SENSITIVITY TRAINING: EXPERIENCE IN STAFF DEVELOPMENT *

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Components of Organizational Development

EAM-BUILDING is a process within a broader framework of organization Organizational developdevelopment. ment, as used here, refers to the development of human relations and realization of professional aims within an organized It characteristically is institution. planned and directed from the top, has a long range plan, and is related to the organizational mission. It is seen as relevant to the personal goals of emplovees. Its activities focus both on action-planning and learning and it pays explicit attention to human processes.

The organizational development process is made up of three overlapping components. The first is the psychological and emotional contract with the individual employee. It includes recruitment, employment, assimilation of the employee to his job, to the group within which he works and to the culture of the agency. It also includes job enlargement, career planning, skills development, separation, rewards, and compensation.

The second component is personnel services, that is, the administration of employee benefits, the maintenance of records, of information about staff, including an inventory of skills. In essence, it includes a kind of data bank from which information can be obtained about who, where and how good people are in the organization.

The third component consists of the methods, techniques and processes through which the human organization is developed. It includes goal-setting, climate change, strategies of change, growth, organizational planning, teambuilding and inter-group training. It emphasizes the laboratory method of learning.

Agency Background

The team-building experience, reported herein, took place in the Jewish Centers Association of Los Angeles. agency is made up of seven operational units: five centers, a community services division and a resident camp. Its staff consists of 45 full time program and administrative staff members. Personnel practices, hiring procedures, and some of the staff training are either performed or determined centrally. A course on Jewish affairs consisting of twenty-five weekly sessions is required for all staff members. Staff teams or committees consisting of workers from each of the operating units meet together on matters of common interest and concern. These

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include such groupings as Nursery School Directors, Teen Workers, Cultural Arts Workers and Physical Educators. JCA is twenty-five years old and was organized originally out of a merger of several Centers already existing in the community. Since its formation, new Centers and a camp have been added. During the year of the experience which will be described in this paper, JCA had a new Director and Associate Director. This team has begun to experiment with some different methods of administration.

The Center in which the team-building took place has a staff of six, a director, a physical education director, a nursery school director, a group work aide, who works mostly with teen programs, an experienced group worker whose job includes work with older adults and with children, and a cultural arts-adult worker. The Center has its own Board of Directors and a membership of approximately 1300 individuals. It is located in a changing neighborhood which has a growing population of minority groups, mostly Orientals, and a Jewish population of about 10,000. The facilities in the building include a gymnasium, built four years ago, as an addition to existing facilities and a variety of meeting rooms. In general, all facilities are considered to be multi-functional, including the gymnasium. The Center's history predates that of the Jewish Centers Association. Many of its leaders have become leaders of JCA and in the Jewish community. One of its characteristics has been a strong sense of independence.

Aims of Team-Building

The goals for team-building, generally, and specifically with the Center staff selected, are

- -to "unfreeze" individuals;
- -to develop a climate of openness and trust;
- -to develop teams as a learning unit;

- -to confront relationships;
- -to set goals;
- -to improve inter-personal communication;
- -to improve performance;
- —to develop insights into one's own behavior and how it is perceived by others;
- ---to gain better understanding of group process;
- —to encourage a greater sense of autonomy and control over one's actions and destinies.

Organizational Norms

Most of these goals are in direct conflict with the norms of staff behavior which are characteristic of bureaucratic organizations. To mention a few which are easily identified and commonly known:

- -Decisions made at the top and the information disseminated through the hierarchy.
- -An attitude of "don't rock the boat."
- -Unwillingness to engage in direct confrontation either of issues or people.
- -Buck-passing.
- -Empire building, that is the building of a wall about one's own functions or department.
- —Prevalence of hidden agendas—because it does not appear to be safe to be open about all of one's motivations or aspirations or problems. The hidden agenda attitude leads to a system of fencing, that is trying to get another person to reveal what he really is after before one declares one's self. It also leads to acting on assumptions of the other person's motivations without checking to see if the assumptions are correct.

These traits were present in varying degree in the Center staff. In addition, as the team-building progressed, several additional norms specific to this staff became apparent. These were:

- —A tendency to use "globalisms." On occasion when a specific issue was under consideration, the discussion could escalate to the purposes of the Center, the changing community, morale, etc. While these may have had some relevance to the issue, the "globalism" would tend to obscure rather than bring any new light or understanding to the specific issue.
- —In analyzing problems there was a tendency to project onto others, onto the agency, onto JCA, onto the community.
- -There was a desire to be supportive of

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other staff members coupled with a concern about getting too close.

