

# FACILITATING PERSONAL GROWTH

*a report on a human  
relations training laboratory*

The Midwest Group for Human Resources (MGHR is a division of the National Training Laboratories) has inaugurated a policy of offering three types of basic (i.e., non-advanced) training laboratories, with focus on personal growth, group processes, and inter-group phenomena respectively. This policy emerged from the fact that in recent years activities regarding personal growth and inter-group dynamics have entered into training designs. Thus, it became important to offer laboratories with a particular focus so that participants could choose one most suited to their interests and so that those planning the laboratory could recruit staff members whose training interests and styles were congenial to the special emphasis.

In this article, we describe a training laboratory conducted by MGHR in June, 1968, which emphasized personal growth. We think the design illustrates what is meant by personal-growth emphasis, and that it was sufficiently effective to be worth describing to our associates.

But, before presenting the design, it seems appropriate to state our views regarding the function of training which is focused on personal growth. Perhaps the case is best stated by the historian, Elting E. Morison. In his book, *Men, Machines, and Modern Times\**, he says he agrees with Whitehead that "The rule is absolute that the society which does not value the trained intelligence will die," then he adds:

"I believe that man is a creature distinguished not only by the intelligence but by the affections as well, which means, I guess, that he is a creature of rapture and despair. But which means also that the affections have an existence, an identity, a set of needs and claims, a shaping influence in the life of man that is their independent own. Man is, not only because he thinks but because he feels, and it is the interaction between these two impressive energies that establishes what people today love to call the human condition. This at least is one of the things I think I have learned from history. I

\*M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1966.

would add that, . . . we must examine with care whether the rule is not equally absolute: the society that does not value the educated heart - or whatever the seat of the affections is - will also die." (p. 83)

He shows that this gets us into the questions of what our genuine affections and intentions are, and "this means . . . finding out who we are, and, more painful yet, accepting it." But how do we make explicit the information we need? To begin with, Morison says, there is the "old fashioned source - the study of the humanities." But the humanities have been "an inefficient instrument:" "They should be approached in such a way that he recovers his power, now almost lost, to be moved. The surest way to *discover the existence* and then to *examine the meaning* of the affections is first to *feel them*." (p. 84-5 emphasis added.)

## DISTINCTIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRAINING DESIGN

One of the first decisions made by the staff (which conducted this laboratory) was to utilize a variety of personal - growth type activities and to do so in a way that would stimulate the interest of participants and create a low level of anxiety. In working out this idea, the following concepts emerged:

1. A central theme around which specific events could be developed was provided in the form of five questions: Where (or who) am I? How do I wish to change? What are the risks in changing? What help do I need from others? What help can I provide others?

2. The events in the lab would provide participants a variety of modes of behaving in order to enable them to learn about themselves - i.e., to obtain information relevant to the five questions.

3. Emphasis in the lab would be upon doing things and then reflecting upon one's reaction to the experience: interpretation of responses could be de-emphasized.

4. The design would move from more toward less structure, and from

PAUL C. BUCHANAN  
Associate Professor,  
Ferkauf Graduate School  
of Humanities and Social Studies,  
Yeshiva University,  
New York, New York.

and

EVA SCHINDLER-RAINMAN  
Community Organization Consultant,  
and Education Extension Faculty,  
University of California  
at Los Angeles,  
Los Angeles, California.

staff-planned activities toward participant choice of activities. More specifically, we planned to introduce a mode of behavior (such as physical movement) by engaging all participants in it and then offer one of several activities from which the participants could choose. At the same time, the activity was introduced in such a way that people could choose not to participate, or they could participate on their own terms. (This will be clearer as one reads the account of some specific activities below.) This arrangement made it possible for a person to explore in depth one mode of behavior (such as fantasy) or to expose himself moderately to several modes.

5. Participants would be subgrouped in such a way that each had meaningful, concurrent membership in several groups and that through overlap of membership they would form an integrated community. As this idea was implemented, each person was a member of a T-group of a "sextet" consisting of two (randomly-assigned) members from each of three T-groups - the total distribution being such that someone from each T-group was in a sextet with people from each of the other T-groups; a T-group cluster; a pair formed of one person from each of the two T-groups in the cluster; and an ad hoc group of varying members formed as part of the "activities" or exercises.

