

GROUP AS A WHOLE LEARNING FOR LEADERSHIP, AUTHORITY, AND ORGANISATION

An IGO Four-Day Group Relations Conference

Introduction

It may seem strange to be told that a whole field of learning is not within our awareness; that a whole range of group processes (group dynamics) are occurring every day of our lives, without us being aware of them. This is partly due to the highly successful method of teaching that has dominated the western world for several hundred years. Yet we are all aware, to various degrees of competence, that emotions and our unconscious -phenomena that cannot be taught - affect our lives constantly. It is these phenomena that are the subject of group processes.

Aims of Conference

The aim of the conference is to provide learning opportunities that will enable members to learn about, understand, and identify conscious and unconscious group processes, and to begin to apply these processes in groups and organisations that members are a part of. Learning about these group processes will enable members, and the groups and organisations that members are part of, to be more effective and will positively affect the bottom line of private sector organisations and the effectiveness of public sector organisations.

Why you should be a member

Starting from the premise that there is no such thing as an individual, groups are an important part of our life from birth onwards. The nature of groups and organisations is such that leadership (formal and informal), authority, and organisation, have a constant effect on all of us. Starting early in life we are all part of group processes: it is vital, therefore, that we can understand these processes, the part we play in them and how they affect us. People like to believe, that their decisions and behaviour are governed by rational, conscious and transparent motives. This is especially true at work, where we put a lot of effort into setting clear goals, roles and responsibilities, and organising everything in a way that supports effectiveness. Unfortunately, such efforts are often less successful

than we expect. Every now and then, you may possibly notice that in the various groups and organisations you belong to even highly competent and diverse people appear to share a single and very limited perspective. More often than not, such phenomena are not results of a deliberate, planned action. They are products of unconscious processes that have to do with the emotional experiences arising from the work being undertaken including the various relationships and structures that affect individuals, groups, and organisations. Becoming aware of, and understanding them may be difficult, but is essential to mature, reflective leadership.

Who is the conference for

Management is about getting results through other people, it is, therefore, a relevant and important function for all members of organisations. Because of the particular demands of their roles, a knowledge of group processes may be even more significant for those in positions of authority. This includes:

- leaders and managers
- HR specialists and business partners
- organisational consultants
- trainers, coaches & facilitators
- members of associations and networks striving for shared or distributed leadership

What you can learn

A group relations conference is a way of learning about conscious and unconscious group processes, and the way that emotions and anxiety can be significant in affecting group processes. Exploring how what happens at the level of the whole system both influences, and is influenced by, the behaviour of both subgroups and individuals. During the workshop, the participants develop an experiential way of learning what happens in a group. Instead of receiving a predefined set of conclusions or concepts, they learn: - how to explore the group as a whole is acting in relation to its tasks and structure; - to form hypotheses that explain the conscious and unconscious dynamics of its behaviour; - to recognise the influence of the whole group on their own actions and experiences; - to act with awareness of the group processes and to influence the group in a meaningful way.

The ultimate goal of the conference is for the participants to become more effective in their work roles, through the ability to be aware of, understand, and influence the group processes shaping their environment. Being aware of unconscious processes and the effect of emotions enables us to become actors rather than puppets; allowing us to truly make a difference.

How will you learn

Learning from experience. The conference is not based on conventional instruction, lecturing or guided exercise. To learn about group processes you need to be a member of a group and to learn from your experience of being a member of a group. This way of learning is challenging – as no right answers are served to you by the staff – and yet is very powerful, because it is personal.

The Task of the Conference: The task of learning in the Conference is as follows: 'To explore the behaviour of the group, as a group, as it happens' To break that down, the task is: - to explore (observe and understand) the behaviour of the group of which you are a member; - to explore the behaviour of your group, 'as a group' - that is, not as individuals, but 'the group as a whole'; - to explore 'as the behaviour happens' - "here and now", by asking what is the group doing right now and why. To explore the behaviour of the group, as a group, as it happens requires that in viewing the behaviour of individuals, pairs or sub-groups we ask the question 'what meaning does this have for the group'. Or put another way, to see the behaviour of individuals, pairs and sub-groups as having meaning for the group as a whole. This includes your own behaviour.

