A HEDGEHOG EVALUATION OF TWO GROUP LEADERSHIP WORKSHOPS[1]

LLOYD W. WEST
University of Calgary

BRUCE R. MAHON and FRED A. MILES
Mount Royal College, Calgary

Abstract

This article describes two group leadership development workshops. The pattern of group development which characterized the workshops is outlined. Major reactions of participants to the workshop experience are summarized. Several suggestions are made for the improvement of similar workshops in the future.

Résumé

Cet article décrit deux ateliers pour le développement du leadership de groupe. On y esquisse le type de développement de groupe qui a caractérisé ces ateliers. Les principales réactions des participants sont résumées. Enfin, on offre plusieurs suggestions pour l'amélioration d'ateliers semblables dans l'avenir.

About 600 B.C. Archilocus commented that the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing. More recently, Gibbard, Hartman, and Mann (1974) have used these animal designations to characterize various strategies of group observation and analysis. Typically, the foxy observer uses an act-by-act coding system to collect a great many data which he later submits to statistical analysis. By contrast, the hedgehog, seeking a unified or holistic view of group phenomena, resorts to a more subjective, intuitive, or clinical approach. Since both approaches have acknowledged strengths and limitations, Gibbard *et al* (1974) describe an ideal hybrid investigator, the *hedgefox,* who is able to successfully integrate the clinical with the statistical.

Although we personally aspire to the ideal of the hedgefox, availability of data sometimes limits us to the methods of the hedgehog. Notwithstanding acknowledged methodological constraints, we believe that useful insights can be gained from a thoughtful post-group analysis of participant and observer impressions. Moreover, we are encouraged by the petition of Richard Mann (1974) which argues for a new group literature that

permits professionals to report not only their statistically significant "findings" but also their less generalizable observations. It is from this perspective that we wish to describe and evaluate two group "leadership development" workshops which we recently had an opportunity to observe.

More specifically, it is the purpose of this paper to portray the pattern of group development which appeared to characterize the observed workshops, to present a summary of post-workshop evaluations made by the participants, and to offer some suggestions for the improvement of similar workshops in the future.

A description of the workshops

In the summer of 1975, Western Human Development Services of Calgary sponsored two consecutive 2½-day workshops billed as "Group Leadership Development Workshops". The first of these workshops began on a Friday evening and finished on Sunday afternoon; the second began Sunday evening and finished Tuesday afternoon. Both were held at YMCA Yamnuska Centre located in a scenic mountain setting near Banff, Alberta.

Promotion of the workshops was accomplished largely by means of a brochure which was distributed to a wide variety of social service agen-

---

[1]This article is published with the permission of Dr. Hedley G. Dimock and Western Human Development Services.

cies and institutions throughout the Province of Alberta. Dr. Hedley Dimock, a distinguished Canadian in the field of human relations training and organization development was featured as workshop leader. The workshops were portrayed as an opportunity for "group leadership development". Promotion literature further indicated that participants might expect to achieve such specific goals as:

a) a conceptual framework which could be used to better understand personal, interpersonal, and group behavior;

b) increased awareness of the roles and responsibilities of group leaders;

c) an understanding of how groups function and how leaders can influence group process and promote group development;

The promotional literature also indicated that the workshops would focus upon experience-based learning.

Pre-workshop materials mailed to all registrants, included Dimock's (1970) booklet "How to Observe Your Group". It was hoped that this booklet would provide participants with a preview of some of Dimock's ideas. A personalized letter was also sent to all registrants which welcomed them to the workshops and provided basic information regarding accommodations.

After the first evening, during which a structured activity was used to help participants get acquainted, it was expected that group members would share leadership roles and would assume responsibility for setting future agendas. Dr. Dimock served as facilitator in this process.

Leadership style

Dimock's model of "participatory leadership" is intuitively appealing. Essentially, he strives to move the group increasingly towards a shared responsibility for various leadership roles in both task (how to proceed) and maintenance (how to get along) functions of the group. The designated leader facilitates the development of these roles essentially by modelling appropriate role behaviors and by encouraging and supporting others to participate. Dimock's model for group work may be described as democratic, participatory and problem-solving. The productive group, according to the model, engages in a series of sequential and iterative activities similar to those involved in the scientific method or in Dewey's paradigm of "reflective thinking". Since these steps are not prescriptive, however, specific roles, leadership responsibilities, and group decisions may be expected to "emerge" in the manner described by Fisher (1974).

