

TRAINER BEHAVIOR IN T-GROUPS

*a review of research
and some conclusions*

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The training or T-group is an approach to human relations training which, broadly speaking, is supposed to provide participants with an opportunity to learn about themselves and their impact on others, and about small group behavior. It is a method of social skill training which brings together a small group of people for the purposes of studying the behavior of their own group, with the aid of a staff member (often known as the trainer). The trainer's task is to draw attention to individual and interpersonal behavior as it develops within the group.

Much research evidence^{1, 2} is available to support the use of the T-group as a highly important method. Very little is known, however, about how or why it is effective. In particular, a major need exists for a better understanding of the trainer's contribution to the T-group.

In a book concerned with T-group training, Blake³ has suggested that the primary task of the trainer in a T-group is one of creating the most productive climate in which the participant can accept responsibility for his own development and can develop valid communications with others. Tannenbaum, Weschler & Massarik⁴ suggest that to facilitate this the trainer can perform several broad functions in the group. First, he can provide numerous focal points for discussion and exploration. For example, he may focus attention on his role of authority figure or use research instruments in structuring particular situations for potentially useful insights. Second, he can establish a model of behavior in the group. He may encourage and accept criticism, express his own feelings or direct feedback to other people. And finally, he can facilitate the flow of communication by initiating, clarifying, and encouraging the discussion of essential issues: issues of leadership, group avoidance, interpersonal conflict, intimacy, and so on.

Everyone involved in T-group training has some conception about what makes an effective or ineffective trainer in a group. More often than not these notions are highly intuitive and have not

been systematically investigated. Our aim in this article is to look at the trainer role in light of the independent research evidence.

The empirical studies of the trainer are of four sorts. The first provides an assessment of the relationship between trainer personality and trainer style: the second indicates participant perceptual change in reference to the trainer; the third, the trainer's impact on group development; and the fourth, the processes of trainer influence as they relate to participant change.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TRAINER PERSONALITY AND TRAINER STYLE

There are two studies that evaluate the trainer's personality and his style. Deutsch, Pepitone, and Zander⁵ looked at a leader of a basic skill training group (the forerunner to a T-group). The study was designed to show the interrelationship between the personality needs of the trainer and his resultant behavior in the group. His personality was measured by TAT, Rorschach, Sentence Completion, Ideology Interview and Questionnaire, and a self-administered life history questionnaire.

His behavior in the group was assessed by the workshop faculty (staff members of the T-group), without prior knowledge of the clinical results.

The clinical examination indicated:

"Superior intellectual ability, turned creative imagination to immediate and practical aspects of work, sufficiently socially adaptable but has internal turmoil. Basically sensitive to others, affiliative and non-aggressive. Skilled in communication, tactfulness and social responsiveness combined with this ideology should make for an affective democratic group leader."

A content analysis of his behavior in the T-group revealed the following:

"Warm and friendly, gets ideas across easily, never interrupts a group member, sensitive and careful not to hurt anyone's feelings, no strong emotional displays such as from moroseness to mania, extremely unassertive, rarely undertakes critical analysis, and spontaneous."

This study illustrates the way in which

the trainer's predilections based on personality characteristics may influence his training philosophy and behavior.

Reisel⁶ performed a similar clinical study on two well-established trainers. A research clinical psychologist carried out the study by observing each of the subjects as they worked with student T-groups. He attended all the sessions for both the groups and after each session met individually with each of the trainers for a clinical interview lasting between 30-45 minutes (the interviews were taped). In effect, the study attempted to show the continuous inter-relationship between trainer personality and trainer behavior in the group. The following excerpts represent the picture drawn of these relationships:

Trainer I:

"The first trainer's main characteristic was his self-effacing attitude toward himself and toward his work. He tended to play a warm and benevolent role of father figure for his group. These characteristic traits, the clinician interpreted, served to hide a large portion of underlying anxiety over the expression of hostility. His role of trainer was thusly carried out without the awareness that it was a means by which he could attract attention and gain vocal vision for purposes of satisfying his strong needs for affection."

