T Group for a Work Team

This case history tells of the use of T-Group training to improve interpersonal competence in a small manufacturing company. The beneficial effects enabled the company to accomplish specific and general tasks, producing economic gain, which would not have seemed possible prior to the T Group. Specific examples of such accomplishments are given.

Certain findings are reported about the methods used in this T Group. These suggest that effective results in a T Group for a work team may be attained by (1) a prior level of trust in the boss, (2) presence of the boss in all T-Group sessions, (3) intensive and consecutive sessions followed by immediate application of learning on the job, (4) emphasis on improving individuals' interpersonal competence primarily for the sake of the business, (5) confrontation of each person as seen by others, and self-disclosure of personal feelings between people.

The case history is in two parts—the company background prior to the T Group, and the day-by-day account of the dramatic highlights of each session.

Introduction

This is the account of a successful training group session in a small manufacturing organization. It involved a vertical section of people from different departments: supervisors and their subordinates. And it included the boss, the general manager.

The company, Delta Design, Inc., affiliated with a West Coast electronics manufacturing firm, was offered an order for special equipment which for years had been furnished by a competitor. Dissatisfied with previous quality and delivery time, the customer asked Delta to deliver this difficult job in one-third the normal production time and offered a large bonus if the deadline were met. Key men at Delta eagerly accepted the challenge which just two months earlier would

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1 Although this paper is the collaborative effort of the two authors, the section on the company was written by Mr. Kuriloff, the section on the T Group by Mr. Atkins, and the introduction and conclusion by both together.

Volume 2  Number 1  1966
have been impossible to consider had it not been for their unusual training experience—a T Group for a work team.

The aim of the training session was to improve the abilities of the people to resolve interpersonal difficulties which were impeding the effective solution of many problems important to the conduct of the business.

To the trainers and the boss who participated, there were several elements, novel in their experience, which can be hypothesized as predisposing T-Group training in business toward a successful outcome:

1. A substantial level of trust built up in the participants before the T Group facilitates the training activity. The participants had learned to speak somewhat freely without fear of recrimination.

2. Presence of the boss during all sessions reduces the participants' concern about the possibility of the trainers' carrying tales to him.²

3. Training should be intensive, with meetings on consecutive days, but with part of each day spent at work.

4. Reinforcement of the new behavior patterns arising from the training is more effective when there is immediate application of the learning on the job.

5. Training in business should be primarily focused on improving interpersonal relations and communications for the sake of the business, not necessarily for the personal development of the individuals.

6. Interpersonal relationships and communication among the participants are improved on the job by reducing the mass and multiple ignorance about people's true feelings for one another.

7. Acceptance of company data transmitted between people depends in large part upon acceptance of each other as people, and upon how much each respects, trusts, and likes the other.³


Though Delta is one small company in one industry, results over the eight months following the training lead us to believe in the general usefulness of T Groups for work teams. Delta Design, Inc., is a small manufacturing firm which produces environmental testing chambers, a technical product involving mechanical and electronic engineering design. It is affiliated with a parent company ten times the size of Delta. The president of the parent company is also president and principal stockholder of Delta. I came to Delta from the parent company five months prior to the T-Group sessions.

Before my arrival Delta had been run by another executive from the parent company. Having primarily a financial background, he had to rely on Rod, the chief engineer; Hans, the production manager; and Earl, the purchasing manager, for decisions relating to the product line and its manufacture. A lack of trust and confidence existed among these three men for many reasons stemming from prior history of the company. The psychological warfare that grew out of the distrust between Rod and Hans tended to distort or destroy their objectivity about technical matters. Decisions reached by the former boss, based on the tangled information from Hans and Rod, sometimes led to improper actions by the company, but more often to stalling and delaying of decisions until the particular opportunity for creative action had disappeared.

Between Hans and Earl, tensions had gradually increased. Earl, an experienced production man, had developed the habit of carping at Hans about what he saw as ineffective and wasteful methods of running the shop. Earl took pains to point out apparent discrepancies in shop operations and incidents in which shop people had complained to him about Hans’s dictatorial actions and behavior.

Hans, in turn, blamed failures to meet schedules and production delays on Earl’s inability to cope with the purchasing problems. He blamed Earl for recurring critical shortages of items needed to finish the jobs, for not knowing how to schedule his buying, for antagonizing vendors, for being rough and crude with vendors’ salespeople so that they were indifferent to doing a good job of supplying Delta. When
Hans had used to do the buying, he claimed, the company did not have critical shortages; he got along well with the vendors, and they went out of their way to render special service to Delta.

In March I was asked by the parent company to take charge at Delta. As a mechanical engineer with extensive practical experience, I had more than once been in charge of engineering and production operations and had suffered the pains of similar organizational problems during my career. At the parent company I had been responsible for management training and development. During the year prior to my move to Delta, I had run a management training session once a week for their key people. Thus, when I took over, I was known to the men casually, if not intimately.

Recognizing that Delta employees would be fearful of the new order, at first I made no drastic changes. I instituted meetings attended by Rod, Hans, Jim, manager of standard engineering, Earl, and Bob, a new man, in charge of sales coordination between field and factory. Meetings were unstructured, but at first essentially problem-centered. Each man was encouraged to talk about problems relating to the business as he saw them. Tentative solutions were considered. I encouraged more openness and adopted the procedure of halting the discussion of a particular problem to encourage the men to consider the discussion and interaction process itself. By my words and responsive attitude, I tried to communicate the idea that feelings could be talked about openly, with safety—that it was important for the success of the business operation to consider feelings, their underlying causes, and to resolve conflicts so the group could get on to constructive solutions of the problems plaguing the business.

