Client-Centered Therapy and the Person-Centered Approach: New Directions in Theory, Research, and Practice

Edited by

Ronald F. Levant
John M. Shlien

PRAEGER

PRAEGER SPECIAL STUDIES • PRAEGER SCIENTIFIC

New York • Westport, Connecticut • London

15 Communities for Learning: A Person-Centered Approach

John Keith Wood

> The question, then, is how we are to summon up the will to survive—not perhaps in the distant future, where survival will call on those deep sources of imagined human unity, but in the present and near-term future, while we still enjoy and struggle with the heritage of our personal liberties, our atomistic existences.
>
> (Robert Heilbroner, 1980, p. 165)

Group processes are vital to human life. Even in highly personalized societies like the United States, deliberations in work teams, classes, town meetings, conferences, juries, parliamentary bodies, and incalculable spontaneous collaborations brought about by common activity or thought determine much of individual possibility. The private person may be said to create her unique world, but is doubtless also created by the groups to which she belongs.

The critical problems facing humanity—the spoiling of air and water supplies, the threat of annihilation from nuclear weapons, starvation, contagious disease—are problems resulting from innumerable coordinated and uncoordinated individual acts. In a Club of Rome report, Botkin, Elmandjra, and Malitza (1979) draw up the radical alternatives:

> At the same time that an era of scientific and technological advancement has brought us unparalleled knowledge and power . . . an enormous tangle of problems in sectors such as energy, population, and food . . . confront us with unexpected complexity. Unprecedented human fulfillment and ultimate catastrophe are both possible. What

> will actually happen, however, depends on another major—and decisive—factor: human understanding and action. (p. 1)

Individuals, although highly advanced, intelligent, and capable, have not been (and may not be) able successfully to manage the complicated patterns created by their isolated actions. The consequent predicament confronting the modern person is how to act intelligently in a coordinated and productive effort with others without forfeiting individual freedom. "The welfare of Humankind," Rene Dubos (1981) suggests, "may well depend upon our ability to create the equivalent of the tribal unity that existed at the beginning of the human adventure while continuing to nurture the individual diversity which is essential for the further development of civilization" (p. 251).

Given the complexity of the modern world, can informed, responsible individuals, despite their differences, act coherently in wise and effective groups to benefit themselves and humanity? It is a challenge, considering the poor reputation established by many group deliberations. Faculty meetings, committees, business conferences, formal social gatherings, and many other groups are notorious for their ineffectiveness and the facility with which they provoke alienation, boredom, frustration, confusion, and irritation in their members.

Large groups can be the most outrageously abrasive. The crowd, when emotionally aroused, convincingly demonstrates not only the large group's ability to act forcefully as one body, but also its destructive potentialities. William McDougall (1928) sums up the unflattering picture on this aspect of the large group as

> excessively emotional, impulsive, violent, fickle, inconsistent, irresolute and extreme in action, displaying only the coarser emotions and the less refined sentiments; extremely suggestible, careless in deliberation, hasty in judgement,... devoid of self-respect and of a sense of responsibility,... its behavior is like that of an unruly child or an untutored passionate savage... and in the worst cases it is like that of a wild beast, rather than like that of human beings. (p. 64)

In spite of these discouraging aspects, observations of person-centered approaches to large group interaction suggest reasons to be hopeful about the large group's capacity for intelligent action. The intention of this chapter is to inform this optimism, rather than to formulate specific intervention techniques, approaches, or even therapeutic attitudes for leaders to facilitate smoothly functioning group meetings. Moreover, the goal is to explore the individual and collective dimensions of wise and effective group functioning, not to promote the merits of either an individualistic or collectivistic viewpoint. The advantages to be gained from the perspective of the individual can be matched by the often radically different perspective of the group. And, a level of stupidity, impulsivity, and cruelty, equal to that found in a collective, may also be found in the lone individual. On the superior of the two viewpoints, the chapter reserves judgment.

BACKGROUND

During the late summer of 1973, a person-centered approach to large group work—communities for learning—was casually conceived.[1] One workshop was originally planned. To date, 40 or more such groups in over 15 countries have been convened, not to mention scores of subsequent events inspired by the initial series of programs. Participants in these workshops, or large group meetings, have ranged in number from 40 to 2,000. They have included persons from a wide range of endeavors, but most were psychologists, educators, and helper-oriented persons. The meetings, usually residential, have been held on a rambling and dilapidated coffee plantation in South America, in a resort hotel in Southeast Asia, in a European marbled monastery, in tree-lined university courtyards and college dormitory halls in North America, in television studios, retreat centers, and dozens of other settings. These minimally structured events have lasted from 1 to 20 days, but most often about 10 days.

