant's behavior, after the group experience, did friends and family note?

***The social perspective***

*What effect does the large group workshop have on relationships between group members, interpersonal relations, in general?*

How are interpersonal communications affected?

How are interpersonal conflicts resolved?

The British group psychiatrist Wilfred Bion (1961) has proposed that group members will fight, will try to leave the group meeting, or will pair off, two-by-two for sexual relations. Flight or fight are instinctual reactions from our biological evolution.

Pairing is doubtless so as well. However, whereas many of the provocations for which our instinct for flight and fight have diminished, pairing has not. There is evidence that people who meet in a situation in which they feel anxious or in danger are more likely to interpret their feelings of arousal, as an attraction for each other. (Dutton & Aron, 1974) What effect does the group have on provoking pairing?

A mature group is thought to be one in which individual members will take responsibility for their actions and for the outcome of the group itself.

How does such responsibility occur?

Also worthy of examining are the instincts which deal with give-and-take in human relations. Reciprocity. Politicians trade favors. Hare Krishna adepts give you small gifts in the airport and expect in return that you listen to a sermon or purchase their literature.

Once, after a lengthy discussion in a person-centered approach workshop, the group refused to allow a man to film the proceedings so that confidentiality could be guaranteed. The film-maker agreed not to film, but asked if he might be allowed to tape record without images. Following the unspoken rules of concession, the group readily permitted this, even though this meant that confidentiality would be significantly threatened, contradicting its earlier rationalization.

The usual way such transactions are discussed is through the metaphor of power. How does power function in the group? in relationships? How is personal power won and lost in the group?

Also, worth considering are the less noted, but nevertheless profound, changes in behavior between human beings apparently due to one another's presence. Examples of "herd instinct" are abundant: fanatics at soccer matches, rock concerts, demonstrators filled with righteous indignation for a cause, followers of the cutting edge of a new paradigm as it sweeps over a culture.

More constructive examples are also not difficult to find. For example, when two people were wired with electroencephalographs to compare their brainwaves while conversing, the recording pens moved together as though driven by a single brain. When one was called away, the pens no longer moved in unison. (Condon & Sandor 1974)

What factors are involved in effective cooperation between group members that benefit both the group and the individuals?

In evaluating the large group workshop or large group experience, one may ask:

Was understanding of self and others increased? decreased? unaffected?

Was interpersonal understanding improved?

Were interpersonal conflicts resolved constructively?

***The transpersonal perspective.***

There is evidence that by the pooling of knowledge and skills of individual members, the group can resolve difficulties that none could have managed alone. Groups even produce ideas that had occurred to none of its members previously in private. There is also evidence of "group learning." After people participated in various groups, the group decisions were found to be greatly improved, even though the individual performances were not. (Kelley & Thibaut, 1968)

The group may react with the instincts of a herd, the logically precise – though not always just – decision of a jury, the self-assertiveness of a nation.

How does the group employ instincts, logic, assertiveness, intuition in a wise, just, and effective way?

In the evaluation of a large group workshop, one could ask:

Was the group successful in self-government?

Did it go beyond democracy (which has been called "a superstition of statistics")? to perhaps a true consensus?

How successful was the group in resolving problems which it confronted? conflicts of values between members? in dealing with threats from within? from without?

How well did the group function in improving social organization and relations, in the role of medicine (improving the well-being of its members), of science (solving problems), of government (making decisions) and of religion (helping members understand the meaning of their existence)?

How well did the group adapt its culture to meet the changing realities both of the collective and of its individual members?

If the culture was transformed, how did this come about?

At what level was a transpersonal awareness experienced in the group? An awareness of the whole? universal feelings? spirituality?

Did the large group workshop accomplish its stated purpose?

**OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

***The relationship between the individual's world and the world of the individual***

*How does one's consciousness differ from one place to another?*

One may note that a person will tend to behave in accordance with the place. (Barker, 1968) A church (where one's demeanor may be subdued because of the architecture, the behavior of others, and by his or her own reflections on what may be eternal), a theater (where one's demeanor includes an expectant waiting, then carried along by the drama), even a drugstore (with its medicinal smells, hushed and shadowy interior), a library, or even a basketball gymnasium (where body odors and one's enthusiasm for sport and victory are not harnessed). All of these reactions may be somewhat at odds with one's "normal" solitary consciousness.

