



GREX 2012 CONFERENCE GROUP RELATIONS DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Conference Method and Content

The Conference is an educational model in the “Tavistock” tradition based on experiential learning and associated review and analysis. While lectures and formal presentations are not a part of the design, there are 8 hours of didactic material included in the Conference Review and Conference Opening Events, the 3 Role Analysis and Application Events, and in the Opening and Discussion/Review parts of the Organizational System Event (see below). The Conference is organized as a temporary institution, within which phenomena that arise in groups and organizations can be examined and understood as they occur in the “here and now.” The Conference structure has many characteristics of existing organizations and social institutions. The experiential model provides a focus on what happens within and between groups *at the time it is occurring*. Participants may explore the complex and often covert processes of organizational systems as they experience them directly, in ways that are usually not available for discussion in “real life” organizations.

The Tavistock Group Relations model is built upon the idea that groups take on meanings for participants that are powerful in influencing their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Group process at this level is seldom examined, but crucial to the effectiveness of individuals and organizations in achieving their goals. Sometimes these processes are clear and visible to people; at other times they occur outside the range of conscious thought and feeling.

Course Goals and Objectives

The purpose of this conference is to improve our work and humanistic relationships as professionals, citizens, family members, in relation to our external environments, through a deeper understanding of the nature of authority and power, role, task, and boundary. We will use a group experiential learning method for furthering our understanding about various roles we take as members of diverse groups, how we gain authority, use power, how groups function, and the ways groups can affect their members. In addition, we use this conference to train those who want to gain the skills to work with people and organizations in any environment. These may include health care professionals in their work with patients and their families, managers or team members taking a leadership role, individuals interested in organizational consultation, or those in architecture and the arts and design. Though group relations conferences use similar methodologies and structure to provide opportunities for learning, each one uses a different theme to better study a particular aspect of group and organizational life. In this conference we pay

special attention to the relationship between the self and the group.

Conference participants will have opportunities to:

- Learn about group processes from participation in groups that vary in size, structure, and task.
- Observe the impact of individual characteristics such as race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, and age on authority and power.
- Recognize personal and collective reactions to well-defined authority and power dynamics within delineated boundaries.
- Understand the difference between the stated task of a group and the task it actually appears to be pursuing.
- Learn from experiences such as isolation, autonomy, affiliation, collaboration, and coalition building to improve leadership skills.
- Identify underlying patterns of group interaction by forming groups, establishing governing structures and relating with other groups and the institution as a whole.
- Understand the difference between the stated task of a group and the task it actually appears to be pursuing.
- Apply conference learning to situations in their personal lives, work lives, and professional development.
- Identify what it means to be a leader when authority is used to maintain one in role and on task by generating growth and authority in others.
- Identify the authority within the role of followership and how authorization in role of follower is necessary part of authorization in role of leader.
Identify how groups and organizations could perform better when individuals and sub-groups are authorized to be reflective on their roles, tasks, and performances

The course is designed to provide opportunities to study group and organizational behavior and to learn about the dynamic forces, both conscious and unconscious that influence the life of a group or an organization. Specifically, course objectives include the provision of opportunities to:

- Analyze the nature of leadership, authority and responsibility in groups and organizations.
- Utilize the concepts of task, role and boundary as they relate to the work of groups and organizations.
- Compare the development of collective dynamics, overt and covert, in group settings, and consider the influence of such dynamics on the life of the group and on individual group members.
- Increase ability to identify and articulate specific dynamics that may arise in educational systems, non-profit community based organizations, and private institutions and enterprises.
- Apply the concepts of covert whole group dynamics to workplace and clinical practice settings.

A Systems Learning Model

As it unfolds, the group relations conference creates an experiential laboratory, a temporary institution that provides opportunities to study both the obvious and not-so-obvious dynamics of organizational life. By holding certain factors constant (task, role, time, and place) and while observing others emerge in the “here-and-now” members become participant-observers who make meaning of the very institution they are in the process of co-creating. This temporary institution often mirrors the patterns and relationships of our work and personal lives, enabling us to learn on intellectual, emotional, political and even spiritual levels. Consultants provide observations to promote awareness of emerging themes regarding leadership, authority, task, role, and boundary formation. While intellectual learning about group and organizational behavior is available in many different forums, the group relations conference is a rare enterprise that allows participants to learn experientially.

