

Gurth Higgin and Harold Bridger

The Psycho-Dynamics of an Inter-Group Experience*

Introduction

This paper offers an analysis of processes that occur between groups collaborating on a task of direct relevance to an objective they have in common. Theoretically it is based on the work of Bion (1961) who distinguishes between two levels of group activity: that of the “sophisticated” or “work” group (*W*), which involves learning and development and addresses specific tasks that must be met and undertaken in social reality; and that of the *basic assumptions*—dependence (*baD*), fight/flight (*baF*) and pairing (*baP*)—which are unlearned, primitive emotional response systems existing as unconscious patterns that alternate with each other. The basic group organization may be in conflict with the sophisticated or *W* organization, and is often unrecognized by members of the group, whose level of performance may be severely impaired in consequence. A detailed exposition and critique of his views is given by Sutherland (Vol. 1, “Bion Revisited”) who also explains such psychoanalytic concepts as projection and introjection, extensive use of which is made in this paper.

The setting of the Inter-Group Exercise, as it was called, was a two-week Tavistock/Leicester Group Relations Training Conference (Trist and Sofer, 1959; Rice, 1965; Miller, Vol. 1, “Experiential Learning in Groups I”). The conference, held in November 1959, was the second such conference. The core experience had been the “study groups.” The Inter-Group Exercise was added to investigate inter-group behavior.

The ideal experience for this purpose would be to analyze inter-group processes in real-life situations. This is not possible in a training setting. At the other extreme were case-study/role-playing activities. The Inter-Group Exercise attempted to find an experience somewhere between these two poles. It provided a task that was real within the conference setting, but which lacked the degree of commitment or emotional involvement that a real-life situation

*A shortened version of the original—*Human Relations*, 17:391–446, 1964.

would evoke. It did, however, create something that was more meaningful and powerful than is possible with a case-study procedure, or even with the more exciting "business game" type of event.

The overall task was to decide on a program of special interest sessions to take place in the second week of the conference. Members were to divide themselves into three groups which would work together in a self-chosen fashion to achieve an agreed program. The Exercise was analogous to what goes on in ordinary working groups. There was a concrete decision to be taken that would affect all the participants. They would experience the results of their decisions. The Exercise was developed by Bridger as a result of previous work with Glidewell of the National Training Laboratories at Bethel.

The conference was held at a large hotel in a small spa in the north of England. To qualify for membership an individual had to be currently in a post of responsibility. Twenty-nine members took part: four prison governors, five lecturers in education, five industrial executives; two hospital sister-tutors; six personnel or training managers in industry; seven applied social scientists from European institutions. Members had been asked on their application forms to suggest topics of particular interest to them which might be taken up during the special interest sessions. There were eight full-time staff, two from the University of Leicester and six from the Tavistock Institute.

Eight 1½-hour sessions would be devoted to the Exercise, which was to start on the afternoon of the second day. By this time the members would have experienced two study groups and one theory session. In the first session of the Exercise members would decide on a method of dividing themselves into three groups, X, Y and Z. Division into study groups was excluded, but any other type of division was allowable.

A questionnaire would evaluate the decisions reached by the groups at various points in the Exercise: the willingness of group members to carry out these decisions; and the degree of satisfaction with the way their group had arrived at them. This evaluation instrument was used five times, the results being made known to the groups.

Each group would proceed in its own way and would have attached to it a staff observer. The observers would help the groups achieve their tasks and were free to make group-centered comments. They had a recording role as a secondary function. The staff not directly concerned as observers formed a separate group. The resources of the whole staff were offered for use during the special interest sessions.

For the second and third sessions groups would devise a system of communicating with each other by means of envoys. The envoys would reach agreement on a single consolidated plan for the special interest sessions. In the fourth session, all the groups would evaluate their experience during the planning stages. The fifth, sixth and seventh sessions would be devoted to

carrying out the program decided upon. The eighth would evaluate the members' experience.

The Exercise

FORMATION OF THE GROUPS

The Exercise took place in the ballroom of the hotel, a large room 54 ft. × 47 ft. In the center of one of the long sides was a small stage and about 12 feet into the dance floor there were two large pillars about four feet square. The rest was clear.

The first session opened with the conference members seated in an irregular group in front of the stage but on the far side of the two pillars. The staff were along the front of the stage at floor level with the conference director standing in front of them facing the members. In the haphazard seating a group of seven or eight were to the side of one of the pillars. There was no-one outside the other pillar.

The Exercise was opened by the conference director running over the instructions. There were several requests for further clarification. Two new points were introduced. First, although members of the staff were willing to provide whatever help they could, the conference was reminded that there were resources among the members themselves relevant to many of the special interests listed. Secondly, that the first phase of the Exercise—to arrive at a decision about the basis for dividing into the three groups—should take no longer than 15 minutes. The conference director then said that the Exercise should start immediately and that within 15 minutes the members should have decided on what basis they would split up into groups.

What happened in the next minute or so was unexpected and crucial. After a short pause a member asked what the groups X, Y and Z were to do. The director explained this again. Immediately, somebody else asked about the role of the staff during the first part of the Exercise when the three groups were working separately. This, too, was answered. Then came a question as to whether the groups were to deal with content or were to just set a program without content. The director answered that they were asked to do what they themselves considered to be a planning job and to deal with content or not as they thought fit. In finishing, he reminded them that they now had 14 minutes left to decide on a means of forming into groups.