Trainer II:

"He was characterized by the clinician as having a powerful need to produce. This trainer was seen as highly ambivalent in his behavior because of his insatiable need to be successful. He attempted to behave in a way that would achieve outward success, as an authoritarian, and at the same time tried to avoid being authoritarian. Consequently he denied the existence of his power in the group but stuck to it un-awares."

The effectiveness of the trainer, it would seem, depends not only on his training, the type of group being trained, or other sociocultural determinants, but also on certain of his personality characteristics. The findings of these two studies are highly tentative, being based on only three cases, but as far as they go, they illustrate that the trainer's personality has an effect on his training style in the group.

PARTICIPANT PERCEPTUAL CHANGE AND THE TRAINER

A second set of studies has focussed on T-group members' perceptual change in relation to the trainer. Lohmann, Zenger, and Weschler⁷ performed a study to determine whether changes occur in students' self-perceptions and their perceptions of trainers during a T-group. The subjects were male and female college students in three T-groups. They used the Gordon Personal Profile which yields measures of ascendancy, responsibility, emotional stability, sociability, and a total self-evaluation score (a summated score of the previous four measures). Scores were obtained for students' self-perception, students' perception of the trainer, and for the trainer's self-perception.

They found that trainers were seen by the students as significantly more adequate at the beginning than at the end of the group. However, the test of another hypothesis indicated a tendency for the students to see their trainer as more adequate than themselves, despite diminished idolization. And lastly, a trend was noted in the direction of the convergence of the students' perception of the trainer and the trainers' self-perception by the end of the group. These findings provide some evidence of the trainer's pre-eminence in the group, especially during the initial stages, and, in fact, although there is a diminished idolization of him, the tendency is to continue to see him as more adequate than themselves.

Vansina⁸ was also interested in the participants' perception of the trainer. He hypothesized that the T-group has an influence on its members' attitudes and opinions and, since the experience is related to the problem of leadership, these should move closer to those of the trainer. He used two groups of social work students on a four-day residential course. After the introductory session every member of the group, as well as the trainer, described, by means of an item-sort, his image of his actual-self and of his attempted-self (image of ideal

leader). This was repeated in the penultimate session when the participants made a new sorting. He found that the participants' attempted-self image were significantly more similar to that of the trainer at the later sorting.

There can be little doubt that the trainer's intervention in the group effects participant change to some degree and in one form or another. This change may take many forms: for example, the trainer may force compliance, serve as a model, or offer help and information. Lohmann et al, and Vansina have assessed participant change re the trainer, but they did not provide direct information about the meaning of the change and thus the reader has to make inferences from the data. To make such inferences meaningful, a consistent theoretical framework which accounts for the mechanisms and dynamics of the change (influence process) is needed. This is particularly apparent when one attempts to make predictions about subsequent perceptions or behavior.

TRAINER'S IMPACT ON GROUP DEVELOPMENT

In recent years, there has been considerable emphasis on group development vis-a-vis the trainer. Stock and Hill⁹ suggested that the trainer's location within the sub-group structure of the group could partially explain why groups develop in given ways. Two groups were observed and a Behavioral Rating System developed to examine a sample of meetings in terms of quality of work and emotionality. Each group was found to be different in its level of work and expressed emotionality, over the period of group life. Each member was asked to describe his own group-related behaviors and feelings (a series of descriptive statements based on 'most like' and 'least like' himself). These were factor analyzed and a number of each group's self-perception subtypes were found (e.g., Group A was identified as "interested in maintaining work-oriented non-personal relationships with others, they are withdrawn, exhibit considerable confusion and anxiety...").

Thus, the group's development could be understood in terms of the kind of subtypes that emerge and the amount of consensus within them. It was suggested that the location of the trainer in terms of various emotional and work subgroups (e.g., "if in one or two mutually incompatible and warring subtypes he was blocked in conflict resolution"), the nature of the consensus of these subgroups, and its compatibility with other groups of varying levels of consensus could provide information on group development.

DUTCH STUDY

Stermerding¹⁰ performed a study which reflected the indirect influence of the trainer on group development. He used two Dutch T-groups composed of management consultants and trainers in industry. A tape-recording was made of the groups throughout the experience. Participants were asked daily to fill in forms to state in which of three possible areas they were learning from the group: about themselves, about groups or about their daily work. They were also given a case study of a decision-making group, at the beginning and at the end of the experience, and asked to describe the kinds of things that were happening in the case.