This model of working and learning evolved from the work of pioneers in group relations theory: A. Kenneth Rice, Wilfred R. Bio, Gordon Lawrence, Pierre Turquet, Eric Miller, and others associated with The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London in the 1950s. Their ideas have since been adopted throughout the world. In the United States, the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems is the national organization that sponsors, through West Coast Center (GREX), this group relations conference and other educational training events.

Conference Structure

The conference is structured through a series of events to provide opportunities to learn through examining one’s experiences in a variety of contexts. The events begin and end promptly at the times designated.

Plenaries – Each plenary will bring together the entire staff and membership to discuss questions regarding the conference and its parts. There are four plenary events scheduled: the Conference Opening and Concluding Plenaries and the Organizational System Event Opening and Closing Plenaries

Small Study Group – These events function in the “here-and-now” to understand issues of leadership and authority in a small system. In these events conference designated consultants offer interpretations about the dynamics of the group where they believe their interventions will facilitate learning. The maximum number of members in each small study group is 10.

Large Study Group – The large study group provides an opportunity to explore and reflect on dynamics which arise in the total conference membership, where face-to-face interaction is not possible. Three staff members are deployed as consultants to the large study group, which is a “here-and-now” event.

Organizational System Event – The Organizational System Event, conducted in the “here-and-now” aside from the Event Opening and the Event Conclusion and Review, provides opportunities for the conference participants and staff to address how authority and leadership among and within systems evolve. Subsystems are created by members. The staff functions in a variety of roles during these events and, as part of the management function of the event, it conducts its own work in open sessions.

Role Analysis and Application Groups – Role Analysis and Application Groups are reflective events designed to facilitate understanding of the roles members adopt within the temporary institution and to encourage application of the learning gleaned from conference experiences to the professional and personal lives of the members.

The conference has three RAAG groups scheduled, one each day for an hour and fifteen minutes. The RAAG group is comprised of a staff consultant and approximately four to six members. In terms of addressing the course learning objectives, it is a critical aspect of the conference design. The purpose of the RAAG group is to give each conference participant an opportunity to receive individual consultation and feedback about their participation in the other conference events. Each participant discusses the roles they have taken in the various group events, the roles they have been assigned or found themselves playing, and a chance to practice articulating and critiquing based upon their perceptions of their own and others’ group and individual participation. The consultant is assigned the task of assuring that each participant can clarify, develop and state clearly their individual learning intention including a discussion of the opportunities and ways in which the participant may experiment with roles as the conference progresses. Consultants can explain group dynamics theory and link it to the individual’s own participation and also help demonstrate the group relations methods and learning opportunities in a reflective and more didactic fashion. An essential aspect of the RAAG group event is for each participant to receive consultation about how to apply their experiences and learning to the home organizational work role. This opportunity to integrate the full range of conference experiences and apply the learning to their own workplace and/or life situation is considered crucial to the educational goals and learning objectives of the conference as a whole.

Two post conference review sessions, approximately two and four weeks after the conference, are offered for all participants and staff to attend for the purpose of more fully implementing the techniques highlighted during the conference. Particular attention is given to the way in which all participants are relating to the conference objectives and are integrating their conference experience into their roles in the workplace. Individual meetings are also offered for this purpose.

All aspects of the “Course Goals and Objectives” are available for examination and discussion during the RAAG meetings and post conference review meetings

Conference Staff

Throughout the conference, staff members serve in a variety of roles designed to encourage awareness, analysis, reflection, and understanding of the emergent conference dynamics. Working from specific but varied roles, the staff works with the members to learn about the processes evident in this particular temporary educational institution and to facilitate application of this learning to other institutions and organizations. The staff's analysis and interpretation of emergent dynamics are conducted at the organizational level. The experiential nature of the conference allows significant opportunity for learning about how individuals and groups affect and are affected by themes, assumptions, myths, and actions in the subsystems and whole system.

Benefit to Consumers

Analyzing how covert or unconscious group dynamics impact organizational life helps prepare conference participants apply the issues of role, task, boundary, formal and informal authorizations, leadership, and dimensions of power to help shape and influence an organization's ability to meet its own goals and objectives. Taking these techniques back to the workplace benefits consumers by providing the foundations for more effective leadership within organizations, better communication between systems, and better delivery of services. For clinicians, the conference serves to heighten awareness of group process. For clinicians and for anyone working within an organization, the increased awareness of group dynamics and of the interaction among subgroups and between subgroups and the organization as a whole provides a strong foundation for improving workplace effectiveness.