—Genuine caring for each other was expressed but appeared more in personal relationships outside of the job.

—There was a tendency toward delayed reaction timing in the expressions of feelings toward colleagues, particularly around situations which created irritations or antagonisms.

-There was a reliance on the director to mediate inter-staff problems.

—There was an over-use of general statements, usually introduced by "we all know that" or "the Center should," "the membership feels."

The criteria for the selection of this Center for the project were:

—The readiness and willingness of the staff to engage in the team-building experiment. Key in this was the director's desire to participate.

-The staff unit was small enough so that the face-to-face interactions in the team-building meetings would have greater opportu-

nity for carry over.

—While there were no problems of crisis proportions, there were evidences of some "aches" which the staff wished to resolve. The absence of major crisis meant that there would be sufficient time for a process to take place.

—It was hoped that any change in this staff or sub-system would affect other staff groupings in the total agency system.

Preliminary Steps

Several steps were taken, prior to the beginning of the team-building program. These included a JCA-wide staff meeting in which each staff unit was asked to develop goals and expectations for their respective units for the coming year. This Center had listed the following as goals:

- -Development of active lay committees.
- -Making maintenance and clerical procedures more efficient.
- -Involvement of more people in program.
- -Exploration in program of our uniqueness as a Jewish community center.
- -Development of an "esprit de corps" among board membership and staff.
- -More programs for the total family.

Following the JCA-wide staff meeting, each unit was asked to discuss further the goals which they had selected for themselves. The associate director (henceforth identified as "trainer") made a series of visits with the Center staffs in order to become familiar with them and for them to get to know him. During these visits, he participated in the staff meeting in a way which was described by a staff member, as "a conscious role of making people accountable for comments and ideas which they submitted for group consideration." Finally, the trainer consulted with the Center director about the goals and methods, team-building program and his willingness to participate in it.

The program was discussed fully with the Center staff at a meeting at which a decision was made to engage in the program. The staff's understanding of the project is reflected in the following excerpt from the minutes of that meeting. "Our future staff meetings will be geared to a double purpose: that of discussing in depth the goals that we have projected for this year coupled with honest attempts on the part of each staff member to be free, to speak openly and honestly about feelings and reactions to other staff members as well as about the Center and programming."

At this meeting, we also considered the question of the trainer's authority position in JCA and its possible effect on the staff's participation in the teambuilding program. Issues considered, were would his involvement retard open expression by Center staff? Would there be attempts to please the trainer by conforming to his expectations, or the reverse of resisting him because of the authority he represented in the total agency?

While these and others were recognized as possible problems, the staff felt that it was prepared to move ahead with the program. It should also be noted that part of the readiness of the staff to participate was due to a sensitivity training weekend held for JCA staff two years before this time.

The team-building program covered a period from November through May and included at least one session a month ranging in duration from two hours to eight. The team-building program was related to and became an integral part of the normal supervisory and staff meeting process of the Center. Data produced at team-building sessions provided material for follow-up in individual supervisory conferences, during informal contact between staff and for discussions at staff meetings.

Methods Employed

A variety of methods and techniques were used during the team-building program:

- 1. Taping the sessions and replaying parts of the tape during the sessions in order to review together what had been said and the perceptions and understandings of those expressions.
- 2. Schedules filled in by staff to analyze staff effectiveness. These were used in the first session and served to identify areas of concern by the group and by individuals. Responses by staff were tabulated while the group was in session and the results shared with them for discussion and analysis.
- 3. Consensus testing. This involved: checking with each staff member at points where there appeared to be lack of clarity or differences regarding perceptions of verbal statements or of behavior. (2) Checking decisions to test the degree of agreement. The one to seven scale in the test for analyzing staff effectiveness was also used to test consensus on issues which arose. For example, a staff member suggested that staff meetings be used for an exchange of information regarding programs conducted by each of the staff members. There seemed to be agreement; however, when thrown onto the one to seven scale it became clear that several staff members were "going along" without real commitment to the idea.