Their replies to the case study were then content analyzed into five categories: general normative approach, personality stereotyping, role functioning and process-analysis. The trainer behavior was examined via an analysis of the tape-recording of his interventions. And finally, a trainer assessment form was used by each trainer in evaluating, at the end of the group, their respective groups in terms of movement toward task, maintenance, sensitivity and overall effectiveness.

A content analysis of the trainer interventions revealed that Trainer A showed a group-oriented approach, while Trainer B directed most of his interventions toward individual group members. Corresponding to this, Group A significantly differed from Group B on a number

of process variables: Group A was seen to accentuate the 'group' aspect of learning while Group B emphasized equally the learnings about themselves and their daily work; Group A described the second case study in more process-analytic terms (in their observations of the actual interaction process of the case study) while Group B described it more in terms of role functioning (the relation of an individual in the social context); and finally, Group A was seen by its trainer as moving toward maintenance, sensitivity and overall effectiveness while Group B was seen as moving toward task only.

The author draws the conclusion that trainer behavior and group development are inextricably related. Once again we have some indication of the impact of the trainer in the T-group system, and yet, the link between the trainer and individual learning or group development is still unclear, that is, *how* or by what process does he influence these outcomes?

EFFECT ON NORMATIVE PATTERN

Psathas & Hardert¹¹ investigated the effects of the trainer interventions on the pattern of group behavior, specifically its normative behavior. They hypothesized that the trainer interventions "contain implicit norm-messages indicating to members what norms should be established in the group." Seven two-week T-groups were used each containing 12 members. A tape-recording was made of the first three and last three sessions for each group and a verbatim record was kept of trainer interventions. At the close of each session the participants and the trainer were asked to write down the most significant trainer interventions. An inventory of norms was established by surveying the T-group literature. A list was then compiled, which grouped the normative items into *ought* and *should* statements, and a list of norm-categories was then established.

The results indicate that "trainer interventions can be reliably classified into

these categories" (potentially biased since the authors did the sorting), and thus, "implicit in trainer interventions, then, is a message concerning what members should or ought to do, and his view of what constitutes appropriate T-group member behavior."

In addition they found that trainer interventions were consistently judged to fit into four normative categories more than any others: analyzing group interaction or process, feelings, feedback and acceptance concern. These categories were consistently high from one time period to another, which the authors suggest reflects the persistent trainer problem of establishing these norms. It is notable, however, that analyzing group interaction or process is highest in the early time period whereas acceptance concern is highest in the late time period which, they imply, offers evidence of some pattern in group development.

Although not specifically structured to investigate the trainer vis-a-vis group development, Psathas & Hardert's study is highly relevant to this issue. One is forced, however, to question the assumption that a reliable classification of trainer interventions into norm-categories is evidence that the trainer is actually communicating to the members what should or ought to be done. The validity of the assumption could have been more directly tested by examining, perhaps, the complete intervention episode (i.e., the trainer's intervention and the subsequent member response).

MEMBER-TRAINER RELATION

Another study¹² examines the member-to-trainer relationship in the development of the group. Two self-analytic groups were used for the study. They were composed of university students who met five times a week for 50 minutes each session, for a total of 32 sessions, and were heterogeneous in terms of age, sex, and background. Verbatim records and tape recordings were used throughout the groups. A scoring system was designed to measure "each

act initiated by a group member for the state of his feelings toward the trainer."

The scoring system included 16 categories broken down into three major headings: Impulse area ('member's aggressive and libidinal ties with the trainer'), Authority Relations area ('power and dependency issues'), and an Ego State area ('member's feelings toward himself in the context of the relationship with the trainer'). A schema was then developed to provide a theory of the development of member-trainer relations, in assessing the similarities and differences on the above variables between the two groups. The five stages of this development are as follows:

Stage 1:

Appraisal: 'The trainer is the focus for much of the anxiety aroused in members by the new situation; they tend to perceive and use him as an ally in reducing their anxiety and controlling their impulses; they tend to project their ego-ideal on to the trainer, partly as a means of setting a satisfying relationship; and he is a source of frustration.'