6. Trainers were to take part in activities as they wished, but were not to stand by as observers.

7. Emphasis was on creativeness, spontaneity, and enjoyment rather than on "remedying pathologies." As one person put it, emphasis was to be placed upon innovative, freeing-up experiences, especially those involved in "meeting the self in unusual places," and on providing opportunity to increase one's "life space."

#### STAFF CHARACTERISTICS

Undoubtedly the design which emerged reflected the staff which planned and conducted it, the people who participated, and the environment in which the lab was held. The following ap-

peared to the staff as important things about themselves:

Members appeared to each other as highly competent, likeable, interested in innovation, not competitive with each other, collectively possessing wide resources, interested in the flow of events rather than in specific techniques, and having a relatively low need for structure. These conditions and attitudes developed even though the staff members were essentially strangers when they began planning (only two had worked together before); and due to late planning of staff they did not begin preparing until the day before the lab. They also believed that the competence and the style of the dean was one contributing factor. But whatever the reason, staff meetings were unhurried; members enjoyed the planning sessions, each felt he contributed to the design and felt pride in it yet did not feel possessive of any particular design component; and all felt the lab was a personal growth experience.

Facilities were very good for the purpose: large, air-conditioned, well-furnished meeting rooms; varied and well-selected equipment (records, graphic

materials, etc.); comfortable living accommodations, beautiful recreation facilities; and adequate isolation.

The 68 participants were all white, apparently middle-class, with the usual mix of men and women (about 2 to 1), from a variety of occupational fields (religion - 14; health - 17; industry - 11; university - 17; school - 1; government - 1; other - 7).

A special feature of participant mix was the fact that twelve men in a T-Group Leader Development Program participated in this HR lab. While they formed one T-group, they took part as regular participants in all lab activities. Thus about one-sixth of the participants in the lab had special interests and capabilities in group behavior, and since two of these were in each sextet, it is likely that they had a significant impact on what happened. Yet it is difficult to know the direction or the extent of this impact.

#### SCHEDULE

So the reader might understand how the design features were implemented, the schedule is described in detail, and the explicit rationale stated where this seems appropriate.

#### Friday

3:00- 3:30 General orientation of participants of both labs to the community; participants separated into the two labs and each moved to its own locale.

3:30- 5:00 (a) Introduction to Lab Section II (five minutes).

The Speaker stated that this was to be experiential learning with the design providing a variety of experiences followed by opportunity for reflection; and he stated the five questions as the focal issues in the design.

(b) Warm-up activities (about 45 minutes) with musical background.

The movement design included a warm-up period during which people were asked to move their heads, arms and legs very slowly and to the accompaniment of some Spanish guitar music. We then moved into groups of 10 or 12 and the instructions were for every person to meet each other in the circle with two ground rules: no speaking and no handshaking. Discussion

followed and then the same thing was done with eyes closed. Next, we asked people to find a partner and to mirror each other's movement, then talk about it. This led to discussion of who led and who followed and how transfers of leadership were made. Next, people were asked to sit on the floor and to send each other non-verbal messages while others observed. They then discussed what they had sent back and forth, with the observer participating; then the sequence was changed. Toward the end of the movement period, we asked people just to move to the music and as a next thing to form a large circle holding hands and moving in and then out, and then in again as close as they could get.

**7:30- 9:00** Warm-up activities to continue to get acquainted with each other and experiencing themselves through different media or modes. (Participants were asked to form into groups of eight and distribute themselves around the room).

- (a) Imaginary objects. "Assume one of you has a circle; do something with it, then pass it to the next number." When all who took part had finished, another imaginary object was distributed (a square, a rod). Discussion.
- (b) Construction. Construction paper was provided and people were asked to make whatever they wished with it. Discussion again.
- (c) Using one sheet of paper each, people in each group were asked to view the work of other groups, then discuss their reactions within their own groups.
- (d) Writing. Each person was asked to write his name, first slowly, then gradually more rapidly, and in varying sizes.
- (e) Drawing. After forming pairs within the sub-groups, members were asked to begin a drawing, then exchange papers and add to the drawing begun by the other person.
- (f) Within the sub-groups, discuss reactions to the whole session.