- 4. A form of role play was used in which staff members who appeared to have differences between them, talked them out in front of the rest of the group. The other staff members were observers of the role-play and then participated with the role-players in the analysis of their exchange.
- 5. Kurt Lewin's field concept was introduced as a means for analyzing the forces at play in the staff system. The concept was developed to view behavior or attitudes. but can be applied to analysis of the conflicting forces at play in a group. Briefly stated, the behavior of a group at a given moment is the resultant of a number of opposing or conflicting forces. The equilibrium is dynamic and is thrown off when there is a change in the strength of the forces which operate either to constrain or to push forward. The change strategy which derives from the concept is that of removing the restraining forces that hold back desired movement. Staff were asked to apply this concept by listing forces which they felt made for better staff functioning and those forces which tended to restrain better staff functioning.
- 6. Non-verbal experiences. These included exercises which were performed individually, others which were done in pairs and several which called for participation by the entire group. Their purpose is to find ways of communicating which do not have predetermined or preset rules or responses, to encourage freedom of expression, to experiment with and recapture a sense of self and other, to encourage a feeling of trust and support. During the session on the nonverbal experiences, opportunities were provided for staff to talk to each other regarding their responses and reactions and to try to make connections between their behaviors during this session with those in other settings.

One staff reaction was that "it was almost totally unrelated to us as staff members, but completely focused on our being people with needs, feeling, and abilities. It was a most refreshing and unusual experience for all. At one point, the relationship of the experience to our being members of a particular staff did emerge, and the results were encouraging. Staff did indicate a trust and willingness to be dependent on other members as played out in an exercise in which each took a turn being passed from person to person in a closed circular formation."

7. Time was provided at each session for an-

- alysis of group processes, that is, the interactions between individuals, decision-making, identification of hidden agendas, etc.
- 8. A full day sensitivity training session was conducted. Discussion was limited to the "here and now," that is, the data which was produced within the group by the individuals involved during that session. Discussion of tasks, that is, job-oriented matters, was ruled out. It should be noted that the group could not maintain this rule during the entire day. The sensitivity training session took place away from the Center in order to be free of the distractions of that setting.

Examples of Experiences

Several summarized versions of discussions within the group are presented here in order to illustrate what took place during the project.

At a regular staff meeting, given the choice, staff selected three subjects for future agendas. At the subsequent meeting, after some discussion, a fourth subject, budget, was decided upon. The discussion went on for over half an hour, at which point, the trainer intervened and asked the staff what they saw as having taken place the first half hour. In the analysis of process which followed, the following observations were made:

- -There was a genuine interest in the need for information regarding budget.
- —All the staff members recognized that they needed the budget figures before any adequate examination could be made. There was general awareness of this yet there appeared to be an inability to stop the discussion of the subject.
- -This was identified as a "stalling device." On the one hand it was felt that the time was needed in order to clarify a plan for dealing with the budget discussion. On the other hand, it was identified as a means of delaying a choice about the three items initially chosen for the agenda.
- -There was some recognition that when this session became identified as a "regular business" meeting, that normal modes of behavior, i.e., non-"sensitive" norms, prevailed. This led to a discussion of the need for interweaving both the task and human relations aspects.

- —The fact that the men tended to dominate this part of the discussion was recognized and led to consideration of some competitiveness between them, of their apparent lack of concern for participation by other staff members, and the assumption that men should be more knowledgeable about budget matters.
 - —The probability that two of the men had formed an alliance against the third was examined.
- —The responsibility of each staff member to act appropriately on his perceptions of group and individual participation was stressed.

Several other incidents can be classified as communication problems. In one, a staff member proposed that the matter of closer working relationship between committees of the Board be discussed because of lack of liaison between the two. It was suggested that this hampered program for two age groups. The real problem which emerged was that the staff member who had introduced the question had not been informed about a change in a program by another staff member and, as a result, had been unable to make appropriate preparations.

In another situation, staff member. A. had not been given sufficient information regarding the number of participants to expect in a program by staff member, B. As a result A had not been able to make proper arrangements. A made a general statement about poor staff communica-In examining the specifics of the incident, a question arose as to what A had actually said. When the tape was replayed, A's statements were proved accurate. However, it was also clear that each of the staff members had a different understanding of what had been said. The meaning of the words had been obscured by the feelings which accompanied them.

In the early sessions, there was great concern expressed by all staff members about the building maintenance problems which appeared to center around one of the janitors. The director found himself under considerable attack because of apparent inability to deal adequately with the situation. The problem was a substantive one which added some severe irritations to relationships between program staff members. In a particularly dramatic session, the director was able to share fully and openly all of the problems he saw in the situation. As a result of the new information and insights which the staff received, they changed from an attacking to a supportive stance and helped to make a more positive analvsis of the situation. The support received from staff was a factor in the director making a decision which alleviated most of the problem.