How did the physical setting influence the group?

*What effect does the presence of others have on an individual's consciousness?*

In trial juries and other situations where an individual must make decisions in the name of the group, one may encounter a divided consciousness: "If it were only myself deciding, I would

decide in such and such a way." "As a 'representative of the people,' I must decide to the contrary."

The Yale University psychologist Stanley Milgram (1974) demonstrated that (not all, but most) good people, trying to do what they understood was right, who apparently wished no one any harm, were capable of applying electric shocks - which they understood to be dangerous and to inflict pain - to other ordinary citizens in the name of "learning" or simply in obedience to authority (education, science, society, the nation).

Even simple experiments show that people are less likely to aid someone in distress, if other bystanders are doing nothing. In spite of what their eyes tell them and the actions that they might take, were no others present, they seem to say to themselves, "Since no one else is concerned, I guess there is nothing wrong here." (Latane & Darley, 1968)

In studies of perception, a significant number of participants have been influenced by a "group pressure" of contrary perceptions. They can thus be induced to go against their own correct judgments and conform to the majority's opinion. (Asch, 1951, 1952; Sherif & Sherif, 1969)

An even more radical and more mysterious example of divided consciousness is what the Stanford University psychologist Ernest Hilgard (1977) calls the "hidden observer." To demonstrate hypnotic deafness, Hilgard hypnotized a blind student. Various tests, such as clapping wooden blocks next to the man's ears and firing a starter's pistol proved that the hypnosis had been realized. Then Hilgard asked him if some part of himself was hearing his voice to give a signal. The man responded by raising his finger. Immediately, he asked to be revived in order to understand why his finger had suddenly risen without his volition.

*The "effect of group," which provokes exceptional states of consciousness in people gathering together, can result in behavior ranging from "mass hysteria" on the destructive end to effective, integrated group actions, on the constructive end.*

An example of mass hysteria:

In 1787, in Lancashire a woman put a mouse down the neck of a co-worker in a cotton factory. The victim, who was terrified of mice, entered a fit of violent convulsions lasting a day and a night. The next day, the contagion affected three more women who without contacting any mice entered a similar state. By the fourth day following the original incident twenty-four in all, including a man who exhausted himself restraining the others were similarly effected. Even two children were among the victims. Accompanied by a rumor of "cotton poisoning," the malady spread to nearby factories. (Sargant, 1957)

An example of integrated group actions:

Traditional groups, such as the Afro-Brazilian *Candomble* have cultivated the large group as a vehicle for, not only healing of individuals' physical and psychological symptoms (public health), but for teaching moral values and character (public education) and integrating the collective force of the community (syndicalism or politicization), as well as the "spiritual development" of the community (religion).

Through a disciplined study of experiential learning of exceptional states of consciousness, the *de santo* – the *Candomble leader* – may harness the raw and spurious energy of an adept in trance, channeling it into an activity which enhances the moral and social values of the community. Thus, the "effect of group," although we do not understand it completely, may be used constructively to increase individual potential and to enhance the life of the society. (Bramly, 1977; Deren, 1970; Goodman, Henney & Pressel, 1974)

For evaluation and study, one may ask:

In the large group workshop, what were the consequences of the altered states of consciousness of participants?

Were they considered constructive or destructive?

How well was the workshop group able to adapt to the "effect of group" for constructive ends, for learning about self and others, for democratic (or better) self-governance, for satisfactory resolution of conflict, for transformation of conflicting values into more appropriate values for a new cultural reality?

*A mind module for group membership? A group field?*

Bion (1961) has said, "Anyone who has contact with reality is always consciously or unconsciously forming an estimate of the attitude of his group towards himself."

Does this mean each of us has some kind of blueprint of the group in the mind?

Bion further states, "the individual in a group is profiting by his experience if at one and the same time he becomes more accurate in his appreciation of his position in the emotional field and more capable of accepting it as a fact that even his increased accuracy falls lamentably short of his needs."

So, maybe not a blueprint, but a *field*? This is perhaps a better scientific concept. Does the group represent a field that effects the individual's consciousness?

