

When using the Theoretical approach

R. Viljoen (2002)

When using the Tavistock approach, **sense is made out of non-sense**, verbal and non verbal behaviors are interpreted and occurrences take place in the here and now. The basic hypothesis to this approach is that the worker approaches the work situation with family needs which are unfulfilled and unconscious. He or she wants to fulfill these needs in the work situation. Because these can not be realized in the work environment, the individual unconsciously experiences conflict. The need also has to do with the need for power over colleagues and even the father/mother figure. Anxiety is experienced because inherent needs do not fit the reality of the work situation.

Differences in approaches between working Rogerian (humanistic) and working psychoanalytical are explored in the following grid:

PHASE IN WHICH BEHAVIOR OCCUR	ROGERIAN APPROACH – HUMANISTIC	TAVISTOCK APPROACH
PHASE	THE FACILITATOR	THE CONSULTANT
Forming	Two facilitators (equal)	Three designated consultants - one in "charge", and one observer
All phases	Facilitator does not give structure. They engage with individual members.	Consultants give structure. They keep to time limits. Don't mix with members, and eat and drink alone
All phases	Share of self Speak of the "I"	"It seems that certain members.." Hypothesis are group orientated
Forming	Facilitator speaks of "us as team members"	Consultants are distant, representing authority – EXCO
All phases	Facilitators are real persons. Form relationships with members	Consultants are almost not human
All phases	Facilitators make eye contact	Eyes are kept down
Storming	Facilitation focused on building relationships	Consultant focused on splits in the group
Storming to Performing	Facilitator may open sessions by asking: "Where do you find yourself now?"	Due to the spiral, the interaction stated already on another level
Storming to Performing	Facilitators is relation on an emotional level	Consultants don't share emotions. They almost ignore individual feelings
Norming to Performing	The facilitator can backtrack	Aggression is towards consultant/ object. Consultant never make a wrong interpretation - just project it back if they experience resistance by saying " Oh, you are resisting . . ."
All Phases	Democracy	Authority
All Phases	Facilitator is relaxed and laid back	Consultant respond to backstabbing, male vs. female split, leadership and other authority issues
Norming to Performing	The facilitator check with individuals, small groups and big groups by asking "are you all right: "Is this facilitative for you?"	The consultant only focus on the group and addresses issues indirectly "It may seem that a member have a problem with.."
Norming to Performing	The facilitator provide a context or learning opportunities	The facilitator provides space to test issues to authority, study group relations, and understand how they act under uncertainty. Insight into individual defense mechanisms are created.

DIFFERENT THE PHASES:

1.1 FORMING – THE PLENARY EVENT

The consultants start the session on time with a vague instruction. The group usually tries to get direction form the consultants. The silence can be very uncomfortable. No structure will be provided. The members try to find out what is expecting of them. Some want to start working at the task immediately. Sometimes there will be support for an opinion, but the group typically doesn't stick to any suggestion. Some group members may coup out. As the consultants are experienced as rude and unhelpful, specific members may sense aggression or irritation which will manifest in fight, flight, pairing, meanness, inappropriate humor and/or rationalization.

The consultants manipulate the chairs and try to ensure that the group work within this structure. Often the chaos becomes so much that the group has an inability to do the task of this session, namely plan for the rest of the process.

This stage is completed when members start to think of themselves as part of the group. They accept the structure provided by EXCO (chairs in format) and begin working on the task.

1.2 DYNAMICS DURING THE FORMING STAGE : DEPENDENCY, INCLUSION

There is a significant amount of member dependency on the designated consultants. The consultants strictly stick to set procedures. Except for the time constraints, they don't give too much content. Because of the need for structure, the effect/impact of the spiral and all the other normal reactions to the first stage, the group can feel tremendously uncomfortable. Due to the almost un-humanistic approach of the consultants, the members may feel totally directionless. Infighting typically starts and politics within the group often prevents the group from working on the task.