The aim of these workshops was to explore those forms of social interaction based on respect for the individual that might yield the wisest collective action in a given predicament. An early theme of these meetings was: "How can one function specifically, locally, and privately in such a way that personal actions are not at odds with, but actually contribute to, the welfare of humanity?"

Staff members did not wish to increase their personal incompetencies by venturing into fields in which they were inexperienced, nor did they intend to construct a new cosmology. Their goal was merely to examine, through experience in large groups, the relevance of principles

developed from practice in client-centered therapy. The resulting large group workshops were called "person-centered," a term which was subsequently used to identify all such endeavors.

Since 1967 the La Jolla Program (Rogers, 1970b) had held an annual training program for encounter group leaders. To supplement the small group meetings, brief plenary sessions were held during each program. These meetings demonstrated that it was possible for over 100 persons to speak in one significant and intelligible conversation. Building on this knowledge, the person-centered workshops established the large group meeting as the core of activities rather than a peripheral aspect. In a significant departure from the structured encounter group program, the format of these person-centered workshops was designed by the participants themselves, who formulated the activities, scheduled events, and even established their own tuition fees. The staff members did not hold themselves apart from the group, but joined in as full-time participants. In theory and practice these workshops explored the question: "What could a client-centered approach teach us about community?"

STAFF—CONVENORS OF THE LARGE GROUP

In these large group workshops the primary function of the staff was to arrange the time and place, to state the purpose of the event, and to invite participants. Since it was not conceived primarily as a psychological event, the staff sought the participation of persons from a wide range of professions, economic classes, races, and styles of living. Most often a quiet private setting was selected for a workshop to be held during the summer months (Rogers, 1977).

Initially, the staff functioned as a central coordinating group: it fielded inquiries, collected deposits, and facilitated travel and lodging arrangements for participants. Staff members were attentive to small details in an effort to provide participants (with whom they counted themselves) with as much freedom as possible to regulate their own experience. Before deciding on behalf of the participants, staff members asked themselves, "Does making this decision oppress or empower the person?" The staff did not wish to make any decisions that might infringe on the person's freedom, no matter how trivial the issue might seem (for example, assigning people to rooms as opposed to allowing them to choose for themselves). On the other hand, because they did not wish to provoke confusion and inefficiency, the staff tried not to neglect simple decisions that would throw the large group into chaotic immobility if it were required to deal with them all.

When participants arrived and were finally face-to-face in one room, a group-centered process guided the workshop deliberations. The staff ceased to exist in any leadership role. They attempted to bring their influence to bear as separate, involved participants, although group members' perceptions may have been colored by previous associations with power.

The unwillingness of staff members to function as leaders brought many reactions. Participants sometimes felt abandoned, deceived, manipulated, and confused by this position. At other times, the staff's attitude was mistakenly perceived as an intervention, modeling: "I do my thing, *you* should do yours; that's the way to build community." But, in fact, it was simply the staff members' attempt to live according to their principles. The attribute that separated the convenors of these workshops from group leaders—even those who produced strikingly similar participant reactions with varying outcomes (Bion, 1959; Doob, 1970; Doob & Foltz, 1973)—was a willingness to enter into, and *be changed* by, the experience they were living with other participants in the large group.

It was soon accepted, sometimes after bitter encounters, that the staff members were not abdicating responsibility but were simply admitting that they were no better equipped than other participants to deal with the knotty issues of conflicting rights, interests, ethics, morals, and the complex crises that the community inevitably faced.

MODES OF GROUP LEARNING

> "They're all from broken homes, you know, luv."
> "Yeh, the poor dears, some have adjusted better than others, too."
> [The housekeepers at a workshop]

Who knows how many voices these massive ceiling beams and mahogany-paneled walls have absorbed in their 75 years. Today nearly 150 persons fill the university's student lounge with sound. Perhaps one-third of the group sits on the floor, surrounding a Mexican jar filled

with flowers; the remaining persons sprawl on overstuffed sofas, shift restlessly on hard-backed chairs, and spill over into an uneven circumference of standing "spectators."

