

**SENSITIVITY TRAINING AS A MEANS OF ACHIEVING
BEHAVIOR CHANGE IN INDUSTRIAL
AND COMMERCIAL ORGANIZATIONS**

BY

GEORGE EDWARD SEREDNESKY

SENSITIVITY TRAINING AS A MEANS OF ACHIEVING BEHAVIOR
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George Edward Serednesky
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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a Research Paper written by George Edward Serednesky entitled "Sensitivity Training as a Means of Achieving Behavior Change in Industrial and Commercial Organizations." I recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Psychology.

Garland E. Blair

Major Professor

Accepted for the Council:

Wayne E. Stamps

Dean of the Graduate School

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This paper attempts to explore and define the role of Sensitivity Training as a means of achieving behavior change in industrial and commercial organizations. Attention is focused on the training laboratory and, more specifically, on the T-Group as the situation within which the process of Sensitivity Training takes place.

Objectives of Sensitivity Training

Argyris (1962) has defined the primary objective of T-Group education as an increase in administrative competence. Administrative competence is related to the organization's abilities to achieve its objectives, maintain itself internally, and adapt to its external environment. Although Argyris is only one of the many individuals involved in the application of T-Group education to business enterprises, his statement of the general goals of the process is probably common to all of the important theorists in the field. Differences occur chiefly in the underlying theories proposed to explain the changes in behavior observed and in the specific methodologies that arise from these different theoretical formulations.

Buchanan (1964) lists five central aspects of T-Group training. First, the primary vehicle for learning is a

face-to-face, largely unstructured, group. Second, planned activities involve interaction between individuals and/or between groups. Third, there is systematic and frequent feedback and analysis of information regarding what happens in the here-and-now and what effect it has. Fourth, dilemmas or problems for which "old ways" of behaving for most of the participants do not provide effective courses of action (and thus for which innovative or "search" behavior is required) are set up. Fifth, generalization, or reformulation of concepts and values based on the analysis of direct experience is encouraged. Groups of this general description are the means by which all of the major theorists attempt to achieve the goal of enhancement of organizational performance.

Underlying Philosophy of Sensitivity Training

Those who advocate T-Group training represent an essentially humanist school of thought as defined by McGregor (1960). Sensitivity training, according to its proponents, increases the perceptual accuracy of the participants. This effect is held to have important consequences. It permits the individuals within an organization to understand the organizational goals more clearly. One individual may be able to understand the actions and motivations of other individuals once exposed to sensitivity training. Communication, among individuals, should therefore be improved; this should, in turn, result in more effective planning and execution of

organizational goals. Therefore, the role of the T-Group is to increase the awareness of the individuals participating of their defense mechanisms which prevent accurate perception. In addition, the participants are shown just what effects their actions are having on other people. It is felt that exposure of the blocks to effective perception will bring about their demise and thus improve human relations within the organization. It is the improvement in human relations which leads to an increase in organizational effectiveness. Thus, the approach is basically humanistic. It strives to remove obstacles that prevent the individual from realizing his full potentialities when he is working in a social context.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF SENSITIVITY TRAINING

The rise of the T-Group may be directly traced to two important pieces of work. The first of these was initiated by Elton Mayo and his associates (Mayo, 1933; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939). This work, undertaken at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company in Chicago, demonstrated that social groups within the factory had an important influence on the amount of work done by their members. Furthermore, it was shown that the perceptions of management's concern with worker welfare held by the workers also had important effects on productivity. Thus, a whole new management problem was exposed. Inadequate social relationships within the organizational hierarchy and misperceptions on the part of workers could severely limit organizational effectiveness.

The actual proposal of Sensitivity Training as a solution to this new problem grew out of the interest in group dynamics shown by Kurt Lewin at the end of the 1930's (Cartwright and Zander, 1960). An early study (Lewin, Lippitt, and White, 1939) had investigated the effects of various styles of leadership on underlying group processes. This study served to focus attention on the importance of leadership to group process and, thus, to productivity. This led to other investigations of group dynamics which spanned a wide

variety of activities designed to further the understanding of human behavior in the social context.