How might these hypotheses be tested?

Bion also claims that, "No individual, however isolated in time and space, should be regarded as outside a group or lacking in active manifestations of group psychology."

Thus, perhaps one should be thought of as carrying "the group" within him or her? In modern terms, one could ask, "Does there exist in the mind of the individual a *module* for responses to the group?" There are said to exist such "modules of mind" for language, facial recognition, spatial relations, tool-use, for fear, for social exchange, emotion-perception, as well as for a "theory of mind" (Barkow, Cosmides & Tooby, 1992)

This point of view may be very helpful in understanding the complexities of the relationship between individuals and the group to which they belong. The mind (as part of the body) developed over thousands of years of Pleistocene hunter-gatherer existence. In this existence, human beings were always in groups. It makes sense that a "group consciousness" may have been part of this evolution.

Furthermore, the sociobiologist Brant Wenegrat (1984) has observed,

... genetic transmission of human response rules may occur via pathways dependent on previous, rather than current, genetic decoding. This is because human beings live in cultures that are environments systematically modified by the behaviors of previous generations. Insofar as earlier generations have shaped it, the human environment itself contains previously transcribed genetic information. Thus, response rules acquired by humans as the result of environmental influences may be those encoded in their own genes.

The studies of the brain researcher Benjamin Libet (1978) have shown that the brain begins to respond to an action (agreed upon between a person and an experimenter) as much as a half-a-second *before the person even knows about it*.

Does the social complicity override individual intention?

Do such studies have implications to understanding prevision and déjà vu, so frequently mentioned by group participants?

It has been proposed that human beings acquired cognitive capacities in order to more effectively relate to their own societies, rather than other realities. (Humphrey, 1976; Chance, 1962) Language itself is thought to have developed to deal with the necessities of large groups: the emergence of city-states. (Dunbar, 1991)

If the group has been influential in human evolution, how is that function affecting our current groups?

*How should "placebo effect" be considered?*

The Harvard Medical School researcher Herbert Benson (1996) has proposed changing the phrase "placebo effect" to "remembered wellness" in order to focus attention on the constructive aspect of this phenomenon. Until now, it has been nothing but a nuisance in medical and psychological treatments predicting a 30% or so improvement in patients even when only they believe in the treatment. Benson points out that when the physician also believes in the treatment (even if it contains no biologically active element), the rate of improvement soars to 70% to 90%. This would explain the variations in psychotherapeutic practices, the vast majority of which rely on "remembered wellness." A new technique is effective in the 70% to 90% range as long as the therapist is enthusiastic and believes in what he or she is doing. When research questions the technique and only the patient believes, the effectiveness drops back to 30%.

Is "remembered wellness" another "module" of the individual mind? Is it an effect of interpersonal relations - between the healer and the patient? Is it a whole-group, that is to say, cultural, effect of a people with common beliefs that guide the functioning of their minds?

**PURPOSE**

Bion (1961) has said that,

Every group, however casual, meets to "do" something; in this activity, according to the capabilities of the individuals, they co-operate.

Individual group members frequently have several purposes that may have little to do with the stated purpose. Also, purposes may not always coincide with what actually happens. One may note that the group, as a whole, may even produce something quite different from the intentions of its individual members. This may be for the better (as with scientific studies that never proved what they set out to, but stumbled on new scientific principles, improved public health procedures or suggested cures for diseases) or for the worse (as when people with good intentions try to help someone and in so doing, provoke a crisis that is not resolved). The group may also be prevented from achieving any constructive action by someone who deliberately intends to sabotage such an outcome.

Nevertheless, the question: *Why was this large group workshop convened?* should be considered.

*Psychotherapy and the large group meeting*

Bion (1961) has described two kinds of therapy concerned with large groups.

One, *the therapy of individuals* assembled in groups. This (according to him), "is usually in the nature of explanation of neurotic trouble, with reassurance; and sometimes it turns mainly on the catharsis of public confession."

Two, *the therapy of groups*, which, "is likely to turn on the acquisition of knowledge and experience of the factors which make for a good group spirit."