Stage 2:

Confrontation: 'Expression of hostile or counter-dependent feelings serves both to challenge the authority of the trainer, and to express the member's exasperation with the trainer's failure to reciprocate affection and esteem. Or, he is at this point serving the purpose of 'naming the devil,' of crystallizing the vaguely apprehended dangers and uncertainties inherent in a new group.'

Stage 3:

Re-evaluation: 'The stage is one in which the previous images of the trainer are tested for their continuing usefulness, and an important means of re-evaluation of the image occurs when the members compare the ego state appropriate to the image with how they feel at the moment.'

Stage 4:

Internalization: 'A shift of the members toward the trainer as internal object. There are two phases in this

stage, identification and work. What constitutes success or productive effort? What is work in this group? And how do we go about it?'

Stage 5:

Separation: 'Anticipation as the group comes to a close, loss and sadness at the losing of the relationship with the trainer.'

He found a number of similarities and differences between the two groups with regard to the above schema. The primary differences, he suggests, were a result of the way in which each group dealt with the trainer in the confrontation period. Group 2 expressed a great deal of hostility toward the trainer and avoided the issue of appraising him. Group 1, however, confronted the dependency and authority position of the trainer. As a result Group 1 entered the re-evaluation stage and engaged in reparative work, "to undo and control the aggression of the previous period," whereas Group 2 showed signs of distress and were frightened about the expression of hostility and concerned about its containment. In consequence, Group 2 never entered the internalization stage to any great extent and was left with the need to deal with unresolved issues of anxiety and depression arising out of the confrontation stage. Group 1's reparative work and consequent decrease in anxiety provided it with a period of internalization, although within this stage some anxiety and hostility reappeared.

Mann's study provides a valuable contribution in understanding the importance of the trainer in the T-group. It increases our knowledge of the possible consequences of dealing with authority-based issues and provides an overall schema of group development that encourages a focus on the participant's experience of the learning relationship.

TRAINER INFLUENCE AND PARTICIPANT CHANGE

A number of points have been made about the variables which need to be considered in describing the trainer's im-

pact in a T-group. No study, however, can escape the obligation to be clear about the conditions necessary to establish a connection between the trainer and the results of his influence on change. The studies discussed in the last three sections, in one form or another, indicate the effect of the trainer in the T-group environment, but none of them states in what form this influence exists and how this relates to participant learning. "Hopefully, we shall soon have instruments which will permit us to assess trainer style as an independent variable and relate it to kind and extent of outcome."¹³

Some research of this kind has recently been undertaken. Peters¹⁴ examined the relationship between trainer identification and personal change. He found that participants who identified with the trainer, assessed by direct, indirect and projective measures, became more like the trainer. Specifically, the participants' self-percept (measured by a semantic differential) converged with their perception of the trainer and the trainer's self-percept. This convergence was noted for most participants in six two-week T-groups. The same results were not obtained in the control group. In addition, it was discovered that men showed more of the self-concept convergence than women, and the more similar the occupational background of the participants to the trainer the stronger was the association. Peters' interpretation to account for the sex-matching and the occupational similarity is that for identification to lead to personal change in the T-group may require a model whose attitudes, values and behavior are relevant, functional and realistically attainable for the person. That is, the trainer is a more realistic 'reference-other' or role-model.

The study, while interesting, has several shortcomings. It assesses personal change by reference to trained ratings and peer ratings at the end of the group. This has two disadvantages: first, they are post-only measures; and second, neither of these measures of 'change' has been validated unequivocally.^{15, 16}

The control group used by Peters is more properly what Friedlander¹⁷ would call a 'comparison group.' As he suggests "perhaps the term 'control group,' as used by the field-researcher, is a soothing misnomer which tends to gloss over a myriad of variables that might otherwise be quite relevant." Certainly in Peters' case the so-called control group differs markedly from the experimental group. The former consisted of graduate students in their early twenties, while the latter consisted on the whole of high status middle-aged administrators (business, school, nursing, government and public administration officials). The differences in age and status make the term 'control group' somewhat inappropriate.