One of the recurrent dilemmas which found expression in a variety of ways was, "How close should I let other staff members get to me?" and related to that, "How much do I reveal about my-Symptomatic of this dilemma were some reluctance to give credit for jobs well done or to respond to moods of other staff members either with sympathy, concern, or interest; some reluctance to move out of one's office to visit another worker not located in the immediate vicinity; reliance on the director to mediate differences rather than dealing with them on a one-to-one basis directly; suggestion that some joint program projects be developed for closer association between staff; expressions by staff members that their own programs or departments were really not related to those of others.

In one instance, there were several comments that staff member, A, really did not encourage visits or observation of his program. A had extented invitations. However, one or two workers who had visited indicated that they had really not felt at home or wanted there.

In the discussion which followed, A was able to identify that he felt that there were some inadequacies in his pro-

gram which he preferred that others would not observe. A voiced some reluctance about consulting with other staff regarding areas in which he felt some improvement was indicated.

The View from the "Outside"

In general, as the team-building progressed it appeared to the trainer that the staff members' expressions of "closeness" swung in pendulum fashion. Sessions and parts of sessions where openness and self-revelation were high were followed by periods of "cooling it" or withdrawal. However, the trend has been toward more closeness as staff has discovered respective strengths and concerns and as they have learned to accommodate themselves to changing and warmer relationships.

Staff members evidenced intuition and insight about others and self but either did not feel free or did not know how to express them in ways which would be helpful. The methods which were employed did appear to provide some retraining of well established patterns, particularly in learning to give feedback to each other.

One of the results of more openness was a greater volatility and a higher state of tension within the group. Uncertainties developed from the confrontations, from the modifications in and experimentation with new behaviors and from shifts in roles. "Shake-ups" such as these were not easy to adapt to and did create some feelings of malaise some of which have continued.

The process did help in solving problems of a task nature by helping to identify the related parts of the problem and by helping to focus on the "real" or most important issues. Decisions were made by individuals regarding work situations after relevant task requirements, feelings and inter-relationships were analyzed and understood.

Staff interest in continuation of the

program was checked periodically. Their insistence on going forward was taken as a measure of their satisfaction and desire for further learning.

Even though this is a small staff, each member tends to function as though he were a department. Some of the relations between individuals have similarities with those which exist between departments in larger agencies. Interface difficulties prevailed to higher degree than had been anticipated by the trainer.

The risk in the team-building program was greatest for the director. His role was changed most as he went from "authority" to peer. Feelings held in check, or concealed, or "lived with" in the normal work situation found expression in the team-building session. Asking for and receiving help and support were a new experience for him and his subordinates. To change back to the director-subordinate relationship could not be completely the same as before and new, sometimes subtle, modifications in that role relationship had to be made.

The tabulation of responses to the test, "Analyzing Staff Effectiveness" shows a swing toward a higher sense of trust, toward more open, authentic communication, toward confronting conflicts and working them through. Staff feeling moved lower with respect to utilization of member resources and to the degree which they felt they controlled themselves. The reasons for the first set of ratings seem to support observations by Why the other factors the writers. dropped is not clear and would be conjectural without giving the staff an opportunity to look at the changes in their perceptions of their group.

View from the "Inside"

The engagement of the whole staff in the process has had beneficial results. The following seem to have a discernible relationship to the process.

The engagement has certainly deep-

ened the supervisory process. Many of the feelings and attitudes that emerged in these persons have helped give the director a much better understanding of the workers and have been picked up in subsequent supervisory meetings.

The director also found it helpful to have the reactions and perceptions of several people in discerning patterns of behavior and problems that particular workers present. Comments of several staff members, directed toward a particular worker, help establish patterns of functioning which are easier to see and use in confronting a staff member.

The process has given staff members an opportunity to learn more about how each appears to others and thus to see themselves more realistically through the others' eyes. Those who were willing to risk could participate more fully and use the group situation to learn more about themselves.

The obvious other side of the coin is that where problems exist, they eventually appear and are dealt with within the group. Thus difficulties and problems are more difficult to hide but certainly somewhat easier to deal with.

The sessions have also affected how the staff functions as a group. Workers feel somewhat easier about confronting other staff about programmatic problems or intra-staff irritants. There was a climate of freedom about discussing both individual and agency concerns that did not exist earlier. Staff members were more deeply involved in these discussions.