Though there was noticeable improvement in the ability of key men to deal with one another, I felt, after five months, that the time was ripe for a more intensive and powerful attempt to resolve the problems of interpersonal conflict. By a fortunate chance, through the parent company it was possible to schedule a T Group for key men and supervisors, with professionally skilled trainers.4

4 This was part of a seminar in T-Group methods for professionals, under joint sponsorship of the National Training Laboratories and the
When the time came to tell my people about the T Group, I approached each person individually. "We've got a chance to go through special training, paid for by the company. It'll be partly on company time, partly on your own. We'll go for five days straight, from three in the afternoon 'til ten at night, with an hour break for dinner. The objective is to help us learn how we appear in the eyes of others, so we can improve our ability to get along with one another and improve our business.

"Attendance is voluntary, and if you choose not to come, it won't be held against you.

"This is a chance for all of us to get a valuable education at no cost to us, except the time we take out of five evenings. I plan to attend myself."

Admittedly there was a kind of covert coercion in this approach. Yet I was sincere when I said that attendance was voluntary. I hoped my sincerity would show and be believed, and that the conditioning of five months of meetings with my key people would, in some measure, allow them to trust me.

My feeling that I had established trust seemed justified when all the key managers and supervisors showed up for the T Group. Helen, the office manager, who had heard about T Groups and was curious and eager for the experience, joined at her own request. She was the only woman in the group.

What follows, then, are significant excerpts from a day-by-day account of the T-Group experience. This experience ended the psychological warfare that had distorted and destroyed the objectivity and cooperation of the key men at Delta.

This account describes only the significant events that occurred in the T Group, and focuses only on the people who were directly involved in those events.

The account itself is highly selective, representing my observations and verified by the boss, Art, and Jack, my co-
trainer. Because it is a condensed account much of the repetition and random progress of the T Group is missing. Much of the build-up to the dramatic improvements in relationships between people is also missing, which makes these developments seem perhaps melodramatic or even sentimental. But my purpose is to report events which are still all too unconventional in a business setting but which nevertheless, as demonstrated by the Delta experience, we believe should be an accepted and standard method in operating a business.

A great deal of emotion and sentiment will be described in the account. What may make it seem odd to some is the strangeness of openly expressed emotion in a place of business. Its very absence, however, is a contributing cause to difficulties in communication.

Simply stated, communication between people on a job involves more than words, more than passing on technical and nontechnical information. Acceptance or rejection of company data transmitted between people often depends upon the acceptance or rejection of each other, as people, and upon how much the people respect, trust, and like each other. Acceptance or rejection of information also depends upon the degree to which people operate on untested opinions and assumptions about each other and how they use these inaccurate assessments to determine the urgency and importance, or accuracy, of what is communicated. Seldom, if ever, are these assumptions explicitly stated in words.

One of the revelations of the T-Group experience is the mass and multiple ignorance about each other that exists between people who work side by side, day in and day out. One of the things people do not know is that they all want to know the same things—how to get through to one another more effectively, how to be better liked, respected, appreciated, and understood—the very basis for the acceptance or rejection of much communication! What people who work together have not known about one another fills the hours of a T Group. This personal ignorance, in spite of

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6 Bradford, Gibb, & Benne (Eds.), op. cit. Ch. 10.
physical proximity, is one of the paradoxes of business life and one of the costliest factors in operating a business. This lack of knowledge causes confusion, duplication, conflict, apathy, and avoidance of responsibility.

On the other hand, when people come to disclose their personal feelings, voice their assumptions—when they make themselves more fully known as persons, no matter how embarrassing it may be at first—they provide many new possibilities for being understood, liked, respected, and trusted. In short, they are more approachable and understandable, are seen to be more the kinds of persons with whom one would like to communicate, the kinds of persons to be trusted with one's technical and nontechnical information.

When people feel this way about each other, the information that passes between them is more accurate, complete, and frequent. Business decisions are far more likely to be made on the basis of fact instead of emotion! Strangely enough, to get more facts flowing in a company, people's emotions must be given full reign, as in the special framework of a T Group. The highly personal account of the Delta T Group, which follows, is one attempt to demonstrate the advantages of encouraging more open emotional expression in business.

Members of the T Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Art</th>
<th>Vice-President and General Manager</th>
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<tr>
<td>Hans</td>
<td>Production Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jules</td>
<td>Supervisor of special assembly group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ross</td>
<td>Supervisor of special assembly group</td>
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<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>Supervisor of standard assembly group</td>
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<td>Chuck</td>
<td>Supervisor of door assembly group</td>
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<td>Chester</td>
<td>Supervisor of tray group</td>
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<td>Earl</td>
<td>Purchasing Manager</td>
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**Members of the T Group (Cont.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rod</td>
<td>Manager of Custom Engineering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Manager of Standard Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ted</td>
<td>Engineer, working for Jim</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Manager of Distribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
<td>Office Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stu</td>
<td>Trainer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Trainer</td>
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**Day 1—The Warm-Up**

It was 3:00 p.m. The circle was formed. Fifteen assorted chairs had been pulled from various offices of the company. The room was cool and quiet, and the irregular shapes of the assorted chairs were a striking physical reminder to me of the psychological differences that would soon be expressed here.

Fifteen brave people would be confronting one another in this circle, finding it very difficult to hide, even behind silence or bright, facile talk. The wide space in the center of the circle would be the dumping ground for people's misconceptions, for untested assumptions about one another that caused confusion, for unstated resentments that had slowed down working effectiveness, making people avoid one another when they should have been working together.

All these personal feelings would be the facts of our group. This would be our agenda: that feelings are facts, the facts of business life that can hinder or help the enterprise.

People who were lingering in the hall began leisurely to drift into the circle. There was chatter and laughter about things on the job, topics of personal interest—anything but the fact that they were in a strange and frightening situation. We trainers said nothing, but we felt the excitement and apprehension involved in facing the same unknown, establishing many new relationships, and becoming a member of the group with all its risks and rewards.

Finally Art called the meeting to order. A hush descended. The whirring of the air conditioning was the only audible sound. It was an empty and rattling silence. With the silence pressure built up on the inside. Someone finally asked, "What are we supposed to do?"