Immediately Z1, an industrial member, said that in industry those responsible for making such a decision would have the advice and help of staff. There was anger in his voice. While he was speaking, the small group of people who were to the outside of the pillar stood up and moved their chairs around to join

the main body so that they could participate more easily. At the same time the members of staff, except the three who were to operate as the group observers, and the conference director, stood up and moved off to that part of the hall designated for the staff group. These movements precipitated other movements, some members standing up and picking up their chairs. Immediately after *Z1* had finished, a member said in a loud voice, "Let's do it alphabetically." He was disregarded. The general stir of movement suddenly increased and within seconds one group of people were heading towards one corner of the room while another were heading for the diagonally opposite corner; in the middle some were standing and some sitting. This central group was made up mainly of those who had come around from behind the pillar. The two groups who had moved were in the corners nominated as *X* and *Z* and the two observers for these groups moved off to join them. The third observer joined those in the middle of the floor. In this way, within 15 seconds, the division had been made without any conscious decision as to how it should be done.

A minute or so later, the group in the middle of the floor, with their observer, moved over to the vacant corner nominated for *Y*. In the *X* corner there were 10 people, in the *Y* eight and in the *Z* 11. All groups then filled out the evaluation sheets regarding the group division process.

PLANNING SESSIONS

SESSION ONE

X: *X* had a rather sharp division of opinion about electing a chairman but did finally elect one. They fell into detailed discussion of the special interest items and developed two noticeable factions. The two factions seemed to be fairly clear what they were falling out about and reached a compromise solution. To achieve this the group took a vote, but they were not content with voting and did not use it again.

The reaction of *X* to the results of the questionnaire was one of interest; they were particularly struck by the great degree of dissatisfaction reported by *Y*. It was as a result of this information that they decided to make an offer to *Y* of repeating the original division exercise. In this action they showed some awareness of the other groups' reaction to the initial break-up, and of their own position.

Y: *Y* were the last to move to their corner. They gathered there in a noticeably dispirited fashion after an initial burst of indignation and sat around rather at a loss what to do next. There was some desultory discussion and lapses into

silence. The group became a little more lively when they got the results of the first questionnaire. These showed that they were noticeably below the level of the others in their satisfactions about the initial division into groups. It was about this time that an envoy arrived from *X* to report that, while his own group were content with the division, they had noticed the low satisfaction on the part of *Y* and offered, if *Y* wished, to join them in repeating the first part of the Exercise. *Y*'s reaction was to perk up a little but to say that, although they were unhappy, they would continue as they were.

The boost in their morale from this incident was not very lasting and after a time they relapsed into fragmentary conversation and periods of silence. After one of these long silences one member produced the outline of a plan for reconciling the special interests of members and for an organization through which the conference might take account of them in the following week's sessions.

The plan was taken up by some but others paid no attention. A division showed itself between those who were active in the planning task and those who were quite silent, out of touch and apparently depressed. The observer reported that several appeared to be quite shocked with the experience they had had in the initial division. Towards the end of the session the group, in a rather casual way, elected a chairman. It was this member (*Y1*) and the member who had originally produced the outline plan (*Y2*) who later became the envoys for *Y*.

Z: *Z* became active as soon as they got to their corner and by the time the observer arrived had already elected a chairman and secretary. They spent the first session arguing volubly over the details of the listed special interest topics. Their reaction to the report of the first questionnaire was one of passing interest only. They seemed hardly aware of any significance it might have and continued with their compulsive inspection of the special interests. Various members took on the roles of "sneerer" at the others and at the whole Exercise; of "clown"; and of withdrawn non-participant. There was little member satisfaction. Two distinct factions were apparent but neither was clear what were the differences between them.

The only movement between the groups during the first session was that of the envoy who went from *X* to *Y*.

SESSION TWO

X: *X* had had an extra meeting before this session. It turned out to be of little value. They simply went over the ground they had already covered. When they

were given the results from the questionnaire, the chairman noticed that there were two members who had expressed dissatisfaction. He did all he could to get them to declare themselves, which they did not do. *X* were the first group to send members outside to make contact with other groups. Their first contact was with the staff to ask questions about the resources available for possible special interest sessions. *X* were also the first to make contact with the other groups, particularly *Y*, in connection with arranging the envoys' meeting. *X*, unlike *Y* and *Z*, gave their envoys the status only of delegates, not of fully responsible representatives.

While the envoys' meeting was taking place, the remainder of the group discussed their own activities to date and the manner in which they had behaved as a group. They thought of contacting the other two groups during this period and explaining to them the plan that *X* had made for presentation at this first envoys' meeting.

The group were eager to hear from their envoys—"How have we done?" The envoys' report sharpened their interest in and commitment to their own plan when they heard that other plans had been put up. They decided that theirs was the best and were determined to defend it and have it carried as the plan for the conference as a whole. *X* showed considerable glee at the news of a split in *Z*. The chairman of *X* was eager that they should come to a decision about their reactions to the plans of the other groups but the group decided that they could not discuss this in the time remaining and resolved to have an extra session before the formal session on the following day.

Y: *Y*'s chairman had had an informal meeting with two other members to discuss the planning problem further. This piece of extra work was useful in the development of the planning task but was not approved by the majority, who felt it was a private meeting that should not have been held without the knowledge of the whole group.

The two factions showed themselves again, one being active in the planning task, the other withdrawn. *Y* made several approaches to the staff group—to obtain information on the course of the Exercise and on the supposed rulings about the nature of staff participation in the special interest sessions. They were also concerned with exploring the roles that the staff might take in the meetings of envoys. The *Y* envoys were the first to emerge onto the center of the floor for the initial envoys' meeting. While the envoys were away the rest of the group fell into a withdrawn, inactive silence.