Cartwright and Zander (1960) listed important effects in the areas of social work, psychotherapy, education, and organizational administration. Social workers learned to manipulate important reference groups in order to achieve change in their individual members. Group work principles contributed to the techniques of group psychotherapy arising from the Freudian tradition. The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations was founded in England in 1947 and provided group psychotherapy (Kelnar, 1947) and family therapy (Bowlby, 1947) from a slightly different psychoanalytic viewpoint.

In the meantime, Kurt Lewin had set up the Research Center for Group Dynamics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1946 this institution participated with the Connecticut Interracial Commission and the Connecticut Department of Education in a workshop held at State Teachers' College at New Britain, Connecticut. The stated purpose of the workshop was to develop more effective local leadership in the implementation of a new state fair employment practices act. Kenneth D. Benne (1964) has outlined the development of the T-Group from that meeting.

There were three groups of ten people each. The trainers were Kenneth D. Benne of Columbia University,

Leland P. Bradford of the National Education Association (NEA), and Ronald Lippitt of the Research Center for Group Dynamics. A five-man research team composed of Ronald Lippitt, Kurt Lewin, and three graduate students in social psychology sat in on the meetings. Techniques of group discussion and role playing were used to examine the back-home problems of the group members. The research team met in the evening to pool their discussion of group events. Leader, member, and group behaviors were analyzed and interpreted.

The group participants heard about these research team meetings and asked for permission to participate. When this was given, the group members joined in the analysis and interpretation. The results were unexpected and of great importance. The group members reported obtaining valuable insight into their own behavior and the operation of their groups.

These fortuitous events encouraged the training leaders to investigate the phenomenon further. The Research Center for Group Dynamics and the National Education Association obtained a joint grant from the Office of Naval Research to sponsor a three-week session in the summer of 1947 at Gould Academy in Bethel, Maine. Cooperating institutions included Teachers' College of Columbia University, Cornell University, Springfield College, and the University of California. Important representatives included Alvin Zander of Springfield

College, Paul Sheats of the University of California at Los Angeles, Robert Polson of Cornell University, and John R. P. French who succeeded Kurt Lewin as Research Director of the Research Center for Group Dynamics upon the latter's death in early 1947. Out of this program developed the National Training Laboratory associated with the National Education Association. Leland Bradford became its first director.

Bennis (1963) noted two phases of development of the T-Group. From 1947 to 1958 the T-Group was sharpened as an instrument for the achievement of behavior change in individuals or small groups. Benne (1964) noted that the original sessions held at Gould Academy in Bethel in 1947 called for a Basic Skills Training (BST) Group. An anecdote would be related for discussion and analysis by the group. The trainer helped the group in analyzing the content of the discussion and the group processes at work. Attention was focused on the skills needed to be an effective change agent. The multiplicity of skills involved constituted an overload of objectives for the T-Group. Benne comments that in the period from 1949 through 1955, many functions were removed from the T-Group situation. Use of the T-Group to teach specific concepts and skills was dropped. The emphasis on back-home organizational structures was greatly reduced. Attention was focused solely on the interpersonal events occurring between the trainer and members, or among members, and group events as the T-Group developed. At the same time,

the method of giving feedback and the role of the trainer changed. Formal feedback sessions were scrapped in favor of spontaneous feedback as events unfolded. Feedback became the responsibility of all group members without the previous emphasis on the trainer as the source of such information. In addition, the trainer became less a member of the group and more of an ambiguous authority figure who explored the causes of distortion in the feedback.

Starting in 1949 the National Training Laboratories began a determined effort to recruit more clinically-oriented psychologists into its programs. Students of Freud and Carl Rogers began to make an impact on the T-Group movement. The language of interpretation began to reflect psychoanalytic and Rogerian terminology. The emphasis on sociological concepts and the theories of Kurt Lewin was reduced.

Meanwhile, the National Training Laboratories spanned a whole network of regional training laboratories across the country. In 1952 the Western Training Laboratory was established in conjunction with the extension activities of the University of California. The Boston University Laboratory in Improvement of Human Relations started in 1954, as did the Pacific Northwest Laboratory. Two laboratories were founded in 1955: the Intermountain Laboratory in Utah and the Southwest Human Relations Training Laboratory in Texas.

