

WHAT CAN STUDENTS/EXPERTS WITH TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCIES LEARN FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAININGS

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Abstract

In this paper we discuss the advantages of the training method consisting in exploiting the group dynamical possibilities of the work performed in small groups. The humans learning capacity is considerably increased when they are not only passive recipients of facts communicated to them but have also possibilities to acquire knowledge through exercises. Such knowledge in training situations concerns the person itself and other persons.

We discuss that the purpose of training may only assist the self-development of the mature, healthy personality. This only could be attained by complex series of educational activities developed in a system. At the time of the planning the stages of the career are to be taken into consideration together with fact on what level we intend to exercise influence. The principal methods are outlined in this paper.

Keywords: psychological training, group dynamic, self-recognition, experimental learning, structured exercises, motivation, communication, problem solving, co-operation, developmental methods.

The expression 'training group' comes from the term 'Basic Skill Training Group'. The elaboration and application of the method can originally be connected to the name of Kurt Lewin. Its essence consists in the fact that in group situations the personality can be formed considerably easier, capabilities and skills more successfully developed by making use of the methods of group dynamics.

Advantages of the training method consist in exploiting the group dynamic possibilities of work performed in small groups. Human learning capacity is considerably increased when people are not only passive recipients of facts communicated to them but also have opportunities to acquire knowledge by practice. Such knowledge in training situations concerns the person himself and other persons. During the dynamic events of the work in group new knowledge is also mastered in connection with experiences that lead to behavioural modifications through extension of the mind. It can be established as a rule that group dynamic methods can not be discarded if the intention is to bring about a change or modification of behaviour in addition to communicating knowledge. Spontaneous or organised learning in group dynamic circumstances (the training is one of the latter's variants) can develop the behavioural repertoire of people manifested in interpersonal situations.

People are not properly prepared to resolve the large number of problems emerging in human relations either by qualifications or by merely receiving knowledge. Closed communities controlled by traditions were able to grant spontaneous preparation; however, in present circumstances systematic psychological assistance is also indispensable for this purpose.

a) **Self-recognition**

The self-recognition, a better understanding of ourselves is a fundamental requisite of social skills, of relations with others and of behavioural changes. The dynamic atmosphere of a group is a primary source for acquiring self-knowledge.

Through more realistic self-recognition, the perception of reality becomes more suitable. The former self-image changes ; this frequently occurs when passing through a psychological crisis. The loss of former identity may be experienced like an identity crisis (term used by E. H. Erikson). This occurrence is in several aspects similar to the catharsis described by Aristotle. Consequently, group effects may serve as motors of both acquiring self-knowledge and change of behaviour. That is, in a group we may know more of ourselves and we can more easily change under the influence of the group.

b) **The Framework of Experimental Learning**

In developing social skills, structured exercises constitute the backbone of the educational process. Such exercises simulate the reality in psychological aspects, that is, they substitute factual experience in a life-like manner. The exercises themselves have to provide some new knowledge; however, this is systematically completed by analyses, generalisations and conclusions to be drawn. Experience of psychological events in the group may be added to this in two different ways. Through the improvement of intimacy and personal contacts we are drawn into the group process and we express our impressions. At the same time we face and confront the impressions and feedback of other persons and we change our feelings in this respect. This process is able to activate learning procedures.

The desired direction of group events can be promoted in different ways. Instructions given at the start of group work, their consistent observance and the proper methods of leading the group play a particularly important part.

The group may contribute to achieve the purposes in the following ways:

If the usual screening is decreased, everybody can freely explain his/her impressions and feelings, free of any interests and everyday life risks. We do not evaluate each other's remarks, we do not judge anything as 'good' or 'bad'. We all are striving to pay attention to each other, to listen and to understand and we approach each other with trust. We offer our experiences but we do not impose them to anyone, we may make suggestions but they may also be rejected. There is no traditional timetable, we do not rush to elaborate the material but we are striving for thoroughly processing problems and group events, for which it is indispensable to establish a proper atmosphere. We are mainly interested in human problems emerging 'here and now', because

they offer a possibility for reasonable and improved learning. We do not 'suppress' anybody, we rather reinforce him/her in giving him/herself. We give feedback to each other without applying or evaluating judgements, we just communicate our perceptions of 'here and now'. We encourage the group to establish the tasks for itself to improve and learn. We do not try to change anyone but we strive to create an atmosphere and a procedure to assist those intending to change.

We also refer here to other aspects of the procedure: from application of video-techniques, the ethical aspects of such application, to the seating order and seating mode, which latter may facilitate the establishment of personal contacts, creating an atmosphere of attentive listening and avoiding that anybody remains passive.

c) **Leading a Training Group**

The group is led in an indirect way, usually in the form of dual leading. Group leaders do not act as traditional teachers but by decreasing their direct leading activity they try to influence group processes as participants. They always keep in mind that knowledge and experiences recognised and formulated by the participants themselves are much more endurable than those received ready 'from outside'. This is important because it does not reinforce the traditional model according to which this topic, also, has its own experts who would explain the how and the why of things and their functioning, but on the contrary, participants feel themselves able to find out about such relationships and explanations. Therefore even after having finished the training they would be able to make use of the trained behaviours and skills by themselves. So group leaders do not lead in direct way, they do not deliver lectures but try to create situations favourable for the development of independent interaction. The atmosphere developed during the learning also has an important impact on group events.