It is only their second day here, yet many must strain to recover memories from beyond this room. The meeting has no leader to call it to order. A growing, yet hesitant, murmur fills the room. Several conversations are being held in clusters of twos and threes as people chat and wait.

At last someone says, in a high breathless voice, "I'd like to get started!"

An expectant hush falls quickly over the room.

The initial speaker (Mary is her name) shrugs her shoulders and adds, "I have nothing specific to say, really. I just want to make *space* for anyone, who has a *need*, to speak to the whole group."

Then Ralph, looking down at the floor, begins to speak. His slow words organize the group's nervousness into an interested stillness. Ralph is 60, slight of body. With only a hint of rehearsal he says, "I have been a physician for more than 30 years. I thought I had stopped learning. But last night I discovered a new appreciation for *feeling*, for experiencing my own emotions. I only regret that I have been closed up for so many years of my life." A silence follows.

"It's wonderful; everyone is so *open* here. I can just be my real self," someone finally says, in a tone of voice lacking conviction. "Everyone outside should have this experience."

A string of statements from different parts of the room unravels. The speakers are anonymous. Their remarks are directed to no one:

"It is okay for us to love one another here, but what about the *real* world?"

"I want to continue what is happening now."

"How am I going to apply what I learn here? I want to take something back to my work."

"I can't speak in large groups like this and really feel oppressed here. I would like to form a small group where I could really be myself."

To this seemingly unrelated lexicon of group members' thoughts is added the appeal for a schedule of activities to "maximize the experience" for everyone. Another person quickly opposes any structuring, favoring "letting it happen" as the best way to maximize the experience. Some wish the staff to make topical presentations. Others feel they can learn more if the staff stays out of the way. Some want more people to speak.

Others call for silence. Some wish to discuss ideas and theories. Others regard the discussions as already overly intellectual and wish that feelings would be expressed more. Someone objects to creating a "tyranny of emotions."

People speak their piece. Their words mark a now familiar, as yet unfathomable, stream of consciousness, of encounters that reveal disappointing relations with parents, miserable childhoods, sadness, anger, even rage, human suffering, and hope. These awkward communications characterize the early meetings of the large group. Once it begins, the stimulation of the group process is relentless, as if by one of the laws of nature.

The people gathered are not specially prepared for the enterprise. Surprisingly, in spite of being mostly from the helping professions, they are *not*, as a group, always skillful in facilitating human relations or problem-solving in this setting. They have come for personal growth, to alter a style of living, to benefit humanity, to become effective professionally, to feel good, to see what happens, to overcome the tedium of a dull marriage or unrewarding work, for attention, to have an adventure.

During the early days of the workshop, meetings generate emotions, rather than integrate feelings. Moralizing, chaotic expressions of opinions, provocative ideas, the threat of violence, all make reasoning difficult and issues seem rationally unresolvable.

At times the large group behaves no better than an unruly crowd, capable of expressing only radical emotion, simplistic thoughts, and (though there is seldom physical violence) senseless aggression. Misunderstandings widen the chasm between factions, and instead of clearing the air, personal expressions can end in unfair judgments and even insults. Out of frustration and exhaustion the group sometimes settles for hasty and arbitrary decisions.[2] Would anyone have suspected that sophisticated and well-intentioned persons, with a childlike desire to express their beliefs in front of one another, could create such an oppressive environment?

Though frustrating and confusing (giving intelligent, sensitive persons reason to be wary), the large group can also present an irresistible attraction. A participant put it this way:

> I go to these meetings where nothing happens, really. Mostly confusion, frustration. Nothing is decided. And still, today when I went downtown, planning to have dinner and watch a movie, I could not

stay away. When the time for the meeting was near, I was *compelled* to return. I could do nothing about it; even from my years as a psychiatrist, I could not resist. When it seemed like the community was about to gather, I was pulled back like a reluctant magnet.

Out of its characteristically awkward and graceless beginning, the large group confronts many of civilization's perennial concerns: power and authority, discovery and distribution of resources, violence and security, competition and fairness, sexuality, health care, education, freedom, leisure, alienation, and scarcity; and frequently—though not always—it develops elegant and equitable means of self-regulation and inventive resolutions to crises. Actions of the group can be humane and intelligent; they can reach beyond the proposals of any single participant. Out of initial confusion and conflict, significant encounters, wisdom, love, and beauty can flourish. The workskhop may be a puzzle, a spectacle, nurturance, learning, inspiration.