In 1958 the second phase in T-Group education began.

It was characterized by the use of laboratory training centered about T-Group experience in a systematic manner to bring about organizational change and development. Previously, T-Group education had been used largely to change individuals. In 1958 the Employee Relations Department of the Standard Oil Company of New Jersey began a T-Group training program in their refineries throughout the United States. This effort was directed by Herbert A. Shepard and Robert R. Blake. Shepard was later to be instrumental in setting up the Organizational Behavior program at Case Institute of Technology in Cleveland. Robert R. Blake was to go on and become Director of the Psychological Research Foundation and Human Relations Training Laboratory at the University of Texas. Later he founded and became the first president of Scientific Methods, Inc. of Austin, Texas.

Organizational Theory and the T-Group

The organic model of organizations proposed by Robert Blake has grown indirectly from the theories of motivation proposed by Abraham Maslow (1954, 1965). Maslow (1954) suggested that human needs are ordered into a hierarchy which McGregor (1960) modified. Needs at each level in the hierarchy would have to be satisfied before the needs at the next level became operative. At the bottom of the hierarchy were the physiological needs for food, water, rest, etc. Next were the security needs for protection against danger,

threat, and deprivation. The third level consisted of man's social needs for belonging, association, and acceptance. The ego needs for self-esteem and status followed at the fourth level. Finally, the self-fulfillment needs fell at the highest level. These needs included the need to realize one's potentialities, to continue self-development, and to be creative.

Douglas McGregor used the existence of this fifth level of human needs as a bludgeon to attack what he felt to be the underlying philosophy of management in the 1950's. In describing this philosophy under the heading of Theory X, McGregor (1960) stated that many managers feel that "the average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can." This implied that people must be "coerced, controlled, directed, threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort toward the achievement of organizational objectives." Clearly, this formulation did not coincide with the research on motivation done by Maslow.

McGregor felt that Theory X did not recognize the fact that satisfied needs do not motivate. Most employees had some measure of employment security; thus, their physiological and security needs were met. Thus, the prepotent set of needs would be the social needs. These management generally thwarted by avoiding group work. Furthermore, the typical organization did not offer much by way of satisfaction of

self-esteem and status needs to many employees. Finally, Theory X simply denied that workers could feel any need whatever to realize their potentialities through performance on the job.

Thus, McGregor proposed Theory Y as a management philosophy that would be more in line with the research findings. Here it was assumed that man would assume responsibility and even seek it in the satisfaction of his higher order needs. These satisfactions could be compatible with organizational objectives. It was suggested that operation by Theory X resulted in a major waste of the intellectual capacities of the employees in an organization. The central principle of Theory Y was that the best organizational performance could be obtained if the goals of the individuals were integrated with those of the organization. Thus, the employee could best satisfy his own needs by contributing towards the achievement of organizational objectives. Due to its face validity, the T-Group was an obvious method to use in examining the assumptions held by managers and changing them to Theory Y assumptions if necessary. The T-Group was, therefore, frequently a part of programs attempting to impart the principles of human relations.

Managerial Grid Theory

Robert Blake took this framework and expanded on it (Blake and Mouton, 1964). He proposed a "managerial grid"

on which the underlying assumptions of managerial behavior could be placed. The grid had two nine-point axes. The first was labeled concern for production; the second, concern for people. On both scales, one indicated minimum concern and nine indicated maximum concern. Five "pure" theories of management were described as reference points on the Grid.

The 9,1 Style. The first style represented maximum concern for production and minimum concern for people. An inevitable conflict was assumed between the needs of people and the needs of production. Therefore, the needs of people were viewed as tools of production; people were seen as being basically lazy and in need of being pushed to work. This style was very close to the Theory X advanced by McGregor. Strict control was to be exercised by one-to-one supervisory relationships. "Useless social interaction" was to be minimized. Blake pointed out that this would cause creativity to be directed at beating the organizational system. Furthermore, union-management conflict would result and there would be a basic failure to utilize the potentialities of the workers.