It is also worth noting that the convergence was clearly significant on only the indirect measurement scale; on the other scales increases were only of borderline significance.

Nonetheless this study is interesting in that it attempts to link participant change directly to the trainer and to indicate that identification is a relevant learning mechanism in T-groups.

SELF-DISCLOSING BEHAVIOR

Culbert²⁵ investigated the effects of self-disclosing trainer behavior upon members of two student T-groups. The same trainers participated in both groups. They were provided with 'job descriptions' which set forth guidelines for their behavior in each group. These descriptions called for the trainers to behave similarly in both groups, that is, to differ only on the experimental condition of being more self-disclosing (*mSD* condition) in one group and less self-disclosing (*ISD* condition) in the other. The first part of the study substantiates that the experimental manipulation was successful. The trainers were judged as more self-disclosing in the *mSD* condition than in the *ISD* condition by each of three separate measures.

The relationship data generated by this study showed that the members

of the *ISD* group more often perceived their two-person relationships with the trainers and their specified dyad partners as therapeutic, and the *mSD* participants more frequently viewed their relationships with *non-critical* others as therapeutic.

As Culbert points out, interpretation as to the desirability of this difference is not clear. It could be argued that the members of the *mSD* group have learned to create better relationships free from dependence on the trainer. Relationships, that is, that have extra-group transferability. Alternatively, it could be argued, that the *ISD* participants, in being centrally involved with critical members, may be participating in qualitatively richer relationships than members of the *mSD* group. Culbert speculates that a very high degree of self-reference behavior in the *mSD* group may have been a factor in the lack of two-person therapeutic relationships.

The self-awareness data showed the *mSD* group as having a significantly higher degree of self-awareness than the *ISD* group, a difference which narrowed with time. Culbert concludes from this that the results are consistent with a "modeling" theory. The subjects of the *mSD* group appear to have modeled their participation after their self-disclosing trainers. This explanation, Culbert notes, is given further support from clinical impressions reported by the two trainers and the group observer.

In his conclusion, Culbert argues strongly that there is an optimum level of self-awareness for T-group participation and that early attainment of this level is to the group's advantage. It follows from this that self-disclosing trainer participation is called for at least during early meetings. Upon attainment of this self-awareness level the trainer could productively "pull in" and be less self-disclosing.

It is to be noted, however, that much of this conclusion is speculative in

view of the small sample size and in the absence of unambiguous data.

Bolman¹⁸ added to Culbert's approach in investigating the relationship among certain dimensions of trainer behavior (similar to self-disclosure) and member learning. He found that one trainer variable was crucial in the learning process, the variable represented by the factor labelled congruence-empathy. It was found that trainer congruence-empathy was positively related to participant learning (as measured by self-rated learning, others' learning, and peer-rated learning). While the data in this study was limited in that it was based only on the perceptions of the group members, it does support the evidence in other social influence situations^{19, 20} that change agents who are seen as congruent or honest provide opportunities for individual learning.

SOCIAL INFLUENCE

Cooper²¹ investigated Kelman's²² theory of social influence in respect to the trainer in T-groups. He focussed in on two processes of social influence, identification and internalization. It was proposed that the participants' perception of trainer characteristics will determine which process of social influence is likely to result and consequently, the way in which participants will change.

He found that in an identification-based trainer influence process, that is, when the trainer was seen to be *attractive*: (a) the participants became more like the trainer in their attitudes (as measured by Schutz's²³ FIRO-B) and behavior (as measured by tape analysis); (b) changes in the participants' self-concept did not occur; and (c) the participants' work associates did not report them as having significantly changed six to nine months after the T-group (on a measure based on the Bunker¹⁶ categories).

In an internalization-based trainer influence process, that is, when the trainer was seen to be *congruent*: (a) changes occurred in the participants' self-concept (change towards an increased

match between self-percept and ideal-percept, self-percept and other participants' perception of him, and self-percept and actual behavior); (b) changes in the direction of the trainer's attitudes and behavior did not occur; and (c) the participants' work associates reported them as having changed six to nine months after the T-group.