Jack, the co-trainer, a tall, slow-speaking, mild-mannered
man of few words, explained that the purpose of our getting together was to explore our feelings and relationships. Projecting a quiet strength, he said, "It's important to express feelings about one another, including us trainers. No holds are barred." He added, "However, everyone should also feel free not to respond if it becomes too difficult or too uncomfortable. Openness is valued, but so is the right of privacy."

Then slowly it began. People talked about petty irritations such as not being able to get parts, exasperating delays in schedules, not being able to complete necessary paperwork, and what had happened in the companies for which they had previously worked. No one began to explore the existing relationships within the present group. Even though most of the comments were directed to Earl, the purchasing manager, emphasis was on procedures, not personal feelings. It was dull. Then it happened.

Jim, the young project engineer, who was formerly second-in-command under Rod, voiced his concern about his relationship with him. With an eager, expectant look, he turned to Rod and asked, "What's happened to us? Lately we can't seem to get anywhere on design problems."

"Strange," Rod replied, in his cool, composed way, "I've noticed it, too."

They began talking as if they were just getting to know each other. Groping to pin down this uneasiness in their relationship, they discovered the turning point. It was the time of acquisition of the company, when Jim was given a design group of his own, and Rod was made manager of custom engineering instead of chief engineer over all engineering operations—and Jim.

Jack asked Rod, "How did you feel about your loss of status?"

Smiling, Rod replied, "Of course I didn't like it." He went on in a matter-of-fact tone. "You know, the usual things happened. I sent out some résumés. But things seemed to straighten out here after a while, and good jobs weren't easy to find." Rod went on to relate that it appeared to him that now that Jim had a design group of his own, he had done a turnabout in his philosophy of working and solving
engineering problems. In fact, Rod said that Jim seemed
downright dishonest, that he had agreed with Rod's philos-
opgies formerly only because Rod was the boss at the time.

Jim was puzzled and disclaimed the accusation of dishon-
esty. Talking across the circle, Rod and Jim became deeply
enmeshed in trying to clarify this misunderstanding. Occa-
sionally their intense exchange was interrupted by questions
and opinions from other people who were acting as psycho-
logical negotiators to help them come to terms with their
relationship.

At the most heated points in their exchange, Rod smiled
continuously. Jack finally commented to Rod, "I've noticed
you always smile when you're expressing resentment. It's
difficult to tell that you're really bothered. This can confuse
people. I know. I do the same thing."

At first Rod denied being resentful. Then he said he was
unaware of his smiling. The group could not understand why
Rod would not be resentful under the circumstances and
made this very clear to him. Finally, Rod admitted his resent-
ment. But he smiled. The group pointed this out, too. Rod
found it difficult not to accept the consistent and concerted
opinions of thirteen other people.

"If you had only let me know how you felt," Jim im-
plored, "we could have straightened this out long ago."

"Well, I got the message that you didn't much care what
I thought," Rod countered. "When you invited the engineer-
ing people to your house for that barbecue, you didn't invite
me. I assumed you wanted the opportunity to solidify your
position with your new people."

"Wait a minute!" Jim protested. "I swear that wasn't an
intentional slight. Someone told me you were going on a
trip and leaving that Sunday afternoon. And as for being
dishonest with you about what I told you when I worked
for you—well, I did mean what I said. But I never had a
design group before, and we've never had a design problem
like we've had on the new line. I had to change my point
of view on some things."

I used this experience to point out the curious way un-
tested assumptions can lead us so far from the reality of a
situation and from contact and closeness with people. I stated, too, that Rod's failure to express his resentment had only made it swell inside—so much so that he had to attribute the same feelings to Jim and interpreted many things along these lines.

The first session ended, and during the coffee break Rod and Jim stood in the hall, drinking coffee and talking busily. Excited, Rod said, "I'm sure glad we could clear the air! I feel a lot better now that I got it out in the open. I think I can sit down and work with you now. My feelings won't be standing between us." Rod extended his hand. He did not smile.

For the rest of the afternoon there was more talk about company procedural problems, duplication of effort, and problems of coordination. People were still warming up.

In the evening, after the supper break, Bob, the sales coordinator between the field and the factory, began reminiscing about the company for which he had worked previously. He spoke about the ten-year close relationship he had had with an engineer and how well he had complemented the engineer's genius with his own ability to get things done. Unaware, he seemed to be lamenting the loss of his friend and the great feeling of accomplishment he had gotten from working with him.

Bob, with his crisp, musical New England accent, turned to Jim and said wistfully, "How lucky you are, lad, to have your youth and to have the clean, bright spark of a good engineer." There was a note of sadness in Bob's affection for Jim. His head hanging, Bob looked like an old man. He sounded as if his career were ended. Mournfully, he talked about lost opportunities to study engineering. Peering over his round-rim glasses, his thin face drawn tight, he confessed to Jim, "If I could do it over, I would want to be like you. You're a fine young man."

Deeply moved, Jim said, "I never knew you felt that way about me. I appreciate it. Thank you."

Then people in the group began to tell Bob how they had sensed a change in him over the past months, the loss of spriteliness, vigor, and the growing sourness when he ap-
proached them with his coordinating activities. They described his abruptness and curtness. They expressed the feeling of being like little children with an impatient father. But the group left it there, as if they were not prepared to press it further, after seeing Bob's sadness.

Something triggered a reaction in George, assistant production manager. He began to describe his feelings about his boss, Hans. "To be honest with you," he said, "I get impatient with Hans." He frowned disdainfully. "I'm bothered by his being so careful and meticulous about the way he wants things done." George described his differences in approach from Hans's, his own desire for action and quick resolution to problems. The group felt that it was unfortunate that Hans, along with several other people, was unable to attend this evening session because of prior commitments. In fact, George felt very uncomfortable talking about Hans in his absence.

In any case, George went on to reveal how generally outspoken and direct he was and how difficult it was for him in the Army, where his outspokenness had gotten him into trouble. The group pointed out to George that he was a forceful person, a rebel who demanded action.

"Yes, I know," he agreed. "I'm not the type Hans usually hires. I'm sure he doesn't approve of my methods of doing a job. Then, again, Hans doesn't approve of the methods of most people in the shop."