Individually , there were generally a few participants who reported disappointing personal experiences, a few whose experience was rapturous, and the vast majority—over 90 percent in Bozarth's study (1981)—who regarded their learning experience as personally beneficial.

This chapter focuses on the large group that is able to reach a constructive state whereby creativity and justice are afforded its members. Many groups, of course, fail in this regard. They stretch and squirm but never develop attributes superior to those of a crowd. The reader is doubtless familiar with such groups.

Presented here, to the contrary, are comments and examples related to large groups that reach a *creative state*: that is, a state in which the group functions coherently and effectively, with wisdom and efficiency. The members are intense, both autonomous and cooperative, sensitive to the subtle flow of consciousness and affect in each other *and* to the patterns created moment-by-moment in the group. The process is not bound by its own previous organization. It changes to accommodate every voice, both sensible and delinquent, will not compromise, and settles only for intelligent actions that are just, growth promoting, and healing to the individual and to the community. The individuals' awareness of the group's patterns—the coherent thoughts and actions of the group brought about by all the individual thoughts and actions—gives the group a self-consciousness. In the creative state the thoughts, sentiments, possibilities of the community and the isolated human

consciousness may not be the same; they may not be *one*, but they are not *two*.

Crises

Crises are well-known for bringing out the best of human compassion and ingenuity. Though the large group can precipitate a crisis, it is also capable in its creative state of resolving it in a manner both intelligent and humane. Threats from within or without the group—the threat of violence, irresolvable conflict between members, and illness—are frequent crises that confront the large group.

The crisis precipitated when a member of the community "breaks down" emotionally is not uncommon. Person-centered workshops have demonstrated (though not always) that the group is capable of resolving this crisis while respecting the security, well-being, and dignity of both the individual *and* the group (Wood, 1982).

Anticipating the Future

In a morning's gathering of 150 persons, the question of how to organize time for meetings and other activities is raised.

"I think we need *more* structure than ordinary daily life," Terry proposes. "We want to have a definite plan whereby people can learn and solve problems arising in the course of our workshop. I envision breaking into small groups and reporting back to the large group according to a definite organizational pattern." Many people nod in sympathy.

Linda agrees: "We have a limited amount of time. We can't take a chance that nothing would happen and this entire venture would be a waste of time and money." Linda, Terry, and Paul volunteer to form a committee with others who work with organizational planning and business consulting in client-centered ways. The meeting adjourns with the committee promising to present a plan at the 2:00 P.M. meeting.

In the afternoon, the planning committee makes a compelling presentation to the large group. Through scheduled blocks of time, workshop participants will be able to "learn and meet personal needs in an orderly and efficient manner." The plan is accepted with apparent enthusiasm by the group.

As congratulations are being shared, a few small voices are heard objecting, not to the plan, or to the suggested topics, but to the very *idea*

of planning. Julie, a shy young woman who has not spoken before in the meeting, and a soft-mannered middle-aged man, Anthony, manage to express a vague fear that something, perhaps an opportunity, is about to be lost. Was anything genuinely *new* being attempted in this workshop? Was this plan the most ingenious one the community was capable of envisioning?

Julie asks haltingly, "What would it be like to live for a while *with others in a community* in a truly new way, governed by our natural relationship, one to another, and our collective organic possibility, whatever that may be? What would it be like to be free to flow and connect with others with similar interests and perhaps discover our common purpose? Do we really need a schedule of activities to do this?"

People here and there nod in agreement.

"Adopting a schedule," Anthony adds thoughtfully, "would give us an efficient workshop. But those who did not fit into it would have to go their own way. Sure, the structure proposed allows them this freedom. If you don't like the society, you can always drop out. But can we all go our *own* ways *together*, wandering without a preconceived plan, but sensitive to the hidden purpose of this whole collection of persons?"

The meeting ends without setting a time or place for the next gathering. People will evidently try having no plan. Even the committee that had worked so hard to produce the schedule excitedly anticipates the outcome.

A participant's journal records the following:

> That evening, while reading in my room, a vague restlessness overcame me. "It must be time for a meeting," I whispered to myself. Unconvinced of my true motives, I left my room and headed toward the place where we met in the afternoon. Joining me were a half dozen others who were strolling down the hill. Entering the doorway we were surprised to find over half of the entire group, assembled and buzzing with excitement. In a few minutes nearly the complete community was present and someone was speaking of his incredulity that this "crazy scheme" might actually be working.