The form of learning is also different from the traditional learning process. The participants sit in a circle in a room without tables. If necessary, the arrangement of the room (chairs and tables) can easily be changed. A cam-corder is also available for the work. It plays an important role in feedback and the related analysis.

After practices of social skill development it is important to elaborate some experiences and to awake group members to the consciousness of their feeling and knowledge. Connecting knowledge and experience can give for them the 'true' understanding of situation and their personality.

Creating learning atmosphere and environment, managing feeling and knowledge, leading the group indirectly require a high level of experimental learning and skills of group dynamics of training leader.

d) **The Group Process**

A particular group development process is manifested in all group events. In terms of social psychology, all those group experiences during work can be considered long and difficult, sometimes painful, at the same time not less exciting, interesting and edifying psychological adventure. This process has

several more or less discernible phases. There are considerable differences regarding the number and the content of such phases differentiated by different authors. Taking also into consideration our own experiences, we can usually observe the following phases:

- (1) Initial uncertainty and resistance. In our culture people have only little experience in group events occurring in an atmosphere of informality, intimacy, spontaneity and mutual understanding. When related instructions are given at the first group meeting, people even hardly believe that it would happen and they can't regulate the processes of training. They expect direct leading from the training leader.
- (2) Increase of personal contacts, 'melting', and conflicts. The members of the group are gradually involved emotionally in group processes; this may have different qualitative signs. The formation of groups of two, the 'creation of pairs' (term used by W. R. Bion) can be observed, in which warmth, support and intimacy are present to some extent. Another type of behaviour is 'flight' (W. R. Bion): it is characterised by evading the problems and abstaining from reception. Opposing and adversary behaviour is increased or is attached to some conflict. The initial embarrassment and uncertainty are already less perceptible, they are substituted by positive or negative emotions following the group events. The group is perceptibly struggling, trying to find its way, the group processes are in movement.
- (3) The establishment of the group cohesion. Group members are more and more involved in group processes (becoming active participants). Manifestations concerning the events and relationships of the 'here and now' are becoming prevalent, the atmosphere of informality, intimacy and trust are improving, differentiated role attitudes have already started to establish, allowing each individual to find the particular ways of their participation in the group's emotional events and task-oriented activities. This third stage of development is not necessarily a stable and permanent situation; frequent fallings back to lower development stages may also occur.

The attainment of the third stage is influenced by several circumstances. Based on experiences with 'laboratory groups' it can be supposed that groups meeting once or twice a week may arrive at this level at their sixth or seventh meeting, while groups staying for a week do so around the third day.

e) **Structured Exercises**

We have already mentioned that structured exercises constitute the backbone of the educational process. The majority of such exercises has been published in the series of 'A Handbook of Structured Experiences for Human Relations Training, Volumes II-V. (University Associates, Inc. La Jolla, California). The same Publishing House published several methodological publications intended for the leaders of training groups (e.g. 'The Annual Handbook for

Group Facilitators' in 7 volumes). In addition, the descriptions and list of 92 test-like procedures have been included in the volume entitled 'Instrumentation in Human Relations Training', which can also be used for learning during training. They include, for example, the EPI method of Eysenck, well-known in Hungary as well.

The exercises can be divided into several categories (blocks, modules). (Some of the exercises may be ranked in several categories.)

The following main categories are to be differentiated:

- motivation,
- communication,
- group process,
- problem solving, and
- co-operation.

Other categories may be formed on the basis of the topics of the exercises, while other exercises or processes constitute a relatively independent element of the training program in themselves. Selection and proportion of the different exercises and blocks may be planned and implemented in function of the composition of participants and of the main points of the purpose to be attained.

Methods and Procedures

The purpose of the training may only be to assist the self-development of a mature, healthy personality. This could only be attained by a complex series of educational activities developed into a system. At the time of planning, career stages are to be taken into consideration, together with the fact at which level we intend to exercise influence. The principal methods are outlined below.

1. Procedures Developing Self-recognition and Self-definition Capabilities

A) Life-style Analysis in Group

According to Adler, attitudes and styles of reaction to the world, to our companions and to ourselves are developed in the first 6 to 7 years of our life and they will have a strong influence on our later life-style, on our choices, processing of experiences and system of values. In our experience, such effects are prevailing not only in our private life but influence, to a considerable extent, disposition to the students, colleagues and leader as well, basically determining pedagogical attitudes or leading style.