The members of the group were eager to have a report from their envoys. They, like *X*, showed great glee on hearing that there was a split in *Z*. They also showed considerable delight in what they took to be the good report of useful activity by their two envoys.

Z: At the opening of the session, the chairman of Z offered to resign because he thought he was doing the job badly. He was *ZI*, the man who had played a significant part in triggering the original division of the groups. His offer was not accepted. The group then had the report on the questionnaire. Several members declared that the group as a whole had reported rather a lower level of satisfaction than they felt was true. There were some jokes about their all being hypocrites, which faded away into languid and unsystematic activity. Z were slow in sending their envoys to the first central meeting. Those of both *X* and *Y* were out on the floor waiting for them and making signs to hurry up. They clearly felt persecuted by these demands. The envoys they did send included the leader of the minority within themselves. They went off with a very unclear brief.

The mood of the remaining group members noticeably relaxed. They became much easier with each other and with their observer. This was the first time they took account of the observer. They showed no interest at all in the envoys' meeting. Nor did they show any interest in their envoys' report when they came back. The minority leader commented that he thought that *Y*'s plan was very much the best.

Apart from the envoys' meeting in the middle of the hall, there had been several contacts by *X* and *Y* with each other and with *Z*, and also with the staff board. Except for sending out their envoys, late and under pressure, *Z* had not initiated any external contacts.

The first envoys' meeting was taken up with the presentation of plans by each set of envoys. Those submitted by *X* and *Y* were fairly comprehensive. That of *Z* was little more than a confused catalogue.

Z let it be known that there was a split within their group. The leader of the *Z* minority, who was one of their envoys, asked the staff member present if members could change groups during the Exercise. Both the other groups drew the conclusion that *Z* was internally riven and was not a serious contender for making a viable plan. *X* and *Y* each decided that the other was the main competitor.

SESSION THREE

X: Between the second and third sessions *X* had another extra session. This proved to be rather more useful than that of the day before. They became absorbed with whether their envoys should be representatives or delegates. They decided that they should be representatives, but without full authority beyond given limits. These limits were never clearly defined. The group asked for, and were granted, the right for their envoys to refer back to them if the

central meeting took them outside the brief they had been given. The group had agreed that they could ignore Z. They decided that they could handle Y by means of a compromise that would not undermine the nature of the X plan.

After their envoys left, the remaining members set out rather enthusiastically on a scheme for research on what had gone on within their group during the course of the Exercise. This project did not get very far because the director invited the remaining members of all three groups to come to the center and act as a silent audience to the final envoys' meeting. X were particularly incensed by this because they had become interested in doing their own research. They angrily declared that the director had changed the rules; however, they did join the central envoys' group. In the course of this meeting, one of the X envoys retired with his group to take advice on a point that had come up that was beyond their brief.

Y: Y held an extra meeting the material from which is reported with that from the third official meeting below. The chairman said he had spoken to the chairmen of the other two groups and suggested that there be a staff chairman for the envoys' meeting. The group did not take this point up enthusiastically. The chairman also suggested that the members of Y might have some informal contact with the other two groups to try to win them over to Y's plan.

Y were noticeably pleased with themselves about their plan, which they thought was very much the best. The discussion now took on a political color, the group deciding that they could ignore Z. Their task in carrying through their plan would be to overcome the alternative bid from X.

The term "reparation" was used for the first time in connection with Y's analysis of the relationships of the other two groups to themselves; they ascribed guilt to them for what they had done at the expense of Y in the initial break-up. However, Y were against their chairman's suggestion of pressing their advantage by attempts to convert the other two groups to their point of view. They condemned this as propagandist.

YI continued to explore with the other two groups the possibility of having a staff chairman for the envoys' group. He got sufficient agreement from X for this plan, but could get no sense out of Z. Some of the members of the non-active, rather depressed, section of Z did not know which of the other groups was which.

Z: Z went through an experience of considerable confusion and strife. They had great difficulty in getting a sufficient briefing for their envoys to take to the central meeting, which caused them to be late for it. They experienced as extremely irritating intrusions the attempts of the other groups to hurry them along. Indeed, the outstanding characteristic of this session was Z's feeling of anger towards the other groups and the staff, and their strong sense of being persecuted by them all.

At the final central meeting, the Z envoys had nothing to offer as a direct contribution to the plan for the special interest sessions, although they played an important part in the process of compromise that went on between X and Y. The next step towards putting the plan into force was to be a further meeting of the group envoys, after they had consulted with their groups, for the purpose of nominating a planning committee. The whole of Z, who had overheard this discussion, misunderstood and thought that the next meeting was to be of the planning committee. They therefore sent two members other than their envoys to this meeting. Faced with this situation, the envoys of X and Y accepted, not only these two nominees, but the original Z envoys on the planning committee. In this way, Z provided half of the eight members of the planning committee.

During the second envoys' meeting, the political alignment that had emerged showed itself from the start. The X and Y envoys were very sharply in competition. Both pairs showed confidence and determination to carry the day. The Z envoys played a much more subdued part, siding at one time with X and at another with Y and, towards the end of the meeting, withdrawing altogether and allowing the final X and Y confrontation to take place. The outcome was seen as a victory for Y—certainly in the eyes of the members of Y, whose envoys gained the political advantage over the X envoys who needed to withdraw to seek a further mandate from their group.