The 1,9 Style. The second style was called the "country club" style. Production and people were again seen as being in conflict. However, the needs of people were given top priority. The Supervisor would attempt to gain acceptance from the workers. Pressure, which could lead to resentment,

would not be used. Supervision would be on a one-to-all basis, and the supervisor would attempt to make the work group one big happy family. Here creativity would be low as the conflicting views that stimulate creativity would be avoided. Goal setting would be done democratically in an attempt to satisfy all. This would result in goals so general as to be useless. Thus, there would be loyalty to the work group and the company, but little commitment to the work itself. Such inefficiency would not allow a company to remain effective. Theory Y was held to include this and the 5,5 and 9,9 styles (Blake and Mouton, 1968).

The 5,5 Style. This middle-of-the-road style would see the needs for production and the needs of people as being in conflict. This approach would seek a balance of the two concerns through compromise. Strong reliance would be placed on communication and established rules and traditions to take the risk out of decision-making. Goals would be set low enough for all to reach. Supervision would usually be on a one-to-one basis although frequent group meetings would be used to give a feeling of participation and to test ideas. The informal communication system would be used often. Creativity would be present to some extent, but the avoidance of risk would often lead to the acceptance of mediocre solutions. Theory Y was presumed to embrace this style (Blake and Mouton, 1968).

The 9,9 Style. The 9,9 style was also included in the Theory Y approach proposed by Douglas McGregor (Blake and Mouton, 1968). This approach did not assume a basic conflict between individual and organizational goals. Here the attempt would be made to unite maximum concern for production with maximum concern for people. A basic concept was teamwork. Mature interpersonal relationships were felt to be essential to organized productive effort. Successful interdependent efforts were to be created by uniting workers through understanding of and commitment to common goals. Thus, two sets of Maslow's higher order needs would be satisfied: the need to be involved in and committed to productive work (self-fulfillment needs) and the need to establish sound relationships with others. Integration of organizational and individual goals was to be achieved through participation and involvement in work planning execution. This was the so-called "big-picture" approach because the worker was supposed to understand the structures and processes of the entire organization and his place in them. Creativity would thus be encouraged and the worker would need less control from above as he would understand and agree with the objectives. Conflict would result in seeking out causes and attempts to arrive at the best possible solution as this would be in the best interests of all.

The Blake Plan for Organizational Intervention

Blake's practical plan for organizational change did not call for dealing with actual problems faced by organizations. Rather, he proposed dealing with the causes underlying these problems. The emphasis was to be on "changing patterns or relationships at interpersonal, group, inter-group, and organizational levels" so that more effective and integrated organizational problem-solving could occur (Blake and Mouton, 1964). It was felt that this approach would be most effective in overcoming the difficulties in communication and planning that a survey (Blake and Mouton, 1968) showed to be the major barriers to effective organizational performance.

Development of the organization was to proceed in six phases. The first three phases were to open up channels of communication within the organization. The last three phases were intended to contribute to the solution of problems of organizational planning (Blake and Mouton, 1968).

The use of a situation much like a T-Group was central to the first phase of Managerial Grid Organizational Development. The first phase was to be a Managerial Grid Laboratory-Seminar Training experience. This phase was to be conducted off-site. All members of management were to take part in this week-long experience at various times in groups of from eight to forty-eight per session. These groups would be

introduced to the Managerial Grid and participate in structured experiments demonstrating the effect of interpersonal relationships on task performance. Some of the experiments and the feedback on them were to be conducted in small unstructured groups at first called development groups and limited to twelve persons from different departments and levels in the organization (Blake and Mouton, 1961). These groups were later called study teams (Blake and Mouton, 1968) and limited to nine members. Unlike the typical T-Group, these development groups operated without a leader or trainer. The chief reason for the use of the unstructured group was that it would provide the greatest opportunity for accurate feedback on the behavior of individuals and the team as a whole. The feedback on individuals was to be achieved through rating scales scored and collected by the participants themselves (Bennis, 1963). The whole procedure was to assist development of managerial insight into the behavior of people in groups.