In the days that followed, a crude order was established. It did not obey a predetermined plan but nevertheless allowed the group to meet efficiently and satisfy its members' social and productive needs.

This example illustrates the fruit of patience and the willingness to be changed—not by novelty but by a new reality, in all of its complexity.

The persons in this community did not just exchange philosophies, but allowed themselves to organize in a fundamentally different way. Community members became aware of not only their individual patterns of behavior but also the pattern of the whole. A seemingly private impulse, for example, to go to the meeting room was shared by many. It was not only an isolated act but represented the group's volition.

The rejection of a member by the group, when individually many accept the person; the restlessness, humor, and moods that are contagious in meetings illustrate other such patterns. The ability to perceive the group's patterns decreases the likelihood of group members ignoring their responsibility for the consequences of collective actions. Moreover, this awareness may also contribute to more intelligent group actions.

Beyond Democracy: Participatory Intuition

The large group can and often does destroy every attempt at systematization. This can either debilitate or liberate the development of a creative state. The following episode illustrates an apparently chaotic experience that resulted in a liberating and precise democratic action—and, one could say, decision—using processes not ordinarily associated with democracy.

During the course of the workshop many participants wish to take a break, a day off from the busy, self-imposed schedule of activities. Many also oppose the idea.

"I am afraid," Lillian says. "Back home, I live alone. Next year I will be 70. All my best friends have passed on, and I spend a good deal of time by myself. I am afraid. I don't know. If we take a holiday, my new friends here... well, they might leave me. I couldn't bear to be dropped after feeling so much... love."

Some agree that the day off is as much a part of the workshop as other days. No one has to be alone. A time off can provide a learning opportunity also.

George objects: "We can take a day off anytime at home. I came here to work, not to loaf around."

"I don't want to legislate a day off," Chip remarks. "To legislate, to me, seems phony and structured. I want to just flow with it. When I feel like taking time off, I will do so."

"But you're not so free," replies Michael. "We are presently *flowing*, as you call it, to a lock-step schedule."

In the discussion it is also suggested (by some of the psychologically

minded present) that "existential aloneness" may be behind the "resistance" to doing nothing on a day off.

Every dimension of the problem is aired. Every thought, opinion, relevant fact, possessed by any person who wishes to be heard is considered. The meeting ends without a stated decision.

Two days pass. Suddenly one morning the routine ceases. There are no morning small group meetings, no late morning general assemblies. A group of music-makers surrounds Lillian at the pool; people are going to town for shopping, some go on a picnic, some sleep late. The result of these accumulated independent acts is a day off!

Of course, whether or not the participants got their day off is of little consequence; but the process of resolving this question illustrates how informed intuition can bring about constructive, coherent action.

The collective action was *spontaneous but not impulsive.* It was not the "tyranny of spontaneity" in which people simply go their own way. This was a coordinated effort. Each knew the others' viewpoints from the exhaustive discussions. The final outcome was tempered by the thoughts and opinions expressed in the discussions. Thus the group was cognitively prepared for an informed choice.

The final action was *intelligent but not strictly logical.* It did not follow from a linear sequence of logical steps but included the participants' sentiments. Feelings and emotions were expressed and taken into consideration in the earlier deliberations. Every need, desire, feeling expressed was accepted as contributing to the eventual outcome.

Furthermore, the result was arrived at by a *democratic process but was not legislated.* In this process the power resided in and was executed by the people. Those whose lives would be affected were involved in the steps leading to the final action. Unlike most processes called "democractic," no compromise had to be made. The communal reality was not defined by a statistical summing of individual positions, but by unified action that respected both the interdependent relationships of individuals and the individuals themselves.

No plan was made, decision stated, or vote taken prior to the eventual action. There was no agreement regarding time, place, or conditions for acting. In workshops such as this, it is common for meetings to end in consensus but without a stated agreement. In fact, after debating an issue with diverse and strongly held sentiments and opinions, attempting to state any "decision" in words, to vote on an apparent consensus, or similar attempts at ratification, often leads to renewed disagreement and factions. The complexity of the group's sentiment, which can be expressed in a unified act, evidently cannot be captured in words like "yes" or "no."