Bion further points out the difficulty of applying principles of one-to-one psychotherapy to the group situation. "If the psychiatrist reacts as if he were carrying out individual treatment in public, he will soon become aware that he is working against the group and that the patient is working with it."

In current large group meetings, that have evolved from Bion's work, the therapy of the group has been emphasized. As de Maré, Piper & Thompson (1991) have observed, "the group becomes the object of treatment, and the individual is the treatment agent." They state further, "We are concerned in large groups with humanizing the group as opposed to socializing the individual."

In general, large group workshops to which the person-centered approach is applied, are not convened for the purpose of psychotherapy. Research has shown that following a person-centered workshop, a few people consider the experience to have been very therapeutic, a few consider it extremely un-therapeutic, and the vast majority found it agreeable and easily integrated it into their normal life. Thus, though the workshop may be valuable to participants in everyday terms, it cannot be considered as an effective psychotherapeutic agent.

More reasonable expectations for the workshop follow the list provided earlier: learning about self and others, self-governance, conflict resolution, how culture is formed and transformed.

Nevertheless, doubtless because frequently the majority of participants are counseling psychologists, the psychotherapeutic perspective prevails in evaluation of large group experiences. In such groups, the tension created by these expectations and the reality of the group's existence may provide one of the workshop's more significant learnings. When participants cease to correct each other's speech for political motives, cease to follow psychological formulas, cease to lay down rules for "respectable" behavior (in psychotherapeutic terms), and surrender their desire for the large group workshop to be an ideal psychotherapy session, they may begin to meet each other as persons, establishing a new person-centered culture in the process. This new culture may embody the values of constructive therapy, but rarely maintains the psychotherapist's or facilitator's technology.

In considering the evaluation of large group experience, one might ask:

How well did the group transform its own culture to one more appropriate to its current reality?

How well did the group feel together as well as *think* together?

Was there room for the *personal* as well as *beyond the personal*?

*Where the stated purpose is not realized.*

Even though the goal may not be accomplished, individuals may have very positive experiences. However, it is not sensible to consider such groups as successful in general, based on all the factors considered here. Likewise, it is not sensible to consider the workshop a failure, solely on the basis that the group meetings were not satisfying to everyone.

Nevertheless, evaluating whether or not the group succeeded in its stated purpose is extremely important to the development of constructive large group workshops and large group meetings.

I have seen groups that have been assembled year after year to "improve communications" and cannot point to any learning's beyond some individual participant's testimonies of their subjective experience. Some of these have been positive; others, negative. As viewed from afar, and over time, the real purpose seems to have been to stage a "happening."

The value of a "happening" is not disputed. Rock concerts, sports events, political rallies are all legitimate gatherings of people. However, their stated purposes are pretty close to what actually takes place. Whereas, organizers who propose a group meeting for a specific purpose and then stage a "happening" are surely deceiving participants in the group or themselves or both.

If the stated purpose was not accomplished, what of value was?

*When the stated purpose was achieved and surpassed.*

I have also seen large groups assembled to engage in a variety of experiences, including personal encounter, classroom-type discussions, informal meetings, "community meetings," and so forth in order to learn through direct experience whether or not the person-centered approach had any relevance in social situations. Not only was this goal achieved, and, as usual, abundant personal learnings recorded, but the group learned very much more: particularly, how culture is formed and transformed.

I believe that more insight into human nature may be gained by studying the large group whose purpose is not primarily psychotherapy, that is not intended to be remedial in any way - not even to "humanize society" -- but is simply the learning group that has existed throughout evolution, whose principles are being organized along with the phenomenon they are organizing.

Large groups can be opportunities for increasing the complexities of our consciousness, to learn to do more than one thing at a time, to increase and preserve the potential to become more complete as an individual and to contribute constructively to an effective cooperative effort.

Whatever the purpose, *Was the group effective and constructive for solitary individuals, for relationships, and for the group as a whole?*

#### *The consideration of group culture*

In their book, *Koinonia*, de Mar6, Piper & Thompson (1991) state that, "the large group can, like any other group take on a psychoanalytic culture, but this is accidental."