Later phases of development would involve the application of Grid theories to the problems of actual work groups and relationships among groups. Corporate strategy could then be developed, planned, implemented, and evaluated in an effective manner (Blake and Mouton, 1968).

As Bennis (1963) has pointed out, Blake's contributions may be regarded as an organic model because they were

centered about a view of organizational change as the development of a set of functions more or less related to each other. In other words, if the problems of communication and planning so prevalent in industry are to be solved, there must be an improvement in the working relationships among the people who are charged with the solution of these problems. These relationships must be based on trust and confidence rather than on authority and obedience (Blake and Mouton, 1961).

The Argyris Plan for Organizational Intervention

Chris Argyris (1957) adopted a developmental view of all organizations. An organization in Argyris' view could include anything from an individual personality to a complex business enterprise or public agency. He described seven important developmental trends in human personality:

1. a tendency to develop from a state of passivity to increasing activity;
2. a tendency to develop from dependence on others to relative independence;
3. a tendency to develop from being capable of behaving in only a few ways to being capable of behaving in many ways;
4. a tendency to develop from erratic, short-lived interests to deeper interests;
5. a tendency to develop from having a short-time perspective to having a longer time perspective;
6. a tendency to develop from being subordinate to being equal and/or superordinate;

7. a tendency to develop from a lack of self-awareness to awareness of and control over self.

These, then, were the "self-actualization" needs whose origins are clear in the thoughts of Maslow. There was much of Lewin in this formulation as well. Growth was held to be an increase in the number of parts and personality dynamics were seen in terms of "needs in tension."

Argyris went on to note, as McGregor (1960) did later, that the principles of formal organization such as task specialization, chain of command, unity of direction, and span of control were inconsistent with the needs of the mature personality for work which would permit activity, independence, a relatively long-time perspective, control over the immediate environment, and opportunity to express abilities. This conflict of organizational and personal interests was seen to lead to such employee reactions as apathy, gold-bricking, rate-setting, and the creation of informal groups to counteract the cause of the conflict. Management was seen to react to these conditions by making supervision more autocratic, by tightening management controls, and by bribery with fringe benefits and other material rewards.

Argyris then suggested two possible solutions. The first was job enlargement, which he did little to develop. The second suggestion was the development of "reality centered leadership" based on diagnosis of reality and use of

the appropriate leadership approach.

In 1960 Argyris became interested in the feedback properties of organizations. This naturally led to the use of the T-Group in what he termed the development of interpersonal competence (Argyris, 1962). Argyris came to believe that one of the most significant factors contributing to organizational success or failure was the interpersonal competence of the executive leadership. It was felt that formal organization required individuals to separate their emotional, interpersonal, and technical selves in the interests of production. The emotional and interpersonal aspects of human personality were, of course, to be suppressed in the work situation. Hence, there was little opportunity to develop competence in dealing with feelings and interpersonal relationships. This resulted in the creation of a system where there would be little

1. exchange of nonevaluation feedback,
2. "experience" of one's feelings, ideas, and values,
3. openness to new ideas, feelings, and values,
4. experimentation and risk taking with new ideas, feelings, and values.

Thus, interpersonal competence and organizational effectiveness would decrease. Individuals would misunderstand and mistrust each other. Conformity and "playing it safe" would then increase, as would dependence.

T-Group training was, therefore, required to reverse these

trends. A more formal learning situation with formal organization would reinforce the very organizational and interpersonal factors and basic assumptions which were to be overcome. The T-Group was to be used to "unfreeze" top management to make it better able to deal with its problems.

Argyris (1962) lists seven assumptions of the T-Group learning experience.

1. It must emphasize responsibility for self-development.
2. It must help the learner become aware of his attitudes and behavior and then help him to unfreeze these.
3. The learning experience takes place in interpersonal, small-group, and intergroup relationships.
4. Re-education demands that emotional learning also take place.
5. The most effective development occurs if a person becomes more aware of himself.
6. As the participant becomes more self-responsible, self-esteeming, and self-accepting his understanding and esteem of others will increase. This leads to less defensiveness and greater openness to new ideas.
7. Re-education should focus on a change in basic values rather than on acquiring skills.