There was agreement on this point from the members of the group, and there was a mounting resentment expressed against Hans—how he fired people, how he had insisted on impossible standards of performance, how he acted in a Gestapo-like manner in reporting back to the former company president the mistakes or failures of people in the various departments, and how he had done all of this to foster his own success.

There was agreement and surprise expressed by people in the group that he was not fired when the new management had taken over. They were surprised, too, that he had not left the organization when he was demoted from assistant to the president to production manager.
In any case, Hans was the cause of their production problems and of their difficulties of coordinating between production and engineering.

Jack asked, "Who here thinks Hans should be fired?" Several people in the group, including George, took a stand and said that they thought he should be fired.

They looked to Art. There was silence while he took a long, thoughtful puff from his cigar. Then in his careful, well-phrased language he said, "I didn't fire Hans because of his technical competence and vast knowledge of the company. Furthermore, I sense in Hans an ability to change from his authoritarian ways of managing. I have been working with him to help him improve his approach and his effectiveness in working with other people."

The group was skeptical about changing Hans. His general reputation, even among people in other companies in the community, was that of a Nazi-like, unfeeling, relentless man who would hurt people to advance his own interests.

It was agreed that tomorrow these things should be discussed with Hans, in person. With this, the evening session of the first day ended.

Hans did not return to the afternoon session the next day. People reported that he had not been at work in the morning either. Someone said he called in and said he had the flu. The group laughed, knowing Hans's cleverness and knowing he would have anticipated a confrontation and exposure of his past "crimes." His absence was not surprising. They went on without him.

But nothing seemed to happen. There was a lethargy throughout the discussion. The group explored people's impact on one another, talked about leadership, how groups work, the lack of coordination and cooperation between departments, the general communications problems that exist among people, and how it prevents getting the work out. It was difficult to resolve any of these issues. They eventually localized and focused on Hans, on whom everyone felt lay the greatest responsibility for inefficiency and lack of communication.

Jack presented the problem of Hans's absence and how it
seemed to be holding back the group’s progress. The problem was posed: how to get Hans back, when in all probability he was perceiving the group as a tribunal or even an inquisition.

Jack asked, “Who will contact Hans to find out about his illness? Does he have a friend in the company who could go to him?”

No, he did not. The only friend he had had was let go two weeks earlier because of changing technical requirements with which his skills were no longer compatible.

The plea was sent out in the group for the person to whom Hans probably felt the closest. Chuck, the head of door assembly, said, in his quiet, self-effacing way, “Hans probably trusts me. He gave me the keys to the shop.”

The group agreed that Chuck should either call Hans or, preferably, drop by his house. He was to tell Hans that the group needed him and could not proceed without him.

When the group adjourned for the evening, Chuck, clad in khaki work clothes, approached the trainers. He was over 6 feet tall, with a round, boyish face, and an overpolite manner. He seemed excited, bewildered. “What should I do? I’ve never done anything like this before.” Not only did he appear anxious about his responsibility but he seemed exhilarated about now being the most important person in the group. It seemed everything hinged on Chuck’s success in bringing back Hans.

The only advice he received from us was, “When in doubt about what to do, follow your feelings.”

Hans was there. He looked pale. No one was paying attention to him as he sat in the circle. Talk about procedures continued. He was being ignored. An hour passed, with the group’s seeming to evade the important issue—Hans. When the discussion on procedures wore thin, there was silence.

Then the youthful office manager, Helen, leaned her attractive red head forward and gaily announced, “I have a communications problem! Maybe we can straighten it out.” She related how difficult it was for her to get through to a certain person whom she kept nameless. “What do you do when you try to please someone and nothing seems to work?” Her voice began to tremble. Though she continued
to describe her situation in general terms, it appeared as if the group knew to whom she was referring. The tension in her voice increased. She was anxious.

Jack commented, "It seems you're talking about someone in this room." There was silence.

The group knew, but they waited for Helen. "All right!" she blurted out, with forced courage. "You probably all know anyway. It's Bob." Again there was silence. "Bob, I don't know what to do to please you," her voice pleaded. "You make me feel everything I do is wrong."

Bob responded defensively at first, but with white-haired kindness tempering his criticism of her inefficiency with certain procedures. He gave reason after reason to support his case against Helen.

"That's not true!" Helen insisted. Heately, she raced through her counter arguments. They interrupted each other. There was anger in their voices.

"Look here, young lady!" Bob snapped. "You can't talk to me that way. Didn't anyone ever teach you to respect your elders? When you've had as much experience as I—when you've lived through what I have, when you've seen the things I have, then I'll listen to you!"

The group chided Bob for invoking his age and experience as a reason to shut Helen out.

"Bob, I give up," Helen said, painfully and with deep puzzlement. "What do you want from me?" she begged. Bob did not respond. Perhaps the group had shut him up. Perhaps he could not answer. He listened. Her voice shaking, Helen explained that they had gotten along well when they both started with the company a year ago, when she worked for him. What had happened?

With the former sadness in his voice, Bob finally replied, "Every time I get someone trained to help me, they're taken away."

Bob described the mounting paperwork, the pressure from the field for answers on technical applications and delivery dates. He evoked a picture of a man drowning in responsibility.

Noticing that Helen was fighting back tears, mixed with
her anger, I commented, "I have the feeling that you've been wanting to cry."

"I wish I could," she mumbled. "I'm afraid I'll look foolish."

"We won't laugh," I promised.
She began to weep. The group was quiet, apprehensive.
We waited.
She stopped.
Then softly, as she wiped her eyes, she said, "I feel much better. Thank you for being patient."

"See what you've done," Bob snapped accusingly at me.
"I suppose you'll blame me, laddie."

I asked Bob why he felt so responsible for everyone—Helen, the men in the field, production, engineering. Giving my further impression, I said to Bob that it appeared to me that he had a strong fear of failure and shouldered responsibility that was not rightfully his. "Why do you try to make everything perfect?" I asked.