I believe that it is accidental in the sense that it was not the intention of the organizers that such a culture be created. However, since the values of psychoanalysis were inherent in their group structures, it is not necessarily an accident, from the point of view of the nature of the large group. I have observed the formation of a very specific culture within the so-called "cross-cultural communication workshops" during some 18 years of annual meetings in Europe. I suspect that such cultural formation is inevitable.

A hypothesis worthy of testing is:

Any large group workshop, over time, will form its own culture, including its own religion.

### **THE QUESTION OF FACILITATION**

Once the subject of a group's effectiveness in achieving its purpose arises, one begins to think of factors which contribute effectively. How can a group be more effective? is a leading question.

In psychotherapeutic activities, there is the notion of "facilitation." A facilitator tries to help a person become more aware of his or her feelings and behavior in order for him or her to improve the quality of life in one way or another.

Since the early "facilitators" in groups were often psychoanalysts or counselors, the psychotherapy perspective has prevailed. Even when large groups took on purposes that had very little to do with therapy.

The large groups that adopted the Rogerian point of view tended to concentrate on the individual member of the group: How could a facilitator help him or her to become closer to his

or her organismic experience? How could relationships between individuals be improved? The group as a whole was of very little interest to Rogers himself and likewise to many of those who patterned large group activities on his work.

The counselor psychologist Brian Thorne (1991) relates the intention of facilitators in large groups in Britain, demonstrating their adherence to Rogerian therapy principles,

It is unlikely to be helpful if the staff find themselves adopting a high profile in these early stages, but at the same time they must feel free to express strong feelings if and when they experience them. In short, they will be attempting to be real and they will be doing all they can to show that they value the contributions of others, especially when these appear confused or negative or seem destined to sink without a trace. Perhaps more than anything else they will be attempting to listen and to maintain this listening attitude in a group where the fears and expectations of the majority make this an acutely difficult activity. They will be listening, however, not only to the contributions of others but also to the changing and probably chaotic flow of experience taking place within themselves. It is exhausting and demanding work.

This is doubtless an effective activity for helping some group participants. However, reliable facilitator skills have never been fully identified for large group meetings because of the various other effects mentioned above and because, as Alan Coulson (1994) has pointed out, "we can never know who is going to say or do something which is facilitative for someone else." In a phenomenological research studying the experience of participants in large-group meetings, Stubbs (1992) found that empathy, thought to be so vital in client-centered counseling, was not even mentioned as relevant to her informants.

Because of these difficulties, Rogers opted for conceptualizing the role of the facilitator in a large group as one who tries to "create a facilitative climate." However, how this was to be done ignored the large effects of the actual environment, the "effect of group" and so forth and stuck to the "therapist attitudes" of client-centered therapy and, contradictorily, the behavioral principle of "modeling" these "attitudes" for other participants.

Clearly, this formula is insufficient. Consequently Rogers was frequently left in a state of bewilderment when his methods having failed, the group somehow managed to muddle through to a constructive outcome. He could only say that it was due to the "wisdom of the group." Likewise, Bion (1961) has reported on the futility of simplistic theories of group facilitation, "The group changed in ways that left me stranded and not able to apply my theories in any way that convinced me." (p.61)

The large groups based on developments initiated by Bion and others at the Tavistock Clinic have tended to concentrate on a perspective, nearly contrary to Rogers's. The group as a whole and relationships between individuals are considered, but the individual participant is not.

A prospectus for a "conference" based on this approach states,

In order to study and comprehend the intricate processes of small group, large group or inter-group life, a shift in focus from the individual to the group as a whole must be made. Although it is an individual who is often speaking, feeling or acting in a group, our prime concern will not be with the individual and his personality, but rather with how, and through what mechanisms, the group as a whole makes use of its individual members as it copes with the task

of studying the problems of authority and responsibility in group life.  
(Newman, Rioch & Thomas, 1981)

By concentrating *solely* on individuals and their "I" messages and ignoring their collective effect, the group is a force capable of destructive acts for which it admits no responsibility. On the other hand, by concentrating on the group as an "organism" and ignoring the individuals who make up the collective, not treating them like persons, may result in harm to some individuals. (Colson & Horwitz, 1983)

The final question is, *How can we integrate these different perspectives in order to understand and to realize more effective and constructive groups (considering all the dimensions mentioned in these notes)?*

## NOTES

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