Conference Design

All members of the conference perform the main task, working in various small, large and inter-group events. Each of these events provides learning opportunities, applicable to "real-life" groups and the organisation to which members belong. The conference design strips away all the usual props available to groups in organisations, such as a formal leader, a hierarchical structure, and a "practical task". Members, therefore, have to develop their own structures for working at the task of learning. How they develop such as structure is in itself a point of interest in the conference. Papers provided after each Day will add to the experiential

learning with theoretical explanations to aid understanding.

Role of the Consultants

The process we adopt is not teaching in the traditional sense. In other words, don't expect the consultants to be doing all the usual things that a teacher or trainer normally does. The role of staff is to provide the structure for learning and to provide observations or hypotheses about what they feel is happening at any given moment that may assist you in your learning. Everything the consultants do will be for the benefit of the learning of the members.

What participants say about the Conference

'What impressed me most was the impact of experiential learning. In concept/theory as in practice. And everything that happened at the conference happens in everyday life. I was aware of that but the total absence of content made it possible for me to experience that process to the maximum and to reflect on it. My own role as well as the groups' role. The second thing that impressed me was the effect of projecting and of taking back your own projections. And by doing so, taking responsibility for not just your own feelings, anxiety, fears etc. but also for the effect that these feelings have on the functioning of the group and the task at hand. It's fascinating!'

Saniye Özer Director of The Presence Company The Netherlands

'The most important lesson is the experience what happens in group dynamics. For sure this is no lesson to get out of a book or by listening to a teacher. This experience showed me what my role in groups is, what the dynamic of the group itself is and how these two influence one another. I learned to observe those dynamics and challenge myself to play with them on behalf of the goal of the group. I expect that this experience makes me more capable of influencing group dynamics to get the best results. It was a meaningful experience that will have more and more impact when I'm going to apply this to my work.'

Dagmar Ambachtsheer Team manager, MEE Drechtsteden The Netherlands

'During the workshop I realised how often my actions are strictly connected with my role in the structure of my organisation. I am now more aware of which decisions are really mine and which I am taking even if no one openly is asking about them. It will help me to make priorities more carefully and not to take too much work on myself. I decided to ask myself what for am I taking action, what will be the result of actions I will take, how to take more consciously my responsibility and how to give back responsibility to their owners.'

**Ewa Skrudlik Development Coordinator in ACADEMY OF the FUTURE Program,
Stowarzyszenie Wiosna Cracow, Poland**

'I work with groups on a daily basis, so when I was told that Group Relations gives a unique experience and knowledge about group dynamics processes, I assumed that it was worth attending. I also knew that the form of the workshop is quite unusual and surprising. And so it was. Group Relations enabled me to observe the processes which happen in small and large groups. I got to understand the roles I take as a group member, trainer, lecturer. It was a fantastic experience, even though a difficult one. It demanded much effort, but made me see the dynamics and processes which happen beneath the surface. I have a feeling that thanks to taking part, I work with groups more consciously, which is why I can assist their development even better than before and make the group work more effective.'

Beata Jałocha Lecturer, The Jagiellonian University Cracow, Poland

The Conference Events

Day 1 & Day 2

Small Study Group (SSG)

The task of the Small Study Group (SSG) is to provide opportunities to learn about interpersonal relationships in small face-to-face groups. The primary task is to study the behaviour of the group, as a group, as it happens.

Day 2 & Day 4

Large Study Group (LSG)

The task of the Large Study Group (LSG) is also to provide opportunities to learn about interpersonal relations as they happen, but in a setting in which the number of members is larger than can form a face to face group. Again the task is to study the behaviour of the group, as a group as it happens. However, in this group, the individual may not only face the other individuals they may also face major subgroups, in the form of study groups or spontaneously created subgroups. Members may seek anonymity in a subgroup or as a member of the whole.

Day 3

Inter-Group Event

The task of the Inter-Group event (IG) is to study relationships between groups as they develop and to exercise the task of giving and taking authority.

All Days

Review and Application Group (RAG)

The task of the Review and Application Groups is to consider the relevance of conference learning to normal work situations.

Plenary Discussion

The Plenary Discussions are an opportunity to make further sense of the experience in discussion with the consultants where necessary referring to theoretical concepts to assist the learning process.

Readings

A selection of papers, relevant to the day's task, will be provided to the members to take away and read at their leisure to provide an opportunity to make further sense of the experience.