Although the data collected by Cooper support the Kelman social influence model, it is important to note some of the assumptions implicit in this study. First, it was assumed that attractiveness and congruence are mutually exclusive dimensions; this, on the surface at least, may not be the case. Second, it was assumed that it is the participants' perception of the trainer's behavior and not the trainer's actual behavior that is the primary basis of influence in the relationship.

More fundamentally, an assumption throughout this article has been that the trainer is the principal source of influence. At the same time, we must consider whether factors other than the trainer - such as group composition, group format, intragroup dynamics - may be determinants of participant change. In future research we must examine each of these factors by introducing them into the analysis and investigating how the relationship between trainer behavior and participant change is affected by them.

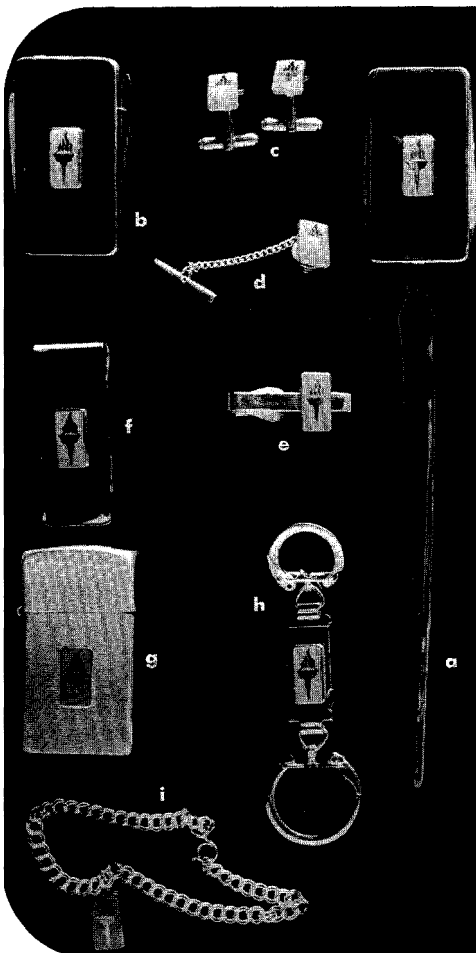
It cannot be claimed that any of the above studies have exhausted all aspects of trainer influence. They all, however, are provocative of further research.

CONCLUSION

Much of the trainer research reviewed in this article is replete with difficulties

which limits the generalizability of the findings in respect to the practical decisions on organizing and conduct of T-group training. There are a number of problems posed by all such studies:

1. The findings are based, on the whole, on small samples.
2. Most of the studies rely for their measurements on participant perception of behavior and not on direct observation of changes in behavior by unbiased observers.
3. There is a lack of agreement and clarity about what constitutes the research focus, which is reflected in the widely varying instruments and criteria used.
4. Little attempt was made to establish a causal relation between observed group or individual changes and the trainer means employed to produce them.



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5. Our survey revealed only one study specifically designed to investigate the effects of the trainer on follow-up change.

The findings cited above are no more than encouraging, more complete and organized data is needed in this area. Stock²⁴ has pointed out that "the issue of the trainer's role is one of the relatively unexplored areas." She goes on to say that we do not know about the types and range of trainer-interventions, the timing of interventions, and how different trainer styles influence the functioning of the group and its usefulness to the individual participant. A plea repeated even more strongly by Reisel⁶ "his (the trainer) influence, it appears to us, must be given serious consideration if full scale understanding of the training process is to be achieved." We can do no more than echo them.

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**SHELDON DOBKINS
IS AUTHOR OF
FEBRUARY HARDCORE ARTICLE**

Mr. Sheldon H. Dobkins should have been shown as the author of "Hardcore? Hell, I Would Have Hired Him Anyhow?" which appeared on page 34 of the February 1970 *Journal*. Mr. Dobkins is Manager, Training, Electro-Opti-

cal Systems, Inc., Pasadena, Cal. Through an editorial error, Mr. George Steinman of the Electro-Optical Systems Publication Dept. was shown as the author. Our sincere apologies to Mr. Dobkins.