"That's enough, laddie. I've said my piece," Bob concluded with finality. "No more. I have to leave for school in a few minutes and now I'm all upset."

I backed off.

There were a few disconnected comments from people, and then Bob left.

Silence closed in. People stared. Time was at a standstill. The silence was eerie to me—like a quiet town before a shattering earthquake breaks loose.

Jim's face grew more serious, then peevish-looking. "I feel there's a cloud over the group." Folding his hands across his chest, he added, "What's more, I don't think we're very honest."

"Well, I'll say what's on my mind," George said emphatically. Accepting Jim's challenge, George turned to his boss, Hans, and said, "I've never had the feeling you liked my work the six months I've been here. What do you think of my work, Hans?"

Hans twisted in his seat. People leaned into the circle to watch. Hans hesitated, then apologized, "I find it hard to speak because of the language. I think something in my head with one language and try to say it in English."
Art told Hans not to worry about the words, that he would help him out if he needed it. "Just say what you feel," Art encouraged him.

Hans's pink-skinned, porcelain-clean face seemed soft even though it appeared tired. It seemed an effort for him to speak. "I think, George, you work good. I know I should tell you before."

But, of course, what else could he say? It sounded sincere, but nevertheless I could sense the group's distrust—as if its feeling were: What do you really think?

Hans carefully phrased his thoughts. "George, I like when you get things done. I don't have to tell you too much."

Still the group seemed skeptical of his sincerity.

"On the other hand," he continued, "sometimes you run around, jump up and down to get what you want. You make some people upset by being always in a hurry. But I never say anything to you because you work good. And usually I do not hire people like you, but you do not seem like that when you came for the job. But I got used to you now."

George was rapt, listening to Hans. He looked puzzled and seemed to be suppressing his pleasure.

"You are different from me, George. I have been slow, careful to do things. You have to understand my methods. For many years I work with my father in his factory in Switzerland—I am Swiss, but people think I am German. Even when I was six years old, I help my father in the shop. I hand my father the tools. If I hand him the wrong wrench, he hits me with it. You become careful. You learn not to make a mistake."

I winced for Hans, as the image of the child being struck by his father with a wrench settled into my awareness.

"One time, I make a mistake. He had a lighted torch in his hand. He hits me with it in the chest." Hans looked down at his chest. "It burns my shirt. It burns my chest all over."

The group recoiled in shocked silence.

"I never take my eyes off the work. I watch everything," Hans said. "I dare not make a mistake."

More silence.

Jack leaned forward and spoke softly, "Hans, did you ever feel that you could please your father?"
“No,” Hans said. Then tears came to his eyes. He began to relive the awful feelings of his childhood. Soon he was crying openly. He sobbed.

I hoped that the little child inside all of us would understand. For me, his self-disclosure and his feeling had catapulted me into his world. It happened so fast. I thought how long he must have wanted, more than anything, to be known and understood.

Rod spoke. “Hans, do you think there’s any connection between what you’ve told us and the way you used to work for our former president?”

Hans nodded. “He was very strict, too. He always wanted to know everything, what’s going on. If I didn’t know, he was very upset. Many times I feel like I’m his tool.”

Silence.

It was time to end the session, but it was hard to break the mood. Finally people stood up. Few could leave, and they huddled quietly. Eventually they went out into the hall.

Jack whispered to me, “Let’s quit when we’re ahead.”

For a few minutes I walked through the halls alone, thinking about my own father. I wandered accidentally into the shop. There were Rod and Jim, George and Chuck, and several other supervisors who work under Hans. They were gathered around an assembly bench, stunned. In an almost reverent tone, Jim said, “I’ve never experienced anything like this in my life. I find it hard to believe.” The others agreed. “Did you know this would happen?” Jim asked.

“We hoped something would happen,” I answered, “but we couldn’t predict what. I’d like to take credit, but I can’t. A group of people can do more for one another by accepting one another’s feelings than any one individual—when they have it in mind. Our job is to help them want to.” I caught myself going into a lecture. I stopped. I didn’t want to spoil their feeling of solemnity. They needed to feel.

Chuck broke the silence. “Look at Hans’s office at the end of the shop, and that big glass window. He can see the whole shop through it. I used to see him looking out and I’d wonder what he was thinking. Now I know. Can you imagine, now I know!” His delight was painful. Then, with
utter disbelief, he added, "To think that I was working so close to him and I never knew how lonely he was."

We walked slowly out of the shop together, saying nothing. . . .

There was excitement in the group. People seemed intoxicated. They shared a big secret—a joke on the rest of the company.

Rod said, "Everybody in the shop is confused. They saw Hans and me working on a problem and laughing together!"

Others reported stories. People not in the group were wondering what was happening. They were describing a new zest and energy loose in the shop.

Chuck smiled with boyish pleasure and said, "I think at last we've got the brakes off."

Bob had missed out on yesterday's session with Hans, but he had been told. He seemed cold and disconnected from the warmth of the group. I tried to help him back in by reflecting this.

Giving warning, Bob said, "Don't try to pull your tricks on me again, laddie. I won't fall for it!"

If technique did not work, I had recently learned that there was nothing more powerful than being myself. "I feel as frustrated as Helen must feel with you, Bob. You just won't let people in."

Bob turned away. I tried again. "What does a person have to do, Bob? Get on his knees and plead? . . . I was thinking all morning at my hotel, wondering how I could get through to you. You remind me how hard it was to get through to my father. He never let me in—like you. It's hard to take."

Bob looked directly at me with a kindly stare, but he said nothing. The subject was dropped.

Art puffed on his cigar. From the corner of his eye he glanced at me, peering from behind his horn-rimmed glasses. It seemed Art was trying to figure something out. I could feel his presence, as if he were hinting for engagement. Jack seemed to sense this and responded. "Art, I've been meaning to ask you, what prompted your move to Delta from your parent company?"