B) Free Interaction – Small Groups

Interaction means the mutual relationship of mutually dependent individuals. In free interaction groups liberty is only reserved for verbal actions and one has to try to express any other urges of action in words. The group leader does not induce any direct leading besides giving instructions and feedback on the group's emotional dynamics, only assists the evolution of free topic selection and free associations. His/her endeavour is to attain that manifestations of the participants should be provoked by their own impulses, their actual problems, feelings and thoughts, and by the tensions generated then and there. Individuals listen attentively to each other, supporting the others and assisting them by making questions. The purpose of the group consists in teaching the members how to express and understand their own emotions, to recognise their own perceptive schemes and models of attitudes under the effect of multiple reflections, thus becoming able to change them from inside.

C) Personality Development – Psycho-dramatic Group

Personality development and the therapeutic application of this technique is associated with the name of Moreno (1890 – 1974) and has been adopted in Hungary by Ferenc Mérei. The basic tenet of psychodrama consists in the idea that human spontaneity and creativity manifest themselves embedded in activities. When in action, we are frequently carried away by passion and we behave, in a given situation, in the same way in the group as we should have behaved in life outside the group. In the roleplay situation – similar to a real situation – social difficulties, life-conduct problems giving rise to the individual's conflicts become representable. This method is extremely successful in improving self-recognition by making ourselves conscious about our behaviour and reactions in different situations. Our self-image may be compared with the multicoloured feedback of our companions.

D) Encounter Group

It gives rise to real human encounters with masks off, accelerated and intensified by so called encounter plays. Such plays able to improve relationships are not destined for their own end, they contribute to the consciousness of relationship models.

2. Procedures for Improving Pedagogic Competence

A) Value Revealing Strategies

The methodology of value revealing is based on the group technique. According to this approach, any scale of values could be imposed on others. Its objective

consists in assisting the individual in awaking his/her own process of appreciation and its application through established convictions and behavioural patterns. The approach is also aimed at furthering the establishment of agreement between the scale of values and pedagogical commitment of – for example technical – teachers confronting them with the contradictions within themselves. (The method has been elaborated in Hungary by Klára Szilágyi, 1991.)

B) Microteaching or Microleading with Video Recorder Feedback

The candidate delivers a lesson as he/she is used to do it. Some details of the teaching process will be recorded and then played back in front of the protagonist and other group members of the same profession. During the evaluation phase, in addition to considering the professional aspects and those of didactics, communication analysis techniques will also be applied, such as: what impression his/her appearance makes, what his/her bearing reflects, when his/her intonation changes, what emotions he/she could experience during the lesson, what emotions are reflected on the faces of the students, etc. Interpretation of metacommunication signals may show much more about the effect of the lesson and teacher–student relationship than strict professional evaluation. This method can be useful for engineers when they study group leading.

C) Communication and Empathy Development Training

Its objectives are the following:

1. To establish a *pattern of dispositions and attitudes* in the participants that may become extremely important means of improving not only general social relationships but efficient professional performance as well.
2. To develop partial skills based on personal experiences concerning the factual effects of *communication techniques*.
3. To increase, through feedback of members' metacommunication, the *congruence* of communication and the *degree of integration* of the personality functioning in the background.
4. To develop *self-definition capabilities*.

It is extremely important to improve responsiveness to other people, empathy and communication skills in professions where the *individual's own personality is the most important working tool* (teachers, doctors, psychologists, clergymen, leaders).

D) Dramatical Case Study and Problem Discussion Groups

Cases brought up by group members are discussed by the group and the situation most characteristic of the relationship is represented dramatically. Thus the source

of the problem and the concealed content of the relation become clearer and more manageable. During such roleplays, members are faced with their own conflict management practice and with its possible consequences.

The repetition of the pedagogic or leading situation allows familiarisation with problem solving techniques, making it possible to practise the corrective behaviour best suited to the participants and to the situation and to reform of mentality (attitude).

E) Improvement of Teaching Efficiency (Gordon, 1989)

Training courses of 30 hours focusing on the teacher–student or leader–subordinate relationship are organised by the Gordon School. A considerable part of their topics is intended to improve the communication skills indispensable for a teacher or a leader in order to become more efficient in establishing relationships. The training does not enter into getting to know the values and attitudes of the participating teachers but it teaches them ready-made methods (e.g. the structure of self-communication). Unfortunately it does not analyse either the game-like character or the concealed purposefulness of school events. Its spreading in our country could all the same be considered as beneficial because of the democratic relationship model of its approach.

F) Different Workshop Groups with Specific Topics and Methodologies

All training courses preparing for the implementation of some methods, approaches, or experimental topics may be ranked under this category, such as, for example, workshop groups representing democratic citizenship education and discussing related experiences; a number of training courses showing the educational possibilities concealed in popular culture; the series of courses transferring the mentality and methodology of the family assistance or of the co-operation with families and so on.

As you can see, there are a lot of training methods for students, for experts with technical competencies, for managers and for technical teachers to increase deeper their self-recognition and to develop their social skills.

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