The two Y envoys also played their parts well in a complementary way. Y1, their chairman, was an aggressive and determined speaker. There was going to be an impasse if there was not some show of meeting the compromise that X were offering, with Z support. Y2, the woman member, took over and, with equal determination but much more gentleness, carried the Y position through the compromise situation with success. The outcome was an amalgam of the X and Y plans. Each group later claimed the major victory for itself—but the sense of success was greater with Y.

The Evaluation Instrument and Its Results

THE INSTRUMENT

The evaluation sheet contained three questions only: how satisfied were you with the decision made by the group; how willing were you to carry out the decision of the group; and how satisfied were you with the way the group worked on the problem. Respondents were asked to put a tick against one point on a five-point scale, varying from high satisfaction through neutral to low. The instrument was used on five occasions:

Evaluation Sheet 1 was given immediately after the division into groups, when each of the three groups went to its respective corner of the ballroom.

The decision referred to was that of the conference as a whole in splitting up into groups.

Evaluation Sheet 2 was completed at the end of the first session when the groups had agreed on an outline of a plan. It referred to this internal group decision.

Evaluation Sheet 3 referred to the work of the central envoy group as reported back to *X*, *Y* and *Z*. It was due to be given at the end of the second session after the first inter-group meeting. There was some confusion about this and, in fact, it was filled out at the beginning of the next conference session some two hours later.

Evaluation Sheet 4 was completed within the groups again, and referred to the revised plans that the groups sent to the final envoys' meeting after they had been informed about the plans of the other groups.

Evaluation Sheet 5 applied to the work of the final envoys' meeting that decided on the overall conference plan.

The recording counted responses to the three questions. The procedure was to arrive at an algebraic sum of all the positive and all the negative responses, ignoring those that fell at the neutral point. To allow comparison between the groups, which were of different sizes, these final figures were put on a base of ten. The ordinates for the "graphs" on which the results were reported were the indices for each of the groups on the five occasions when the evaluation sheets were filled out. A simple scale of +10 to -10 was used for each of the reactions asked about.

COMMENT

The three groups produced characteristically different graphs (Figure 1). The greatest change over time is shown by *Y* and the least by *X*. For the two questions dealing with satisfaction about decisions, with the exception of *Y*'s first reaction, all group responses are at the top end of the positive side of the scale, and all show less variation than do the other judgments.

X: *X* showed less variation on all questions than did the other groups and an alternating reaction to the same questions as the Exercise developed. They felt slightly less satisfaction about decisions made within their own group than about those made by the inter-group envoy sessions. They began with a high level of expressed willingness to implement, which rose to a maximum following the first inter-group meetings—at which they thought they had done rather well—and tailed off only slightly thereafter.

Y: The *Y* graphs are the most dramatic. The group's reaction to the initial break-up decision was 100 percent negative. However, by the time they made a

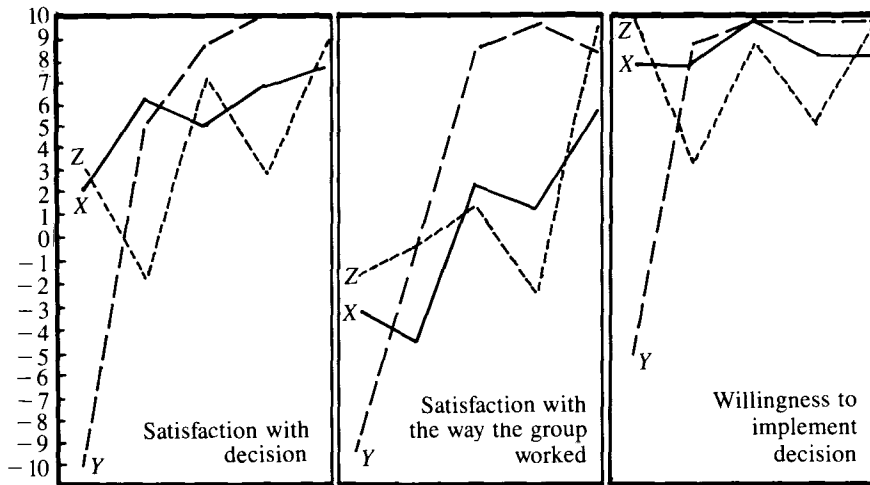


Figure 1. Evaluation sheet results

second report, which had to do with their own internal work as a planning group, their level of satisfaction had changed markedly and took them half way up the positive side of the scale. Thereafter they continued to improve, finding themselves 100 percent on the positive side after their second internal planning session—a level they held to the end of the Exercise. Their unwillingness to implement decisions was never as great as their dissatisfaction with the decisions themselves. Their willingness to implement their own and the inter-group decisions was high and remained high until the end of the Exercise.

Z: The graphs for Z reveal interesting variations. The responses expressing satisfaction with, and willingness to implement, decisions taken in the inter-group arena reached a high level, with corresponding low points for the responses concerning their own decisions. The exception to this zig-zag pattern occurs with their satisfaction about the way the groups worked on problems. Here they showed themselves rather negative to the first break-up decision, neutral about themselves in their first planning session, a little more positive about the first inter-group session, slipping back to dissatisfaction in reflecting on their own second internal planning session, but reaching a maximum of satisfaction regarding the way the final conference decision was taken.

Evaluation Sessions

The first evaluation session started as a plenary for the whole conference, taking the form of a general discussion on the planning sessions. It went on for

about 20 minutes. *X*, *Y* and *Z* then met independently with their observers and spent another 20 minutes in group reviews and evaluations. The whole conference then reconvened and the graphs depicting the evaluation sheet returns were made available. There was now much more interchange of views about the inter-group relationships.