Art thought for a moment, then said, "You see, in my
former position most everyone held the opinion of me that I was a theorist." He puffed on his cigar and spoke carefully, phrasing complete sentences. "When I conducted management classes, people would subscribe to the notion that what I was teaching was all right in theory, but unrealistic in practice. They posed an artificial dichotomy between the two. They simply were not aware that I had had substantial line management experience for years, with all the attendant problems that go with that sort of responsibility. At Delta I could put theory into practice again, and get some fun from seeing the results."

I reacted to Art. "In the three years I worked with you in your previous job, I must confess that I thought you were all talk, too." Art showed no emotion, continuing to puff leisurely on his cigar. "But seeing you in operation here, Art, I believe you’re one of the best managers I’ve seen."

Still Art sat immobile, silent like a large, life-size monument of a "good manager." He took another slow, heavy draw on his cigar.

Jack tried. "There’s something about your manner, Art. Something that makes what you say sound unbelievable though true."

The group leaned in.

"Your big words and careful phrasing," I observed, "make me feel as though you’ve wrung all the life out of them. Just the words remain. I’ve noticed that the more strongly you believe in something, the more abstractly you phrase it and the more unreal it sounds to me."

Art had been listening attentively. He puffed on his cigar once more. He said nothing. If anything was happening to him, it was on the inside. He was acting as an interested observer, studying how he could be more helpful to his people.

Helen said, "Sometimes I don’t know what you’re saying. I feel I should walk into your office with a dictionary under my arm and stop you to look up what I don’t understand." Art smiled.

"Yeah," someone chimed in. "We all should walk around with dictionaries under our arms to remind you to go easy on us."
Art smiled benevolently and said, "Words should be shaped and used like a fine tool to give exactly the meaning one wants."

Jack and I were visibly frustrated with Art. We welcomed the coffee break.

In the hall, with cups of hot coffee in hand, Art, Jack, and I sifted through the people until somehow we were standing together in a doorway. We smiled at one another warmly. We just stood there. I felt anxious; maybe we had offended Art. Art spoke first. "I've been wanting to tell you guys something. You're the best trainers I've ever worked with. And I've been in four other T Groups with the best of them."

Jack and I were immensely pleased, but we tried not to appear too delighted. We wanted to be reserved and professional. "Thank you," I said. "That means a lot to us." Art's praise was needed confirmation of our competence.

Jack and I slipped away down the hall and began discussing Art. Perhaps he had sensed our need for confirmation. Did it show that much, or was Art really that perceptive? Perhaps he was reciprocating for the praise he had received about his management skills. Perhaps it was because his beliefs were being proved in the T Group—especially about Hans. Then something else struck us: perhaps we were exceptional, or at least very good!

Maybe a lot was going on behind Art's outward immobility, but exactly what could only be inferred. It was uncomfortable being so unknowledgeable about so knowledgeable a person.

Art, we agreed, was not one to let himself be known. It was possible that he would never open his world more to the outside. But, we concluded, maybe he should arrive at this decision with more understanding of the puzzlement he posed for people. Like all of us, he would have to make the choice between the loneliness of concealment and the vulnerability of exposing more of his self.

The break ended and the group returned to the circle. I appealed to the group. "Frankly, I'm frustrated with Art. Are there any suggestions on how to get him to come out more, to be more responsive with us, to let us in a little?"
Bob looked across the circle at Art, studying him for a moment and then he spoke, with lyric rhythm in his New England lilt. "I think I understand Art. What it is about him, I'm not sure. I think... I think he must be very much like me, in some ways."

Bob closed his eyes. He was concentrating, as if he were going into a trance to divine some feelings deep in his soul. "I have known this man, at times... The time he told me about violins—the labor, the patience, the craftsmanship to make them. He makes them, you know. He loves that—to hear the beautiful sounds made by the strength and power of his hands. For a moment then—only for a brief moment—I felt this man. He opened the door—just a crack—and I saw inside." Bob paused. "And I saw myself inside. I saw... a loneliness."

The room was still. "It's like being out on my boat, alone, surrounded by the sea. I go out at night when it is pitch black, with only the moon on the water to light the way."

Bob opened his eyes. He looked around. "Forgive me. I didn't mean to go on like this. I'm sure nobody wants to listen to this nonsense." But the group was drawn to him. They wanted to know more about his boat, what it was like to be alone at sea.

"I have a fine, sturdy craft," he said proudly. "It's sixteen foot, fully equipped, and I know what to expect of her. I take her out sixty-five miles—that's our limit."

Some people in the group shuddered. It was a big risk in a small boat.

"Don't think that I'm an old fool for taking her out so far," Bob said. "Some crackpot. I know what she'll do. I've tested her, first 10 miles, then 25 miles, then 35... 45... 55... then 65. No more, no less. Exactly 65 miles—our point of no return. Once I took my wife out. It was quiet and dark. She was frightened. I said, 'Don't worry, honey, I know what I'm doing. I've figured everything out to the last detail. I'm master out here.' She calmed down, but I never took her out again. I go alone. I've never taken anyone else on my boat but her, that one time—and I never will."
Some people were sitting on the floor by their chairs, listening to his loneliness and courage, like children gathered at a storyteller’s feet, urging him to go on.

"Don’t think I wasn’t frightened when I first went out. It’s dark and quiet, and the only sound is the water splashing against the side of the boat. A clean, cool spray hits my face. All around me darkness. Nothing. . . At first the sea is rough, but then—far out—the sea is calm. I’m not frightened anymore. 25 miles—I’m following the stars. 35 miles—the moon glistens on the water. 45 miles—a fish jumps out of the sea—I’m startled! . . . It’s quiet again. 55 miles—I can feel the excitement in me. I’m almost there—65 miles. I made it. I stand up in the boat and stare into the darkness, then up to the sky. Something surges over me. I throw my arms open wide and scream into the darkness. . . . I wait. . . . listen. . . . Nobody hears me."

People were crying for the lonely old man. There was the look of peace on Bob’s face and slowly, somehow, the loneliness was leaving. He looked young, strong.