In the foregoing example the process did not result in democractic policies but did result in wise action. The group did not adopt an "organic model of consensus management." Rather, each person expressed a unique individuality in an efficient collective effort that promoted the well-being of the whole and of the individual.

As one might suspect, when groups have *tried* to make decisions "intuitively" or by an "organic process," they have rarely succeeded. If individuality becomes the focus, self-preoccupation and chaos are the usual outcome; if individuals exhort one another to "work as a team" or to "build community," oppression or immobility often result. In the creative state, attention on the group process is alert but diffused.

Transformation of Group Culture

A participant confronts a large group with a furious need to "stage a happening." Members of the group are eager at first to support what they imagine to be a psychodramatic emotional display—beating pillows, kicking, screaming—a norm of behavior that has been established in this group. The man proposes an encounter. He will play the part of his wife. Another person will play the husband. The group will look on.

Though they cannot explain it, several persons in the group express discomfort with the man's proposal. Others grow impatient to "get on with it." A sensitive and profound dialogue ensues between members of the group and the protagonist. The play that takes place is not what the man had in mind. No one moves from their chairs. The group draws out of him an agonizing story of how he sadly witnessed his wife sink into an emotional breakdown over the death of a friend, which led to her eventual hospitalization. Step by step, as their understanding allows, the man and group members struggle through a drama of mutual invention.

"In doing this psychodrama, do you intend to live what your wife felt?" he is asked.

"Yes, in order to better understand her experience and my love for her," he answers.

"Do you intend to do something that could end in *your* hospitalization?"

"I don't know the outcome, but I am prepared."

"Could anyone be hurt in this play?"

"It is not my intention to hurt anyone."

To some his answers are reassuring, proving that he is "taking

responsibility" for his actions. To others, his replies signal alarm. The tension builds steadily. Some urge him to "go ahead, dive in; the risks are worth it." Others want to support him but do not "feel right" about their involvement.

Minutes give way to hours and finally, an integration.

"I don't need to act out my wife's trauma. I *feel* what she felt and you feel it with me. I have gotten what I need already. I needed you to go with me. But I needed you to be strong, so I could be strong, so I could face myself. I needed you to care, in order to feel my caring. I've got what I needed, not what I thought I wanted. Suddenly, I understand the love of two strong people."

"What had your wife done?" someone asks as the group members shuffle from the room.

Passing through the swinging glass doorway, he replies, matter-of-factly:

"Exploding insanely, she threw loose objects at me and, tearing off her clothes, shattered a plate glass window with her naked body."

Somehow the group had sensed that the man's intention might be dangerous. Even if he assumed responsibility for his actions, the group would not accept a harmful outcome. Together, through mutual searching, members of the group (including the man himself) created a constructive alternative.

Conventional thinking might regard the change of direction as the "group will" putting "pressure" on the individual to conform his behavior to the group norm. But one must not forget that the man began with the intention of conforming to the cultural norm of explosive display of emotions and the group initially supported this approach, prepared to assist in the action.

Rather, the drama was one coherent act, during which the path, but not the destination, changed. The goal was accomplished through the transformation of the group culture. The person followed his desire to understand himself and it took him in a surprising direction—not toward violence but away from it. The community could have handled the crisis of an "emotional breakdown" if the man became a "problem." In this group, however, members of the group were sensitive to the pattern of the group and its consequence to the person. In a sense, they empathically "lived" the experience with him. They changed together.

The man related afterward that he understood more clearly the relationship with his wife, not only in the group but back home as well.

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS WHICH ACCOMPANY CREATIVE STATES IN LARGE GROUPS

> One person alone is nothing; when two are together, you have a unity.
>
> [from a small Brazilian village]

What a person-centered approach taught us about community was that a large group, in a creative state, can resolve crises, find solutions to complex problems, intelligently coordinate its activities without plans, legislation, or parliamentary procedures, and even transform its culture in a compassionate and efficient process that involves, respects, and benefits each of its members and itself. The question that remains is: What allows one group not only to surpass the accomplishments of individual members, but to reach a creative state, while others end without ever reaching the level of capability of one of their individual members?

Doubtless, the effects of setting, sunshine, summer leisure, the magic of beginnings, other romances, adventure, challenge, and many nonspecific factors play their part in forming a creative state. The composition of group membership is a critical factor. However, not being well understood, it is not developed in the following discussion. Suggested here are essential aspects of individual behavior and consciousness that seem to accompany the creative state.