The second session was entirely a plenary discussion, led by the conference director. It covered all aspects of the Exercise and of its product for the three special interest sessions. This is given in the Appendix.

Analysis and Interpretation

FORMATION OF THE GROUPS

Because of its sudden and dramatic nature, the details of this had not been fully recorded. As many members of the conference as possible, therefore, were informally contacted the next day and asked to give short statements both of their recollection of the event and of their feelings about it. These were recorded anonymously by a secretary:

X: "Someone said 'come along' and most of the rest got up and moved either to *Z* or *X* corners. A group . . . moved towards the middle to take part in a general discussion and found . . . the group formation had already taken place. They became group *Y*. . . . *ZI* stood up and made a remark—he was the only one who did—that in industry there would be a leader who would select people to form his group. . . . When people rose following (*ZI*'s) statement . . . I found myself swept into an informal group which settled itself in that corner of the room." "I was feeling pretty sore about the complete organization . . . I did not really want to cooperate and thought we should rebel . . . I wanted to be the leader of a rebellious group . . . I felt a kind of anger."

Y: "Suddenly two groups were formed, leaving a very small number of us who had a very interesting feeling of rejection and of being leftovers, the unwanted . . . It took us, who turned out to be *Y*, some time to recover our balance. One member of the group was shocked into a state of non-participation. The total development in the group was made by not more than four of its members. . . . All through the time we were trying to develop a proposal we felt quite dissatisfied with ourselves and with the proposal . . . then we sent our delegates to the general meeting and they came back each feeling about seven feet high. The proposals we had made were greatly superior to the proposals made by the other groups."

Z: "We were all left in the center of the room with no one at all taking direction; everyone obviously feeling very lost and rather perplexed . . . there seemed to

be a rapid movement towards one corner of the room . . . persons that eventually formed groups X and Z sat down in their respective corners leaving the remainder in the center of the room, who were both amazed and angry . . . they willy-nilly were forced to become the third group. Most people seemed to think that probably a random method of selection for groups was the best way of doing it, although at the time they would have liked a little direction in order to obtain this.”

INTERPRETIVE COMMENT

The first session of the Inter-Group Exercise was in the late afternoon of the second day when the members were, as a group, suffused with a basic assumption of dependence (*baD*). This *ba* was suddenly confronted at the beginning of the Inter-Group Exercise with an apparent betrayal by the conference leadership that was the object of the dependence. The group were put into a situation in which they had to take a decision for themselves. They were not prepared for this and the basic assumption of flight (*baF*) immediately took over, frustrating the development of a task-oriented work (*W*) process.

The group were given two tasks: to take a decision about the principle on which the Inter-Group Exercise groups would be formed—this to take no more than 15 minutes—and the action of actually forming the groups. Faced with this situation, some members were prepared to tackle the first, but the majority were not, and they immediately flew to the second under the dominance of *baF*.

The minority who resisted this flight into action and stayed in the center of the floor were prepared to undertake the first task. Once the flight had occurred, however, and these eight people experienced their exposure, they too succumbed to flight from the situation in which they had been left.

The quotations given above demonstrate the rebellious anti-organizer fight aspect of this basic assumption. The rationale the members gave for their behavior was, first, that the organizers had been aggressive by giving them a job to do that they considered to be both too difficult and inappropriate; and, second, that it was not possible for such a group to reach a decision in the time given.

GUILT AND REPARATION

The following quotation is from private notes made by the conference director during the course of the first session:

Ask X, Y and Z how they felt about the results. Possible interpretation that X and Y could proceed more actively with the task because of the gesture made by X to

Y. *Y* feel that their troubles and difficulties have been perceived and tackled by *X*, and through this recognition can proceed. *X* have made reparation in terms of their own going off and therefore also proceed with the task. Both, however, have expressed their aggression towards *Z* by having no contact. *X* perceives *Z* as the originator of the selfish act. *Y* will have nothing to do with *Z*. It was *X* (the middle group) that had to make the gesture. It is noticeable that the group that suffered most took no action and said it was prepared to go on working. It would now appear that *Z* is the isolated group. At one point, when, the results were being discussed, all members of *Z* turned round to *Y* with questioning looks and even guilt. To what extent will *Z* now be affected in their work by having to lean over backwards to conciliate the group that they have left? And how far will their program be inappropriately oriented towards providing for the unknown interests of the other members of the conference?

This quotation is given because it was the first appreciation that guilt and reparation were a main theme, conditioning the interactions of the groups throughout the Exercise.

From *Y*'s evaluation comes the following statement: "The actions and attitudes of our small group affected the two other more powerful groups because we accused them of doing something and they felt guilty." From *Z*'s evaluation: "The dislocation in *Y* was almost complete but they have constantly improved and have actually got up to finish level. We saw that we were bobbing up and down."

There is also, of course, the significant move by *X* to *Y* following the distribution of the first evaluation sheet results. From the observer's record it can be seen that this was a move of reparation from *X* to *Y* about whom *X* felt uneasy.

The groups did complete the task of the Inter-Group Exercise; they did not remain suffused by basic assumption processes. There was at work through the course of the Exercise an effective *W* process. From the analysis and interpretation below it will be seen that one of the principal tasks that the conference as a whole had to undertake was to contain the basic assumption forces sufficiently to allow the *W* process to proceed.