The participants

Twenty-six registrants participated in the first workshop and 27 in the second. All participants were employed in one of the helping professions or were involved in a related volunteer capacity, e.g., school counsellors, social workers, college instructors, recreation leaders, child care and family life workers. Although there was considerable variation in previous group experience, all participants reported some past experience as members and/or leaders of small groups. Several participants had rather extensive previous experience.

Concomitant to the varied backgrounds of participants was a wide range of preconceptions and expectations regarding groups. Such diversity, as we shall see, posed a problem for the workshops. Of necessity, the expectations of several participants had to change or remain unsatisfied.

Group development

As participant observers of the workshops we attempted to monitor their developmental history. More specifically, with the guidance of several classical models of group development, we attempted to delineate specific phases or stages through which the groups appeared to pass. Our observations, presented below, are consistent with and are supported by the comments made by participants in a follow-up questionnaire.

During the short life span of the groups, dynamic processes indicative of Tuckman's (1965) *forming* and *storming* stages of group development were clearly manifested. Participants readily engaged in activities to get acquainted and to orient themselves to the situation. Polite surface interaction soon gave way to the expression of intragroup conflict and emotional resistance to task demands. Tuckman's *norming* stage, characterized by group cohesiveness and *performing* stage, characterized by functional role relatedness and productivity, however, were never achieved. As each workshop drew to a close a final stage similar to Mill's (1964) separation period, nevertheless, did occur.

Bion's (1959) basic assumption activities and valance types were readily observed in both groups. *Dependence* was indicated by suggestions that the leader assume more responsibility and offer more guidance. In post-workshop evaluations, one member commented that he "came to hear from an expert". Another "experienced complete frustration when people didn't listen to Hedley's suggestions". *Counterdependence* was

exemplified by members who "found the workshop too structured and unspontaneous", and by those who insisted that "groups can find their own way". A few members also remarked that they "did not like the leader's methods", or that he modeled "how *not* to lead a group". The *flight* assumption was indicated by comments like "things had to change, otherwise I would have left", and "I became bored and reluctant to participate". Although somewhat covert, the *fight* valency also was present and perceived by group members. One participant remarked that he "certainly encountered a lot of semi-hidden hostility", and another "was clearly aware of the resistance of some people". *Pairing,* although evident in large group meetings, primarily flourished in the small group situations. It was our general impression that *basic assumption activity,* that is, the irrational emotional component of group life as distinguished from the rational, productive or work component (Bion, 1959) predominated both workshops.

In terms of Bennis and Shepard's (1956) two phase model, neither group advanced beyond Phase I in which problems of dependence held the group's attention. Dependency-flight (Subphase 1) describes accurately the focal concern of both groups during the first day of the workshop. As the leader's role became increasingly viewed as weak and/or manipulative, counterdependence flight (Subphase 2) emerged. Polarization between dependents and counter-dependents predictably followed. There appeared to be a few interdependents or unconflicted members, however, with the skill and courage to engineer a compromise solution to the dependency concerns of the group. In this regard, it is of interest to note that 35% of participants indicated that the name "Hedley Dimock" had a considerable influence on their decision to attend the workshop; 15% indicated that it had a "moderate" influence; 15% indicated that it had a "minimal" influence; and 35% indicated that it had no influence at all. Note the U-shape of this distribution of responses. In general, Dimock's name, reputation and expertise played a *substantial part* or virtually *no part* in decisions to attend the workshop. Some participants (the dependents) came to meet Hedley, hear the word, observe the model, and develop some leadership skills. Others (the counterdependents) came to meet people, develop sensitivity, get personal feedback and "experience a group high". Hence, it is not surprising that within the short time available, resolution and catharsis

regarding dependency issues (Subphase 3) was never achieved.