Softly, I said, "Do you realize you’ve taken us with you? You’ve given us the privilege of being the first on your boat."

People said, "Thank you, Bob." "You’re a poet." "You’ve got great courage." "I could listen to you all night." "I’ve never known what a wonderful person you are."

Jim asked, "How old are you, Bob?"

"Forty-nine," Bob replied.

Jim exclaimed, "Is that all! You’ve been acting like you’re an old man—like your life’s over, like your career with the company was finished. You’ve even looked old."

Jack said, "You’re a young, powerful person, Bob. Look at yourself."

Bob’s smile was young. He seemed to be overwhelmed with the adulation of the group—with the love that came by letting people in. . . .

Jack and I were late, but the group had been waiting quietly in the circle. On the floor, in the center, was a 12-inch-tall polystyrene object, shaped like a large mushroom. The group watched the trainers curiously. No one said why the object
was there or what it was. They laughed and enjoyed their prank.

Jack and I looked at each other. We knew how difficult last days were. We felt the same desire to be distracted from the sadness of saying goodbye.

Finally Hans pulled the object from the center of the circle. Jim confessed he had put it there.

Bob turned more serious and said, "I'd like to tell you how good I feel. It's like..."

Jim interrupted, "You must! I heard you on the 'phone this morning. You were really firing up those field people to sell."

"That's nothing," Helen laughed. "The door between Bob's office and mine is open for the first time in six months. We actually talked together!"

The group laughed.

"What will I tell my wife when she gets back from vacation?" Bob asked. "She'll never believe what's happened here."

"Bob, I have a suggestion for you," Rod said. "The second night, I could see my wife's reaction. With all my enthusiasm, she was getting a little annoyed at hearing about the group. I'm sure she must have felt left out. So I took it easy and just told her a little at a time. It was a lot easier for her."

I added, "It's like going to sea. Take your wife out a few miles at a time. In fact, the same thing holds true about the purpose of T Groups. The journey is going deeper into ourselves and becoming closer with people. We have to go a little at a time. Test how far we can go—how far the limit is. And it's very frightening at first. The sea's the roughest when you start, but when you find your 65-mile limit, you're the master—and the sea is the calmest."

One of the shop supervisors said, "Driving to work the other morning, I heard this song on the radio—probably for the fifteenth time. But it's the first time I ever really heard the words. I think it's called 'People.' It goes, 'People who need people are the luckiest people in the world.' It really got to me."
Jack joined in, "There's another line in that song I remember, 'We're children needing other children, and yet, letting our grown-up pride hide all the need inside, acting more like children than children.'"

Helen looked cautiously at Art and said, "And there's not one big word in it, either."

"All right, all right," Art protested. "I still say words and sentences should be designed for the job, much the same as sheet metal in our temperature chambers. Words are things, to be worked and shaped. Our language is the only thing that makes us uniquely different from animals. We should use it, develop it. And that's what I believe. You'll just have to accept it."

"Maybe Art can meet us halfway," I posed. "He could use smaller words and we could learn some bigger ones. Maybe we would all benefit."

"Look," Art said, beginning to stir. "You've got to understand one thing. I've been an intense reader all my life—all kinds of things with all kinds of words. When I was a kid, they skipped me three grades in school. I was nine and the other kids were 12. They didn't want to have anything to do with me. I was too little. So I'd go home and read and learn more words. I've learned them, and I like to use them. That's me."

Art didn't seem so different after all. The group seemed more comfortable knowing something about the man inside the "good manager."

"Art brought his violin," Bob announced, "as we asked."

Everyone encouraged Art to play. He went to his office to get the violin and returned with the long black case. He opened it and walked into the center of the circle. "I'm still learning to play," he apologized. "I figured if I'm going to make them, I should have the fun of hearing the results."

Finally, with the violin tucked comfortably under his chin, Art began to play. No one seemed bothered by his musicianship—he went right on when he made a mistake. People seemed pleased at just being let in on something so important to him. When he finished, the group applauded and thanked him.
It became quiet again. Some people were looking at the floor; others were staring thoughtfully. They were deep in the silence.

I commented how difficult it was to say goodbye. Then each person told of his way of avoiding a goodbye. There were laughter and sadness.

"Do you have any suggestions how to carry this on?" Bob inquired. "After you leave, how often should we meet?"

"It's something you can decide together," I replied. "It depends on how often you want to, how often you think there's a need."

"What about trainers?" Rod asked.

"Work together yourselves," I recommended. "If the group seems at a standstill, don't give up and run for a trainer. Stay with it—confront one another with your feelings. Then, if you're still hung up, you can get a trainer or you can get a trainer when you want to get checked out or tie things together."

Jack was slumped slightly in his chair. Then he engaged several people who had not participated much, giving them a last opportunity to express themselves. This unfinished business continued right through to the evening.

Occasionally someone would comment on the time left before the end of the T Group. There was one hour left. Some people became more quiet, more thoughtful. A half-hour remained. They began telling what the week's experience had meant to them personally—what it meant to them in their work.

Someone said, "When you get to know the people you work with, it just seems you work better together. You understand what's going on. You don't waste a lot of time and energy trying to second-guess them."

There were only a few minutes left. We sat together in the circle. The room was still. Someone coughed. Another sighed. It was quiet again.

Jack stood up in front of his chair. Other people stood up, slowly. Some moved a few feet into the center of the circle. Soon everyone was in the center, mingling quietly and expressing their appreciation.
One by one, people maneuvered toward Jack and me and each expressed thanks in his own way. We huddled together in two's and three's. We looked into each other's eyes as though we were getting used to a new kind of closeness. We could reach each other more directly now, in a way that was impossible before. . . .

To the profit-minded businessman, the intensely personal nature of the disclosures made by the people in the training sessions may seem strange and unrelated to business. However, in such disclosures lies the strength of T-Group training, for then the person behind the job emerges. Treating one another as people, with similar and understandable needs, fears, and concerns, makes the business relationship smoother and easier. People are less fearful of one another and more approachable. They talk more freely and openly about problems, are less afraid of showing ignorance, and less concerned about what people will think of them. They become more concerned about solving the problems of the business. Thus the intensely personal experience of the T Group removes the mystery and fear of personal feelings which often block the accomplishment of the job.