Allowing Diffused Control

Though the organizers play a key role in convening the workshop, their actions alone do not predict a creative state. As soon as the preparatory tasks are accomplished, the staff relinquishes its institutionalized authority to the group. No leaders are elected, appointed, or otherwise designated, but they do emerge. They are many, and they are recognized as the persons who provide a significant fact, insight, or technical skill; an appropriate sentiment that others only vaguely sense; or a piece of information at exactly the right moment. It is as Xenophon described his comrades, 10,000 leaderless Greek soldiers, who made their way safely from Persia back to Greece. Drawing on individual intelligence and initiative, each one was a leader, "free individuals unified by a spontaneous service to the common life" (Hamilton, 1942, p. 226).

Autonomy and Humility

The creative state seems to be accompanied by what are usually regarded as contradictory aspects held concurrently in the group and eventually within the same person.

One aspect will be called *autonomy*. A person is capable of self-governance, independent thought and action, and expression of his or her unique thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and perceptions in reacting to the group. The person can maintain a separate identity by experiencing personal values, feelings, and thoughts in a larger context than merely the present moment. Thus, in the example related earlier, Julie and Anthony illustrate autonomy by confronting a movement toward unanimity with, "Wait a minute. This does not feel right to me as an individual."

Somewhat paradoxically the person is also able to live fully in the moment, abandoning pride, a sense of personal significance, to surrender to something that transcends himself or herself. This aspect will be called *humility*.

Those who put forward their best idea for a solution to a serious problem the group faces and then relinquish their idea, doctrine, belief, perception for one superior in that moment are expressing the convergence of autonomy and humility present in the creative state.

Humility. In order to further clarify this aspect it may be useful to define the notion of "trance states."

The usual state of consciousness is characterized by a frame of reference called the "generalized reality-orientation" that, in the background of attention, "supports, interprets, and gives meaning to all experiences" of the person (Shor, 1959). This orientation can temporarily fade or disintegrate in special states of mind and become nonfunctional. Sleep is the most common example of this condition. "Any state," Shor has stated, "in which the generalized reality-orientation has faded to relatively nonfunctional unawareness may be termed a trance state." In trance the person is highly suggestible and may come to experience reality in a totally different way. What was regarded as impossible becomes possible, even superhuman feats.

> The person no longer seems bound to the necessity for syllogistic reasoning, the distinctions between cause and effect may vanish, the notion of time may become more relative, opposites can coexist and not seem contradictory.... A type of "perceptual cognitive restructuring" tends to occur in which the individual has available new avenues of experience and expression. (Ludwig, 1967, p. 13)

Trance can be induced by separation from routine daily life; emotional tension (Sargant, 1957); ambiguity and confusion (Frank, 1973); public confessions of feeling (Lifton, 1961); listening to music, singing and dancing (Deren, 1970); fatigue (Tyler, 1955); boredom (Heron, 1957); fasting (Field, 1960); and the use of alcohol, caffeine, and other mind-altering chemicals. These factors are all present to some extent in large group workshops as well as in the course of psychotherapy, psychic experiences, healing, religious conversion, spirit possession, and many other activities.

Persons in trance are able to extend their powers of physical agility and strength, concentration, perception, insight, and creativity—not only personally but also to guide and maintain the collective. Through trance and the developed tradition of the community (such as what witch doctors, healers, or psychotherapists may oversee):

> The individual participates in the accumulated genius of the collective, and by such participation becomes himself a part of that genius—something more than himself. *His exaltation results from his participation,* it does not precede and compel it. (Deren, 1970, p. 229)

What we are calling humility allows the person to yield to the creative aspects of the trance: to relax the critical faculties and to surrender opinions, convictions, and perceptions by allowing the mind to bypass "the particularities of circumstances, the limitations and imprecisions of the senses" to arrive at "some common principled truth of the matter" (Deren, 1970, p. 22). This humility allows the surrender of impatience and easy answers for an attentive waiting—alert to follow *or* to lead *or* to remain still.

In this state, the individual is able to live unattached to a particular form. At one time, the absence of structured activities may bring about a creative state; at another time, the group may require a highly organized structure. Solutions that worked before or succeeded in other groups are not necessarily effective in a different situation. The individual may have to surrender even the understanding gained from past experience, to live with doubts, with fears, but without being governed by them.