STARTING SITUATION

It was a matter of only a very few minutes after the original break-up into groups that their initial differentiation was perceptible to all concerned. *Y* had the painful task of facing each other, all conscious of being the conference rejects. This presented them with a tremendous task in handling their common emotional situation. On top of this, like the other groups, they had their Exercise to perform.

The members of *Z* were suffused with a feeling of guilt at being principally responsible for the flight from the conference task that had created the painful situation in which *Y* found themselves. Dominance by guilt as the characteristic of *Z* was present from the beginning. It had a central effect on all that the group did and was not dispelled until the Exercise was complete.

Between these two emotional climates was *X* who, like *Z*, started off with some sense of guilt at what they had done to *Y*. *X*, however, chose to perceive *Z* as the initiators of this move and so were themselves less inhibited by guilt. Their greater freedom from the dominance of guilt allowed *X* to make a gesture of reparation to *Y* which enabled them to get on with their contribution to the overall task.

Each group ascribed from early in the Exercise a definite, if not yet clearly defined, identity to the others. From the results of the first evaluation sheet it can be seen that there had also developed a level of common feeling within groups that marked off the members of each as being much more like one another in their reactions than like members of the other groups. As regards satisfaction, all members of *Y* had reactions that were below the neutral line, all members of *Z* had neutral reactions and *X* straddled it. Thus the members of each group had a fairly consistent self-image even at this stage. By the time the first evaluations were returned their identities and their wish to remain together rather than dissolve and start again were strong. This was true even of *Y* who had had so much pain to contend with. The observers' reports show that competition between groups had already developed as a factor.

DEVELOPMENT OF GROUP CHARACTERISTICS

The first event that took the development of distinctive characteristics a step forward was the reparative approach made by *X* to *Y* during the first session. It was a public gesture of reparation that allowed *Y* to develop sufficient self-confidence to get on with their work. But *Y* were able to meet both their emotional and task demands only because they effectively divided themselves into those who should be concerned with the group's emotional task and those who, because the emotional task was being carried by others, were free to undertake the group's formal task. This work was done by three or four people, the others were not only silent, but out of touch with what these first members were doing. The silent members were doing the group's emotional work, absorbing pain and shock, thus releasing the others to proceed with *W*.

The effectiveness of this division of function by *Y* was such that by the end of the first session and before there had been formal contact with the other groups, they had not only managed to handle their original emotional problem but had made a definite contribution to the task they had been set. This

recovery of *Y*, as the evaluation graph (Figure 1) shows, was a demonstration of the capacity of a group to overcome a forlorn and painful situation. Remarkable though it was, it was possible only because of the roles taken by *X* and *Z*, and *Y*'s relationship with them.

One of the factors that determined the membership of *Y* was a willingness to face the decision-making task given to the whole conference at the beginning of the Exercise and not immediately to fly from this. It would be expected, therefore, that within this group there would be elements of resilience and of ability to hold to a task in face of basic assumption pressures. This proved to be the case, and *Y* displayed from the beginning a determination to show its potency *vis-à-vis* the task and the other groups.

Y arrived at this position at some cost. The observer recorded the painful few minutes during the first session when the whole group retreated from both its tasks, and members withdrew into silence. *Y* were not notable for their democratic procedures. Given the emotional/intellectual differentiation of tasks within the group, the democratic process would not necessarily have been appropriate. There were neither emotional nor intellectual group-wide consensuses. All members did not need to be equally involved in the total group life when there was parity of respect for sub-tasks.

Z, on the other hand, achieved practically nothing in terms of the Exercise task during its first session and little more during the second. Members became compulsively active on a mass of detail but added little to the development of the task. There was internal irritation and bad feeling which led to a split into two factions. These, according to the observer's account, failed even to communicate their points of view to each other. Moreover, *Z*, unlike the other two groups, never felt the need for extra work sessions.

X were again in a middle position. They, too, displayed a certain element of compulsive activity on details but recovered from this. They also suffered some degree of inter-member irritation and the growth of sectional conflict. These were contained and compromises were found. *X* were thus able to make a satisfactory contribution during the first session. The graphs show that their sense of satisfaction with their internal decisions increased, but not so their willingness to implement them. They slipped back in their general feeling of satisfaction. This reflects that side of the group's task that had to do with containing the remnants of the emotional difficulties originating in the guilt inherited from its part in the initial break-up.

Unlike *Y* and *Z*, *X* did not allow themselves to develop any internal differentiation. At the same time, they did not have a clear and unified voice in their external relationships. They were the only group that did not grant their envoys full representative status. By avoiding sharp internal division and by compromising between conflicting positions, *X* prevented themselves from developing a defined policy and so were unable to take a clear and definite external stance.

DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL POSITIONS

By the end of the first session both *X* and *Y* had developed a sufficient sense of self-identity to enable them, during the second session, to initiate external contacts with each other and with the staff group. Their feeling of internal security was such as to allow them to look beyond their own boundaries and to take actions outside themselves appropriate to their developing tasks. It was these two groups who initiated the first meeting of envoys between the groups. *Z* had made no external contacts at all. They had made very little progress on their internal task. Only pressure from the envoys of *X* and *Y* got *Z* to join the first envoys' meeting.

This meeting was the crucial confrontation at which the political positions of the groups were established. *X* and *Y* became the contenders for the role of creator of the plan for the special interest sessions. *Z* brought little more than marginal contributions. *X* and *Y* wrote *Z* off as a political power.