#### Saturday

**9:00-10:15** Formation of T-groups and clusters

- (a) Members convened in their T-group rooms (grouping was heterogeneous except for those in the group leaders program). Each group was informed by its staff member that the people in two rooms were to form a cluster in such a way that those in one room were to join the other three people at a time and at four-minute intervals. Those receiving were asked to con-

sider how they wished to greet the newcomers, and those in the other room were asked to consider the order in which they would leave to the cluster room and how they would enter the other group.

- (b) After all were in one room about five minutes, the discussion was interrupted and all were asked to reflect and write down how they felt about the experience and what it suggested to them about themselves, about interpersonal relations, and about entry, inclusion and exclusion. In trios, members were encouraged to share what they had written down.
- (c) Group picture. Members were asked to move around and arrange themselves in such a manner that being near the center of the room would reflect high involvement in the cluster and being near the periphery of the room less or no involvement. Individuals were offered opportunity to comment on their location or to ask about the placement of others.

#### Break

**10:45-12:00** Cluster meeting using participant-observation design.

Task of working group: to share what members had found out about themselves and how they felt about it. Members of the observing group were paired with members of working group.

**1:30- 3:30** T-groups

**7:30- 9:30** T-groups

#### Sunday

**9:00-10:15** Total-group activity.

A variety of materials (large blocks, tinker toys, crayons, construction paper, etc.) was distributed about the large meeting room. Attention was called to those materials, and (working alone, in pairs, or in groups) members were encouraged to find something they wished to work with in order to inquire further regarding themselves and inter-personal relations. Music was available for listening or moving to. (Rationale: this was Sunday morning and was also the day of RFK's funeral, so we thought people should have full opportunity for choosing their own media of reflection yet have the communion of being together.)

**10:45-12:00** Sextets.

(We met briefly as a total group to explain the basis for forming the groups and to state the task of the groups (i.e., *to attempt to be authentic*). The sextets then met for the first time.

1:00- 3:00 T-groups.

7:30- 8:30 T-groups (or clusters).

8:45- Film - "A Thousand Clowns."

(Rationale: partly entertainment, partly its relevance to where people seemed to be in the lab)

#### Monday

9:00-10:15 Activities.

Through advance announcement, individuals could choose among the following concurrent activities: physical movement, finger-painting and "improvisation."\* Rationale: continue providing varied modes for exploring self and interpersonal relations, yet with choice and readiness left to the individual. In the conduct of each, there was room for wide variations of involvement and participation. It was possible to choose the same or different activities each of the three days an activity period was scheduled.)

\*A separate report on this activity is being prepared by Donald Glad.

10:45-12:00 Sextets.

1:00- Free time.

7:30- 9:30 T-groups.

#### Tuesday

9:00-10:15 Activity - fantasy.

Participants met in clusters, with one staff person in each conducting the activity and the other participating.

10:45-12:00 Sextet.

1:00- 3:00 T-group (or cluster).

7:30- 9:30 T-group (or cluster).

#### Wednesday

9:00-10:15 Activity. Smorgasbord (painting, fantasy, movement or improvisation)

10:45-12:00 Sextets.

1:00- 3:00 T-groups.

7:30- Free evening.

### THREE GREAT DAYS AT THE DOW LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE CENTER AT HILLSDALE COLLEGE — AUGUST 25, 26 & 27

HEAR AND DISCUSS "THE MANAGEMENT DILEMMA OF THE 70's" WITH DR. SAUL GELLERMAN, DR. EUGENE E. JENNINGS, DR. M. SCOTT MYERS, DR. HERBERT NORTHRUP, ROBERT TANNEHILL AND 35 OTHER TOP RESOURCE PEOPLE.

Watch, listen and participate as this high-level, fast-moving conference massages the tough environmental factors that promise to influence the corporate future. Take home ideas that will help form your own solution to the sensitive and ominous years ahead.

BE ON HAND AS THE DILEMMA EXPLODES INTO THREE MAJOR CRISES —

- THE MANPOWER CRISIS — AUGUST 25
- THE HUMAN EFFECTIVENESS CRISIS — AUGUST 26
- THE URBAN AFFAIRS CRISIS — AUGUST 27

Located in southern Michigan, the Dow Leadership Conference Center is a unique facility. There's nothing like it in the country. Those who have been there agree. The full conference cost is \$175.00 which includes fee, lodging, meals and social hours. Proportionate costs are available to those attending one or two days. The conference will be limited to the first 300 registrants, so early registration is urged.