Highlights of the follow-up survey

As part of a post-workshop evaluation, a questionnaire was mailed to each workshop participant. Completed returns were received from 37 or 70% of the members. Percentage responses to the most relevant items of the questionnaire are presented below:

1. To what extent were your expectations *fulfilled?*
   (7.5% — not at all; 27.5% — minimally; 27.5% moderately; 30.0% — adequately; 7.5% — beyond expectation)

2. To what extent did your expectations *change* during the workshop?
   (26.7% — not at all; 26.7% — minimally; 22.2% — moderately; 24.4% — significantly)

3. How do you rate Hedley's leadership style?
   (26.5% — ineffective; 44.7% — moderately effective; 28.8% — highly effective)

4. Did you experience any confusion or frustration during the workshop?
   (7.0% — negligable; 13.6% — moderate but fleeting; 79.4% — substantial and persistent)

5. Of what value was the workshop to you?
   (26% — of no value ; 50% — of moderate value; 24% — of extreme value)

6. Would you recommend that a friend or colleague participate in a similar workshop, in the future?
   47.5% — yes; 7.5% — perhaps; 45.0% — no).

The most valued aspects of the workshops as suggested by responses to open-ended questions were: a) the opportunity for social interaction; b) the chance to meet Hedley and to observe his leadership style; c) the mountain retreat setting. The most commonly noted irritants included: a) the varied expectations and hidden agendas; b) the frustration and conflict of not knowing what was happening and why; c) the heterogeneity of participants; d) the size of groups and shortage of time.

Discussion and Recommendations

An alarming degree of "customer dissatisfaction" is indicated by data reported in the previous section. By way of summary, consider the following:

a) Only 35% of participants report that their expectations were met or exceeded.

b) 24% of participants found it necessary to "significantly change" their expectations.

c) Substantial and persistent frustration and confusion were experienced by 79% of participants.

d) The workshops were rated as having "no value" by 26% of participants.

e) 45% of participants would not recommend similar workshops to a friend or colleague.

These statistics suggest that substantial changes in both workshop design and leadership style are required to assure acceptable levels of consumer satisfaction in the future.

How might consumer satisfaction for such workshops be increased? One possibility is to play the cognitive dissonance card. Make the group experience costly! Charge a big fee. Screen applicants. Get members to relinquish their rights and dignity. Use abusive tactics. The rationale is simple. "I have paid a high price" and "I have received nothing of value" are incompatible cognitions certain to generate dissonance. A resolution of such dissonance is then achieved by altering the latter cognition from an expression of dissatisfaction to an impassioned testimony. Although our values prohibit the use of such an approach, apparently it has been employed with considerable success by Leadership Dynamics Institute (Church and Carnes, 1973) and by Erhard Seminars Training (Brewer, 1975).

Seeking a more benign technology, we begin with the assumption that genuine satisfaction is a function of expectations fulfilled and goals achieved. Based upon this assumption and our experience observing and working with groups, we offer several suggestions for the consideration of group leaders. The recommendations which follow are regarded as hypotheses for field testing and for the critical scrutiny of our colleagues.

Plan the workshop carefully. Preplanning imposes structure but need not negate creativity, spontaneity, nor freedom of choice. Indeed, we believe the benefits which derive from planning far outweigh potential hazards. Careful planning and accurate portrayal of the workshop can do much to assure later consumer satisfaction.

An obvious factor which must be considered during pre-workshop planning is the amount of time available. Can the same structure and process be predicted to be as effective for a two day workshop as it is for a five day workshop? In

this regard Levin and Kurtz (1974) have reported a recent study in which they compared groups functioning with similar purposes but with different degrees of structure. Their results indicate greater participant satisfaction in highly structured groups than in groups with little structure.

Salient non-negotiable features of the workshop should be carefully outlined in promotional literature. In particular, the primary objective or statement of purpose must be made clear. The nature of the group processes that are planned for the workshop and the preferred *"modus operandi"* of group leaders should be indicated. This information may be supplemented by a more detailed introduction of all resource personnel.

Careful planning and promotion should assure that the consumer knows clearly what he is purchasing. Such assurance will permit registration to be treated as a contractual acceptance of the basic workshop plan.

In the course of a group's development, it may be productive to re-negotiate aspects of its structure. The defining structure of the workshop, nevertheless, should remain explicit. It is suggested that such a policy of contractual rigor will help to minimize the hazards of diverse expectation, discourage the pursuit of hidden agendas, and promote the self-screening of potential registrants.