The Afrox-group moved to this phase in the first half an hour as for the solid leadership provided by one group member. The maturity level of some of the other members also influenced this significantly.

As the group leader also took responsibility for managing the time boundaries, no sense of interruption were experienced.

It is critical for members to at the end of the process clearly understand that they will react to any change in the same way that they have reacted to the chaos of the plenary session. If individual leaders can realize their own dynamics, emotional self awareness and thus emotional intelligence is increased significantly.

2. STORMING

The goal of the group is to forge agreements about beliefs and values. During this phase the power struggle can be furious or subtle. This is a phase of intra group conflict. During this phase participants have the opportunity to assess their beliefs and values about authority, how they respond to people with different views and how they believe the group should function. Members feel safer about expressing their opinions and disagreeing with others. There is generally a struggle for informal leadership of the group among some of the stronger members. Some members will see the group as a way to increase their power and control. Quieter members may tend to withdraw and not participate.

Working from a humanistic approach, introversion is appreciated and valued. In this approach however, it can be viewed as power play – withholding of opinion. Leaders, especially HR practitioners need to rise to the challenge and claim authority in the face of adversity – whether extraverted or not. This skill can be practiced and form part of emotional intelligence.

As trust and confidence are not yet established, more aggressive members can overpower more passive ones. Conflict develops, the group seems to drift along, and everyone feels as though they are in rut. Members may deny that they are having a problem or that there is any conflict. At this stage members need to encourage each other to talk about their feelings and be honest about what is occurring in the group. Open communication becomes essential to moving the group into the next stage. Each team member has hidden agendas that he/she carries into the team. During this stage it starts to emerge. The existence of the group is accepted but there is as resistance to the constraints that the group imposes on individuality. Confrontation may be through accusations or incompetence, lack of direction or refusal to disclose personal feelings. Language like referring to oneself in the second and third person is used (as “you” or “one”). This depersonalizes statements (may lead to conflict). The speaker is in effect giving up ownership of what he/she is saying.

Group members still seek assurance/approval from the leader/consultant. However, often the group now become dependent on one or two leaders within the group and ignores the consultants. Some group members sense guilt for doing this. It is quite challenging for the leadership in the group to consolidate all ideas / thoughts and often this needs to be done by force to enable the group to move forward. Passive aggression, unconscious sabotage starting to take place – this time reflected to the leadership within the group. They still ignore or react negatively towards hypothesis made by the consultants.

The same frustrations that manifest in a working environment where not everybody knows exactly what is going on, where there is uncertainty as to how to perform the task, where individual needs are denied and where there is no recognition for work well done, play out in the group. (How disappointing for the group – they so much wanted to escape reality of pressures of work – if even only for a day!).

If an individual has an inability to make him or herself heard in a working context and the same happens in this simulation, powerlessness is experienced and the consultants are blamed for it. Often the blame also shifts to the leaders within the group.

If individuals can acknowledge their own feelings – they do not have to share it – and if they can understand WHY they feel that way, WHAT triggered it and HOW they respond to it, intra personal skills will improve and interpersonal effectiveness will be enhanced. This can be a life changing learning – not only to apply at work.

If a member can identify what exactly caused him or herself to feel the intense emotions that they experience during this phase and what the impact of that emotions is on their functioning (e.g. withdrawal), they can recognise it in their own psyche and manage it consciously rather than being in the grips of the unconscious.

Individuals also take up specific roles in groups – some take up the role of the joker, others that of facilitator or the rescuer. It is also helpful to ask yourself what roles you end up playing in all the groups you join. Although the group unconsciously assigns the role to a specific member, the member takes on the role – consciously or unconsciously.

It is also important that HR Practitioners understand the impact of change on the psyche of their line partner and to realise that the same dynamics that were experienced in this session, will play out in the bigger system.

Often, groups do not move passed this phase. The Afrox group did it brilliantly!!!