To many, first exposure to expression of emotion in business may make them uncomfortable. This stems from the strangeness of the experience, which is contrary to our social custom of not revealing our feelings. In the Delta T Group it took some time for the members to become accustomed to the experience. The discomfort came about from the members' fear of losing control of their emotions. In these Delta sessions this never happened. Rather, the members, once the strangeness had worn off, were relieved and grateful not to have to struggle with concealed feelings that interfered with their work.

This cannot be accomplished at first without the assistance of professional trainers. The trainers lend reassurance to the group that feelings will not get out of hand. Furthermore, they set up the acceptability of expressing feelings. It seems more appropriate for a trainer to encourage feelings at first than for a boss to do so, for the latter is seen mainly in his authority role.
In addition, the trainers can confront people with their feelings because of their objectivity as outsiders. Also, they do not operate under the same degree of risk about being liked and accepted as those inside the company. Acting as a model, they often encourage the expression of feelings by disclosing their own.

Finally, the trainers employ their skill in pointing out the group's processes, that is, when they are evading important issues or avoiding expression of feelings. They also lend support and protection to those who find it difficult to function in a group.

Another question which might bother the business manager is the possible loss of authority by self-disclosure as a member of the training group. The fact of life is that the moment the manager sits down behind his desk he automatically re-establishes the authority of his role. The signs and symbols of his position are all around him, making him remote and unapproachable. The revelation of the person behind the authority, as disclosed in the T Group, improves use of communication by diminishing the fear induced by the authority symbols. It does not in any way reduce the authority. Authority is like love: the more you give away, the more you receive in return.

As noted in the beginning of this paper, the acid test of the practical value of this T Group came two months after the sessions, when Delta was offered a special bonus by a new customer. In order to earn the bonus offered for meeting the critical and almost impossible deadline, Delta had to use every resource at its command with maximum effectiveness. Confusion, miscommunication, or duplication of effort would have been disastrous.

Under conditions existing when he took over, Art would not have considered taking this job. Having watched Delta's key people work together for two months since the T Group, he felt the risk now lay only in the technical problems and not in the people's ability to work together. Art had seen the key people concentrate more on their work and worry less about what others were up to. They were paying attention to their own jobs, and that is what made the business begin to move.
Once this special order had been planned with the key people, Art felt confident enough to leave the plant for a two-week trip to develop new business. He returned in time to see the job tested, crated, and shipped as scheduled. The bonus on this job alone paid for the time and money spent in the training sessions, several times over. The open expression of feelings paid off in many ways, not the least of which was dollars and cents.

In the months that have passed since the Delta T-Group training sessions, there has been considerable evidence that the ability of the people to communicate effectively has reached and remains at a level substantially higher than before training. Problem solving has been and remains at a much more effective level. Several instances of improved operational effectiveness can be cited as typical of many.

On more than one occasion, Rod and Jim, both engineering managers, have talked out frictional differences arising from divergent viewpoints on solutions for technical problems or conflicts on scheduling of work in the common laboratory.

While the boss was away on an extended trip, Jim, Rod, and Hans, the production manager, together saw the need for a line of new environmental chambers. They established specifications, agreed on the basic design, set a price range, and completed building and testing of a prototype model before the boss got back. Such cooperative and expeditious effort would have been impossible a year prior to that time. Nor would they have dared to proceed without an okay from the boss.

George, assistant production manager, and Hans, working together, developed and proposed a more efficient way for reorganizing the door group’s personnel and manufacturing operations.

Bob, distribution manager, and Helen, office manager, analyzed the problem of receiving procedures to improve the flow of paperwork required in preparation for payment of invoices. They proposed a new system which has expedited the procedure and has removed a constant source of irritation between shop and front office. There are numerous instances of this kind.
But, beyond these kinds of operational improvements, there has been and remains a feeling of buoyancy in the organization. There is an exciting sense of possibility for accomplishment, a good feeling of vitality difficult to put into words.

In conclusion, it seems to us that several of the hypotheses stated in the introduction have been substantiated by the limited experience of the Delta training group:

1. Depth of feeling and openness of expression came early in the training, indicating a high level of trust before the T-Group sessions.

2. Testing of the boss’s reactions proved in the early sessions that it was safe to be open in front of him about dissatisfactions of all kinds without fear of recrimination. Thus the presence of the central power figure removed the blocks to full expression as we have experienced them in other T Groups.

3. The successive sessions of six hours each on consecutive days kept the productivity of the group at a continuously high level. In contrast, we have seen slippage in productivity in other groups because of the long intervals between sessions scheduled on a once-a-week basis.

4. Working a part of each day, between T-Group sessions, the participants had the opportunity to apply and test their new behavior on the job. With positive reinforcement on the job, individuals were stimulated to deeper involvement in the T Group and thus encouraged other members to test out new behavior on the job.

5. The test of the value of the T-Group method in business lies in the improvement of ability to achieve economic and organizational goals. Keeping this as the central target in the Delta T Group intensified the effectiveness of applying the learning in the real world. That this happened in the Delta experience is clear and evident.

6. The reduction in conflict and improvement in communication now apparent among Delta personnel started with the elimination in the T Group of the multiple ignorance about one another’s true feelings. Organizational chan-
nels of communication were opened as the blocks to personal communication were removed.

7. The cooperative solution of many different kinds of problems at Delta since the training experience was made possible by continuing transmission of more complete and accurate data of various kinds. This had not happened prior to the T Group because of distrust, dislike, and lack of respect among key personnel. The T Group reversed this condition, allowed the data to flow, and facilitated the solution of problems.

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Argyris, C. Interpersonal competence and organizational effectiveness. Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1962. Note: For comments on the advisability of the “natural” work group in sensitivity training, see Ch. 12, p. 278, by Roger Harrison.


Articles