Laboratory education was then to create a dilemma which could not be solved by principles of formal organization. A new solution would have to be invented. Then feedback could take place among the members about their values, feelings, and attitudes. Generalization to see what outside situations are matched by laboratory conditions could then take place.

In the laboratory, leadership would be controlled by

the members, as would rewards and penalties. Information would be used to increase feelings of self-responsibility and self-commitment. The role of the T-Group trainer was then defined. He must help the executives see the extent to which they (1) give evaluative feedback, (2) are unaware of their feelings, (3) do not help others understand their feelings, (4) are not, or do not permit others to be, open, and (5) experiment and take risks. This will cause the members to feel "dissonance" and experience conflict. The reaction will be to project responsibility onto the trainer. This he must resist. The group can then alter its values or retrench. If the latter is chosen, the trainer must push for consideration of the former. Hopefully, the group can grow towards the objectives of

1. exploring values and their impact,
2. determining if values should be replaced or changed,
3. becoming aware of how groups can inhibit, as well as facilitate, human growth and decision-making.

This was the way in which Argyris' conception of the T-Group was derived from his theoretical framework.

CHAPTER III

SUBJECTS AND TRAINING

Typical T-Group Subjects

T-Group education has been applied to a wide range of subjects from industry at the National Training Laboratory and at other regional laboratories. The process is more often employed with supervisors and managers than with hourly-paid workers. This means that a wide range of ages and educations are represented. However, the intelligence of trainees tends to be average or above. Relatively few, below-average intellects are present. By the same token, there are relatively few disadvantaged individuals in T-Groups. It is precisely because a group has been excluded from positions of greater responsibility in industry or, indeed, from all of industry, that it may be called disadvantaged. The trainer must be attentive to

Blake's development groups (Blake and Mouton, 1964, 1968) are aimed at much the same groups of people. He advocates the use of a "diagonal slice" of all levels of management in the initial phase of organizational development. This slice includes individuals from all levels and all departments. Thus, one group may contain accountants, engineers, foremen with less than high school training, or

scientists with doctoral degrees. Similarly, recent high school and college graduates and executives near retirement may all be present in the same group. Intelligence could vary from average to very superior.

Argyris, on the other hand, concentrates on top executives in his T-Group work. Therefore, his groups are more likely to be of high intelligence and more advanced age. The disadvantaged are virtually excluded by definition.

The T-Group method cannot be used with people who are mentally ill. House (1967), reviewing the literature, noted that the T-Group was not only capable of producing anxiety, but also that anxiety was an intended part of the program. For those who can tolerate anxiety, the desired effect of "unfreezing" attitudes and behavior may be achieved. But, in the case of those threatened by the process, the reaction may well be maladaptive. Thus, careful screening is necessary to prevent tragedy and the trainer must be attentive to the effects of the process on the individual subject.

Thus, the typical T-Group subject is a manager or a supervisor, between 25 and 65 years of age, of average or above intelligence, and relatively well-adjusted. Argyris (1962, 1968) has been careful to point out that the T-Group is for training, and not for therapy. According to him, therapy requires learning processes which are more guided and controlled, with considerable interpretation by the

therapist. The unhealthy subject, who is survival oriented, must be made to examine the genesis of here-and-now behavior in terms of historical causes. In addition, evaluative and interpretive behavior is necessary to break through his closedness. All of these conditions do not apply to the healthy subject who may be re-educated by means of a T-Group. However, the object of the T-Group is still behavior change, so this distinction from therapy may be simply a question of differing techniques for differing situations.