Try a team approach to leadership. It may be unrealistic to expect one person to facilitate both task and maintenance functions of a group. If two compatible and cooperative leaders were to share the division of labor, one might focus upon, model, and support task functions which move the group toward stated objectives. The other might focus upon, model, and support maintenance functions which solidify the group and personalize the substantive content of communication. What we are suggesting here is that designers and leaders of workshops might experiment with a co-facilitator model similar to that outlined by Turgeon (1975) for "dyadic group counselling".

Use an OD specialist to observe group performance and provide periodic feedback. Group members, like proverbial fish oblivious to water, often ignore the dynamics of the groups in which they are immersed. Without a conceptual system for sorting and anchoring perceptions, life in the group may be experienced as a "booming, buzzing, confusion". It will be recalled that a frequent criticism of the workshops described in this paper was "the persistant frustration and confusion of not knowing what was happening or why".

An OD specialist might make a useful dydactic contribution to group learning. After observing the group in action, he may attempt to piece together varied observations in order to help form a comprehensible gestalt. An OD specialist might direct the group's attention to "what's going on" and to "what the group is ignoring". He might also suggest plausible explanations and "attributions" for the events which do occur. Since the attributions (and misattributions) we give to the events in our lives mediate our emotions, motives, and evaluations (Jones, Kanouse, Kelley, Nisbett, Valins, & Weiner, 1972), the role of the OD specialist in providing the group with attributional insights may be crucial to the ultimate success of the workshop.

Conduct formative evaluations. Unlike summative evaluations which are made at the close of a workshop, formative evaluations monitor the success of a workshop as it proceeds. If each component or phase of the workshop is assessed at the time of its occurrence, the reinforcing or corrective feedback obtained can be used to modify workshop design and leadership style while change is yet possible. In order to be effective, however, formative evaluations, must be short, simple, and practical.

It seems likely that formative evaluation could more readily occur if some of the previous recommendations were also implemented (e.g. the use of team leadership or an OD specialist).

Conclusion

This article began with the suggestion that the hedgehog "knows one big thing". As participant observers in the workshops which have been described we also clearly sensed "one big thing": considerable participant dissatisfaction was associated with these workshops. While we in no way equate dissatisfaction with absence of learning, we believe it is useful to understand the sources of dissatisfaction. To this end we have critically examined the workshops, both in terms of group theory and in terms of participant post-workshop evaluative statements. On the basis of these observations we have made recommendations for the improvement of similar workshops.

As a final comment we wish to encourage other researchers and practitioners to examine and report their less "foxy" observations, not to deny the value of statistical and experimental approaches but rather, to acknowledge that the "hedgehog" within us is alive and still has a useful role to play.

References

Bennis, W. G. & Shepard, H. A. A theory of group development. *Human Relations,* 1956, *9,* 415-437.

Bion, W. R. Attacks on linking, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis,* 1954, *40,* 308-315.

Brewer, M. Erhard seminars training: We're gonna tear you down and put you back together. *Psychology Today,* 1975, *9,* (3) pp. 35-36; 39-40; 82-83.

Church, G. & Carnes, C. D. *The pit: A group encounter defiled.* New York: Pocket Books, 1973.

Dimock, H. *How to observe your group.* Montreal: Concordia College, 1970.

Fisher, B. A. *Small group decision making: Communication and the group process.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974.

Gibbard, G. S., Hartman, J. J. & Mann, R. D. (Eds.) *Analysis of groups.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.

Jones, E. E., Kanouse, D. E., Kelley, H. H., Nisbett, R. E., Valins, S. & Weiner, B. *Attribution: Perceiving the causes of behavior.* Nova Scotia: General Learning Press, 1972.

Levin, E. M. & Kurtz, R. R. Structured and non-structured human relations training. *Journal of Counselling Psychology,* 1974, *21,* 526-531.

Mann, R. D. The identity of the group researcher. In G. S. Gibbard, J. J. Hartman & R. D. Mann (Eds.) *Analysis of groups.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974.

Mills, T. M. *Group transformation: An analysis of a learning group.* New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964.

Tuckman, B. W. Developmental sequence in small groups. *Psychological Bulletin,* 1965, *63,* 384-399.

Turgeon, P. Dyadic group counselling. Paper presented at the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association Conference, Vancouver, June, 1975.