The development of the second envoys' meeting in the third session was much the same. During the early part *X* and *Y* were making a good many external contacts with each other, with the staff group, and with *Z*, whereas *Z*, initiating no external contacts, became increasingly persecuted by the attentions of others.

During the first half of the final envoys' meeting the *Z* envoys teamed up alternatively with *X* and *Y*, but for the second half they effectively retired from the discussion, leaving *X* and *Y* to final confrontation over the points of conflict in their two plans.

In this political struggle between *X* and *Y*, *Y* emerged as the most potent group. Unlike *X*, they did not need to withdraw and take counsel. When, after taking counsel, *X* came back with an acceptance of *Y*'s proposal, this was perceived by *Y* to be a public acceptance of the greater determination, unity, and effectiveness of *Y*.

FINISHING SITUATION

The finishing mood of *Y* was one of considerable satisfaction, almost of glee, at what they as a group had achieved from such an unpromising beginning.

The division of labor between the emotional and the task demands, which was the necessary means whereby *Y* achieved their success, is illustrated by both the group's and their envoys' reactions when the envoys were away from the group. The envoys were their chairman and the member who was most responsible for the development of their plan. They were the leaders of the *W*-oriented subgroup within *Y*. The members left behind were mainly those who had been doing the emotional task of the group. When the envoys were at

the center, the group that remained became depressed and worried about what their envoys might be doing. Similarly, the lack of cohesion between their intellectual and emotional life showed itself in a parallel concern on the part of the envoys. During the group's evaluation session both the envoys reported that they were concerned about the group when they were away from it.

During the evaluation session *Y* became preoccupied with the slight dip to the final position of the graph recording their satisfaction. Their conclusion was that this represented "the group's horror that it was about to die, although the total conference group had achieved its task."

Z's evaluation was much more restrained and introspective. They became interested to interpret the "bumping up and down" of their group reactions at different points through the Exercise. Their conclusion was that "at the end of the negotiations a feeling of satisfaction was the outcome." They decided that their responses to the central envoy meetings showed that the group itself was incapable of doing anything that satisfied it, and that it was only when the overall conference task went forward at the envoys' sessions that any degree of satisfaction could be achieved.

Although the step to an inter-group interpretation was not made by the group, they felt that they "did what was required," even though this could not obviously be seen as a direct contribution to the overall task of the conference. That *Z* as a whole felt that they had made a useful contribution and were satisfied with the result can be seen from the final positions on the graphs of their expressed satisfaction. At two points they were at the position of maximum satisfaction, and almost so on the third at the end of the Exercise.

X again displayed characteristics of both the other groups in evaluating their experience. They were quite satisfied with themselves although they did not have the euphoria that suffused *Y*. Their main concern was to learn a little more from the introspection and recollection of why they had done things the way they had. They decided that they had handled their differences rather well. They prided themselves on developing a culture of containment and compromise, which had allowed them to avoid a direct split such as *Z* had experienced. In arriving at this conclusion the group once again showed their tendency to compromise by finding valuable aspects in the behavior of both their majority and minority groups.

PROJECTION-INTROJECTION HYPOTHESIS

The members of the conference as a whole, divided into three groups in the Exercise, managed to accomplish the overall task. They produced a practical plan for the special interest sessions, and at the same time contained the

emotional forces working against this achievement. The principal psychodynamic mechanism whereby the work was done was a pattern of projection and introjection of these emotional forces as a division of labor among the groups.

Z was not involved in the (for X cathartic and for Y reparative) activities following the distribution of the first evaluation sheet. From this point Z felt themselves, and were perceived by the others, as the most guilty group. This recognition prevented Z from ever making real contact with the task of the whole. The group became preoccupied with internal struggles, irritation, depression and splitting. Very early they showed themselves as an isolated group. They initiated no outward contact at all. This emotional stance of Z was of value to the other groups. It allowed X to project into Z the remnants of their own guilt. It also allowed Y to project into Z their aggression towards all who had left them stranded. By this means the release that both X and Y had experienced was reinforced. X and Y did the work that resulted in a conference plan for the special interest sessions. They could not have done it had they not had Z doing the emotional work for them, releasing them for the planning work. The group processes that went on within Z can be seen as a replica of the processes on the wider stage. In the evaluation, something of this was seen by the members themselves.

Z had taken on the complementary introjection of the emotional difficulties of the conference as a whole, which the other groups were quite happy to project into them. Z were not unaware of their function in this respect. It was a member of Z who, in the evaluation, would not accept dissatisfaction with the group's contribution to the overall task because "We did what was required." Because of the special emotion-containing role the group were carrying, they were not free to take decisions for themselves or to contribute to those of the whole. As the graphs show, it was only when progress on the common task was made at the inter-group meetings that Z felt any satisfaction. The group seemed to realize that the satisfaction of work done could be achieved only outside itself in the meeting of envoys. It was during group meetings that Z felt any satisfaction. The group seemed to realize that the satisfaction of work done could be achieved only outside itself in the meeting of envoys. It was not the group's function to do this internally: "Contact with external groups made the solution possible." The high level of satisfaction recorded at the end of the Exercise by Z is further evidence of their attitude. It must, indeed, have been a pleasant release for Z to have the task completed so that they could shake off the scapegoat role that they had carried on behalf of the conference as a whole.

Some recognition of the contribution of Z to the task can be seen in the willingness of X and Y to allow Z twice the number of representatives that they each had on the planning committee. X and Y could have insisted that Z should have only the allotted number.