Training for the T-Group Practitioner

Because of the anxiety aroused in the T-Group situation, it would seem wise to agree with House (1967) that the T-Group trainer must have education equivalent to that of the clinical psychologist. In 1960 the National Training Laboratory initiated an internship program for trainers (Benne, 1964). Applicants were to have completed, or to be near completion of, a doctoral degree in a basic or applied behavioral science and possess demonstrated aptitude for developing and handling "helping" relationships. In a summer-long program, the intern would participate in one basic laboratory program, serve as an observer in a second, and join the staff as an active associate in a third. During the first two sessions, the intern would attend seminars on the aims, assumptions, and methods of training and join practice sessions in designing and conducting training

programs. Then, during the following year, the intern would be a full staff member of one or more National Training Laboratory Programs. From Benne's statements, it appears that a doctorate in psychology, with about a year of practical T-Group training, is the optimum training required of a T-Group trainer. Also, some negative findings have been reported. Using a simple rating procedure, it was found that the impact of laboratory training was on personal and interpersonal learnings. Laboratory training was found to be "slightly more helpful than classroom training in changing the organization. Argyris and Schwenk, in three different organizations, found that laboratory training was related to innovativeness, willingness to take risks, and problem-solving effectiveness, as measured by members of the organization. Argyris also noted that the learning acquired through laboratory training tended to be of short duration, probably because the training programs pay attention to personal, economic, technical, and structural organizational behavior. That is, the change in behavior by Argyris, and others restricts the focus on interpersonal and group factors as the causal factors in thinking problem-solving activities. The T-Group consists of a track organizational

CHAPTER IV

CRITICAL EVALUATION

As Bennis (1963) has noted, there has been considerable difficulty in evaluating T-Group programs because adequate measuring devices for criterion variables have simply not been developed. Also, some negative findings have been reported. In using a simple rating procedure, it was found in one study that the impact of laboratory training was greatest on personal and interpersonal learnings. Laboratory training here was found to be "slightly more helpful than useless" in actually changing the organization. Argyris (1965), working in three different organizations, found that interpersonal competence was related to innovativeness, willingness to take risks, and problem-solving effectiveness, as perceived by members of the organization.

Bennis (1963) also noted that the learning acquired during human relations training tended to be of short duration. This is probably because the training programs pay little heed to task, economic, technical, and structural aspects of organizational behavior. That is, the change programs proposed by Blake, Argyris, and others restrict themselves to interpersonal and group factors as the causal variables of interest in blocking problem-solving activities. This means that the T-Group theorists attack organizational

problems as something of "Johnny-One-Noters" with only one tool in their bag of tricks. There are instances where organizational problems may have nothing to do with group dynamics. The T-Group approach then might well be left out of the solutions proposed. In other situations, social factors might be combined with industrial engineering (for example) to alter the task in a favorable manner.

Furthermore, the T-Group approaches presuppose the truth of a value system. This system (Bennis, 1963) holds that openness is preferable to secrecy; superior-subordinate collaboration to dependency or rebellion; internal to external commitment; team leadership to one-to-one autocracy; authentic relationships rather than direction or control. But the universal law of psychology is that individuals do differ. Therefore, those persons who may have high needs for status and power or for structure and dependence and low needs for participation may derive little satisfaction or learning from T-Group methods. The same will be true of those whose needs are best expressed through bureaucratic mechanisms which the T-Group methods aim to destroy.

In addition, Bennis (1963) found in a literature search that participants in the work of T-Group theorists had difficulty in generalizing their learning to new situations. Even worse, friction was found to develop between members of the organization who had had T-Group training and those who had not.

House (1967), reviewing experimental studies in the literature, indicated that the behavior patterns taught in T-Groups were only partially determinant of leadership effectiveness. However, it had not yet been demonstrated that T-Group training actually increased leader effectiveness.

Summary

In summary, the T-Group may be a useful method of improving organizational effectiveness if properly used in situations where interpersonal relations are a genuine part of the problem. However, for maximum effectiveness, the T-Group should be used with other techniques, when this is appropriate. Furthermore, the T-Group should not be used when diagnostic analysis indicates that factors other than social ones are the variables of interest. There is a continuing need both for improved diagnostic techniques and for more effective means of evaluating programs of organizational change. Finally, the techniques can be highly dangerous as they attempt to arouse anxiety. This demands a highly trained individual both to screen participants and to supervise progress in order to prevent serious damage to individuals and organizations.

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