Although not every person in the group is admired, or even liked,

humility enables each person's existence to be *accepted*, as one accepts the world, without trying to decide if it is to be believed or not. People try to put themselves in the other's shoes, trying to sense the meaning of the person's expressions, both for the individual and for the group. Negative feelings are accepted as a reality and not *always* a prelude to destructive action. Different interpretations of the same event are used for invention. Without autonomy to express conflicting feelings, the group lacks the tension of creativity; without humility to transcend differences, it lacks the fact of creativity.

This creative state, it must be said, is fragile. It is so vulnerable that probably anyone, with the intention to do so, can prevent its appearance. This contention is supported by observations from other groups as well. Doob (1970) reports how the sensitive resolution of complex issues (through the development of a creative state) was sabotaged by "erratic and sometimes calculatedly disruptive behavior which seemed to manifest itself most when some progress or agreement was close to hand" (p. 109).

Sometimes, however, even well-intentioned people can do the same by lacking humility. As one person in a workshop put it, "We weren't mature enough to handle it." One need not be nice, agreeable, congenial, or even cordial; only good willed.

Autonomy. Without inner discipline, or a ritualized tradition to provide discipline, the trance state can also lead to the radical crowd behavior described by McDougall in the introduction to this chapter. The same conditions that result in relaxation of the generalized reality-orientation, opening the possibilities of creativity, can also, through weakening the critical judgment of group members, render participants prey to "group think." The person's self-transcending nature—humility—can be manipulated if he gives up a "dynamic, changing, viable and useful kind of cognitive response" for "certain kinds of routine and stock thoughts which he is unwilling to examine critically" (Schein, Schneier, & Barker, 1961, p. 262). The creative state needs self-directed persons to challenge mechanical thought and stock premises and to check the formation of mindless followers. Autonomy, with its isolated, personal viewpoint, can protect against the development of "true believers" and help to piece together a wise outcome for the group. It relentlessly challenges the objectives and fundamental values of the community.

By not abdicating responsibility and by exercising individual intelligence the individual is less likely to be "swallowed by efficiency,"

"sacrificed to the higher good," or pressured into becoming "the correct member of society."

Humility and autonomy are merely names given to the primary, yet inseparable, individual factors accompanying the creative state. They characterize one consciousness of the individuals. They are two sides of the same coin: The individual can be vigorously expressive, lucid, and delineated, while functioning in a spontaneous congruence, diffused with an intelligent and effective collective of persons. The conjunction is more than either face. It does not obey the private or the universal. This conjunction faces life with expectancy and without expectations. It is not interested in chaos or self-preoccupation. It is interested in *being* community, not "forming community," and will not tolerate oppression or immobility in the group. Contrary to conventional expectation, its autonomy functions for unity of the whole; its humility functions for individual growth.

Finally, good will, acceptance, and trust are not ends in themselves. They are likely an essential part of the provocation for wise and effective groups. Their role, as it may originally have been in religion, is probably as technical prerequisites to the transformation of group consciousness, not to anchor morality or a belief system.

In other eras autonomy and humility were part of this transformational consciousness. There were participants who, as oracles and prophets, provided leadership and wise counsel to the community in a state of consciousness that was also "a curious blend of gainfully directed hysteria and patient self-discipline" (Field, 1960, p. 65). In this regard, groups have probably always provided the means for altering the human consciousness to facilitate individual growth, make intelligent group decisions, and instruct the community.

Perhaps the group still provides such possibilities. At its best, the whole, the community, can be a teacher for the seeker, a therapist for the client, provider of alternatives for the problem-solver, inspiration for the artist. The essence of its creative state may come not from one person, with answers, but out of a group of persons with questions, not fully realizing that a wisdom may be hidden in their searching.

NOTES

1. The initiators of these large group interactions were Natalie Rogers, Carl Rogers, John K. Wood, Alan Nelson, and Betty Meador. After the first year's work Nelson and Meador undertook other pursuits and the staff was

reconstituted. In the next six years the most consistent staff group, working together on this approach to large group work, consisted of Natalie Rogers, Carl Rogers, John K. Wood, Maria Bowen, Jared Kass, Maureen Miller, and Joann Justyn. Since 1976 many other combinations of persons have also convened similar events in all corners of the world.

2. Doubtless, the tribal groups often envied for their harmonious functioning also failed to arrive at unity free from boredom, frustration, confusion, and aggravation.