Z's need for the central envoys' meeting to be successful can be seen in the way their envoys behaved. The observer reported that the Z envoys were surprisingly lucid and useful at the envoys' meetings compared with their behavior inside their group. Although the group sent the leader of its minority as well as a spokesman for its majority as envoys, they did not break up the central meeting by carrying their internal split to it. On the contrary, the Z envoys' behavior assisted the work of compromise going on between the other two competing groups. They tended to side with one or the other in the compromise-finding process, and then withdrew for the other two to reach their final settlement, which Z was happy to accept.

COEXISTENCE OF ANXIETIES, DEFENSES AND WORK PROCESSES

The Exercise as a whole carried throughout a ground-bass of *baF*. This was shown during the initial break-up and in members' comments about it. It was still present in the final evaluation: "I felt that we had not been given quite enough chance to find our feet before something rather formidable was put upon us. It was asking a bit too much at that early stage in the conference to stand up to this." "Especially when previously we had had two study groups. This was an expression of aggression."

During the Exercise, there were various attempts to make the change back to basic assumption behavior. On several occasions moves were made to involve the staff in making decisions or in taking executive roles for the conference as a whole. Had the staff accepted these implicit invitations, the conference would probably have returned to *baD*. Such a return would have been so deep that the conference would never thereafter have accepted the struggle to achieve its task.

Nevertheless, the conference did have to cope continually with the ground-bass of the fight/flight assumption with which it started and which it never lost. There was, however, genuine emotional learning as a result of the dramatic explosion in the first few seconds of the Exercise. The guilt and aggression left behind had to be dealt with in its various groups if the Conference were to get on with its task. It also had to contain the continuing temptation to flight which it did by creating in Z a part of itself that carried the emotional burden for the whole. Z continued in flight. They remained disturbed and unable to work because of their preoccupation with the guilt that had arisen from the first flight, which they had absorbed on behalf of the whole conference. Because Z were doing this job and having these elements in X and Y projected into them and, in turn, introjecting them, it was possible for the other two groups to be sufficiently free from this basic assumption to get on with the task. In this way, all the groups can be seen to have accepted, and in their different ways acted

on, the task-traction of the shared real objective. With any group of ordinary people, once they are convinced that responsibility does rest with themselves, the development of such task-traction is inevitable. Not only is it the way, through reality acceptance, of achieving any degree of positive ego satisfaction, the alternative is an unsatisfying confusion and, in the extreme, universal futility (Fairbairn, 1952).

This process did not completely free the conference from the fight aspect of the basic assumption in operation. The idiom of the working relationship between *X* and *Y* was one of sharp competition. Each was fighting the other for the honor of drawing up the conference plan for the special interest sessions.

The three groups took an equal share in the work of the whole conference of which they were all part and for which the task was being done. There were two tasks to carry out. One was the sophisticated task—the planning task; the other was to contain the intruding basic assumption that was interfering with this. This was a fight/flight basic assumption. *X* and *Y* were able to handle *W*, and, through their competitive relationship, the fight side of this basic assumption. *Z* carried the main emotional burden—containing and manifesting throughout the Exercise the element of flight, by making no real contact with the task, and also by taking on the guilt and aggression of the other two groups.

Basic assumption and *W* can coexist. In most life situations, which are never free of these processes, the greatest social sophistication is to find a way, as did the conference members on this occasion, of allowing the emotional and the work tasks to be carried on concurrently.

Appendix: The Product

Five members with a staff chairman constituted the Planning Committee which circulated 24 items from the original list of special interests. Members signified their first and second choices. Items were grouped into three sections. *A* had nine items with which members of staff were willing to help; *B* four items with which staff had not expressed such a willingness; *C* 11 items that the staff considered already covered in the program. The returns gave 52 (89 percent) from *A*, five from *B* and only one from *C*.

For *X* the most popular choice (20 percent) was “Interviewing techniques—especially group techniques,” a role-playing session conducted by the staff. For *Y* (38 percent) “Resistance to change in large organizations,” a seminar to be run by a staff member; for *Z* (27 percent) “How to use the dynamic individual,” again a seminar to be run by a staff member. Very close behind (23 percent) was “Problems of verbal communication”—another seminar to be run by a staff member.

The most popular overall was “Resistance to change in large organiza-

tions," 22 percent of all preferences. The next was "How to use the dynamic individual," 16 percent of all choices.

Most people had their first choice. Five groups were set up:

- Resistance to change in large organizations (8 members).
- Problems of verbal communication and problems of correlating theoretical and practical training (7 members).
- How to use the dynamic individual (6 members).
- The effects of group work on attitudes (4 members).
- Interviewing techniques—especially group techniques (4 members).

Each group had a staff member allocated to it but was free to decide how to go about its study.

All groups presented material at the third session: one a short dissertation on the results of the work, using their own experience as their case material; three others conducted role-playing sessions—with or without commentary; the fifth, concerned with problems of communication, used a variety of blackboard and tape-recorder techniques and a communication exercise involving the whole membership. In none of these presentations was a staff member invited to participate.

There was no doubt of the involvement of all participants in these sessions. The quality of the final presentations was high. The members had produced a plan which had succeeded in accomplishing the objective set.

References

- Bion, W.R. 1961. *Experience in Groups and Other Papers*. London: Tavistock Publications; New York: Basic Books.
- Fairbairn, W.R.D. 1952. *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Rice, A.K. 1965. *Learning for Leadership: Interpersonal and Intergroup Relations*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Trist, E.L. and C. Sofer. 1959. *Exploration in Group Relations*. Leicester: Leicester University Press.