Because of this serious involvement in overall agency problems, we have been able to use both our staff meetings and the team-building sessions to deal with problems and concerns that cut across divisional lines. We have begun to look at and deal with problems using the total agency as our framework for discussion. Thus while we are manifestly dealing with a problem of a specific program or division, the discussion is also concerned

with the total agency. This has permitted workers to ask for consultation and help about difficulties they are having in staff meetings and also encouraged the involvement of total staff in working out approaches and trying to deal with issues.

Staff seems much more willing to help one another. It is most encouraging to find a genuine interest in agency problems as well as a feeling of support when the total staff mobilizes to deal with what otherwise would remain an individual or divisional concern. This was graphically illustrated when the adult worker was encouraged to raise the problem of weekend coverage for two successive weekends because of our drama group's presentation. Other staff volunteered to pick up staff coverage. The significant thing was that this kind of problem could be shared with the total staff and help was forthcoming even though this responsibility was traditionally handled by the adult worker because the program falls under his supervision.

Additional observations by the director are:

- (a) The process certainly has stimulated some of the staff a great deal. Staff meetings have more meaning than previously. The whole process of looking at yourself and how you function and appear to others has offered new stimulation and the opportunity for growth. Some of our staff have been with Centers and the agency anywhere from five to fifteen years, and a sense of sameness and low-key stimulation sets in after this length of time. It is good to feel stimulated and to have the opportunity for further growth re-introduced in your work.
- (b) We are still dependent on the "outside" trainer who brings not only additional skills, but a more objective observation and analysis of our group interaction. Although we have felt more ready and willing to confront one another, we still need the catalytic activity of the outsider to stimulate new insights and challenges.
- (c) As indicated earlier, where individual problems of both relationship and functioning have been uncovered, workers are

put in a position of dealing with them. In some instances, relationship difficulties between individuals have been sharpened and accentuated. Some of these problems are most difficult to handle, even develop some backlash. However, they are more out in the open—issues and conflicts have been joined. The important difference about the handling of these problems in this way is that we have the opportunity to get consensual reactions and observations from the group.

(d) The process needs an investment of time and a determination of priority from administration. The effectiveness is so much greater when sessions are planned in advance and staff can spend extended periods of time together.

(e) The more complete engagement of most staff members in the affairs of the Center has had a most helpful effect. Some of us are freer to ask for help, and other staff members are more willing to help and become involved. The process has created a sense of closeness between us and a more genuine concern for other staff members as well as the agency.

It must be noted that the person in a position of authority, whether it be the Center's director or a divisional supervisor, plays a key role in permitting and encouraging the team-building process to work. It can be difficult and painful for the authority figure to become involved, as he thereby allows himself to be criticized or second guessed and to be made accountable for decisions by people he supervises. It goes counter to usual forms of staff behavior, which depend on a rigid hierarchy of authority in which the director represents management and thereby retains most of the decision-making authority, and the staff represent workers who are under the control and authority of the director.

In some of the training sessions, the director found it difficult to resolve his role. Should he be the director and person in authority or an equal participant like the others? His role has shifted with the issues being discussed. At points he had participated as an equal and at other times he functioned as the

director with an overall point-of-view and knowledge about the various parts of the Center that the others did not have.

The element of trust is quite important. If staff senses that the person of authority is being open and honest and willing to take risks, staff are encouraged. In a sense, the authority figure can set the tone for subsequent meetings and can provide a model for staff. It still remains an individual decision about how fully or superficially individuals will participate and how much they will share and risk.

The process has deepened the quality of supervision within the Center. Some of the attitudes and concerns expressed in our training sessions have been followed up in individual conferences. The percentage of time spent on administrative matters has lessened while the time

and energy spent on inter-personal relations and feelings have increased. The degree to which workers are willing to use either the team-building sessions or individual conferences to work out some of their concerns differs; but we have created an atmosphere where there is more freedom and where it is easier to raise questions of feelings and relationships.

Finally, the director has found this experiment in team-building personally exciting and exhilarating at times. He has gotten to know the staff members more deeply, found increased opportunity for self-insight, and in turn is much freer in talking about real concerns to his supervisor. The process has presented opportunities to deepen the practice of supervision. He has found himself dealing with issues that are more taxing but more satisfying.

JOKES, ANYBODY?

A correspondent at Wayne State University School of Social Work, Assistant Professor Sidney H. Grossberg, submits the following brief colloquy, which he assures us is a joke. An opinion is an opinion. What's yours?

Psychologist to Social Worker: Would you like to join a new synagogue that a group of psychologists is forming?

Social Worker: What's its name?

Psychologist: B'nai Stanford.

Nu?