TELL YOUR ASSOCIATES ABOUT THIS "MUST" CONFERENCE, THEN CALL (517-437-3311) OR WRITE TO RICHARD L. HILL, DIRECTOR, DOW LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE CENTER, HILLSDALE COLLEGE, HILLSDALE, MICHIGAN 49242, FOR DESCRIPTIVE LITERATURE OR ADVANCE REGISTRATION.



## Thursday

9:00-10:15 Activity - smorgasbord.

10:45-12:00 Sextets.

1:00- 3:00 T-groups.

7:30- 9:30 T-groups (or clusters).

## Friday

9:00-10:15 T-groups.

10:45-12:00 Sextets.

1:00- 3:00 Closing General Meeting.

- (a) After announcing the purpose of the afternoon as focusing on group-level developments, bringing the community together again and having some fun, the staff member asked the T-groups to divide into halves. The staff formed a separate group. Each then took a minute to identify a sound which members thought captured the flavor of their T-groups, then on signal all sub-groups "sounded off" together. Then each sub-group repeated its sound while the others listened (and howled).
- (b) Each sub-group did the "trust exercise" - passed each member who wished to take part around the circle, then rocked him. (Rationale: pleasure, display of trust and support)
- (c) Each sub-group was again asked to think of a sound which reflected its T-group and again these were sounded in concert and then individually.
- (d) In clusters, one group talked about its self-perception as indicated by its sounds and about members' reactions while the other group observed, shared its impressions, then changed roles.

(During this session the staff took part as a separate group.)

7:30- 9:30 T-groups.

## Saturday

8:30-10:30 T-groups.

10:30- Coffee.

(Rationale: provide good opportunity for those who wished to say goodbye)

## OUTCOMES

No attempt was made to obtain reactions from the participants. Instead, assessment is in terms of the extent to which the intended processes occurred. The major sources of information are the observations of the staff which were discussed and noted during staff meetings, and from people in the group leaders program who were participants in the lab. Information from these two sources are presented

separately. Staff impressions were as follows:

1. The thing which was most noticeable to the staff was the difference in the mood of this lab as contrasted with others in which they had been involved: the mood (of both staff and most of the participants) was one of pleasure, liveliness, supportiveness and openness. People seemed to enjoy the morning activities, they seemed to feel free to take part or not to take part in most activities. "Learning can be fun."

2. The theme around which the events of the lab were planned became clear to the participants, and so far as we could determine each activity "made sense" to them. This was indicated by the fact that very few questions were raised regarding the reason why things were planned as they were, by the fact that there were very few indications of counter-dependence - no suspicion about there being a "master plan." No suspicion about differences between our lab and the other one which was concurrent, few questions regarding the presence of interns (group leader program participants) in this lab, no questions about when the staff did its planning, etc. and the absence of "angry feelings."

3. The goals of inducing high involvement, low anxiety, and much learning appeared to have been accomplished.

4. There appeared to be an integrity to the sequence of events. The pattern of engaging in varied activities and following this with time for reflection around the original five questions seemed to catch on readily, and so too did the idea of offering participants choice of "modes of experiencing oneself." (Some people chose to stay with one type of activity several days, to pursue something in depth, while others chose to try a variety.) While the smorgasbord was offered three mornings, there was little tapering off of participation.

Reactions of the interns were as follows:

1. The sextets seemed to be particularly meaningful to the interns. In part this was because sextets provided opportunity for the interns to practice serving as trainers; but they also provided opportunity for people to see themselves in another context than the T-group and to have reactions from another person who saw them in both.

2. The smorgasbord with its variety of activities and freedom of choice struck the interns as being excellent. Some felt more time could have been given to these, some suggested a different sequence, and one thought more time should have been given to examining reactions to the activities.

3. All who responded indicated a deep level of personal learning.

We think it is safe to say that this laboratory provided opportunity for the participants to feel and then "to discover the existence and examine the meaning of their affections."