When members begin to value each other's contributions, become tolerant of each other's differences, and are comfortable participating, the group has moved to the next stage - norming.

2.2 DYNAMICS DURING THE STORMING STAGE: COUNTERDEPENDANCY AND FIGHT

The role of the consultant is yet again to be "inhuman", to avoid eye-contact, not to address a member personally and to through every thing back to the group. They start making conclusions out of the non-sense in the room. They may look at the order in which people sit and draw conclusions from that, or they may look at the colors / clothes people wear. They make comments on the authority figure, male/female or race issues. They start to link unconscious behavior to certain manifested behavior. The consultant must give responses that will address the here-and now.

3.1 NORMING

Members learn to handle other member's hidden agendas and recognize that in diversity there is strength. Learning to confront issues, developing feedback skills and actively listening, help members to become a cohesive, unified team and expedites movement into the final stage. Unacceptable behavior is "punished" by the group. One may seek approval and is punished by feedback or silence

Members, who have not had many opportunities to share themselves, will find this phase very special and satisfying. Individuals might however lose sight of their goal. Individuals can facilitate group development by being open to new ideas and ways of reacting. Giving and receiving open feedback is very important. Helping oneself and others to gain awareness and to experiment with new ways of responding is important.

Resistance to group processes may take place. Members may do any of the following:

- intellectualizing
- rambling
- complaining about norms
- being defensive
- monopolizing the conversation
- not sharing feeling
- being afraid to lose control
- being afraid to cry
- moralizing
- refusing to participate
- scapegoating
- avoiding anxiety
- being absent
- exhibiting seductive behavior
- engaging in lengthy silences
- storytelling
- focusing on others
- being sarcastic
- blaming

This stage is complete when the group structure solidifies and the group has a common set of expectations of correct, acceptable member behavior.

To the surprise of the consultants the Afrox-leadership managed to get the group passed this phase in a very short time.

Although the picking order was sorted out quickly in the group, the process was still unconscious and underlying emotions created unease. Usually the same hierarchy will form in the group that plays itself out in the organisation.

3.2. DYNAMIC DURING THE NORMING STAGE: TRUST AND STRUCTURE

Members feel more secure. Trust develops between members and leader, Negotiation take place about goals, structure, roles etc. Communication is open and members start working with their task. Power struggles lessen in intensity. Feedback is more related to task. Feelings of trust and cohesion increase. The emotional undercurrent is cohesiveness. People use “I”, “mine” etc. and start working with their own feelings towards e.g. authority.

Often the inputs of the consultants are now worked with – explored. The group takes ownership of the time limits and often do not stop when designated consultants ask them to do so.

Specific members of the Afrox group did not realise that it is their responsibility to take up ownership for their process and not to let external influences keep them from their task. A blaming culture can result from this dynamic.

4.1 PERFORMING

This stage occurs in groups where each member is respected and protected by the group. Performing groups have learned to be tolerant of individual weaknesses and to utilize strengths. They also recognize that diversity within the team makes it more interesting, dynamic, and resourceful. They take advantage of the collective knowledge and insight residing in the group. Now the group is fully functioning. It is now the time to make the changes to which members have decided. New ways of responding and behaving in the group is practiced in order to prepare to do the same outside the group, back in the working context.

The team no longer depends on the consultants and realizes that hypothesis is made to the benefit of the group process. They start to enjoy the input and laugh at their own dynamics.

Another important part of the work stage is to begin the exit process. Some of this happens informally. Formal, more structured methods to transfer new ways of thinking feeling and behaving can also be undertaken by the group

In the case of the inter group event, members were invited to step out of boundary and enter new systems. Contracting needs to take place. The Afrox group could have engaged more and missed the opportunity to explore across boundaries. This can also be a risk in the working environment where time constraint and good intent to do own assigned tasks, can have an influence on the amount of energy spend on ensuring that relationships across boundaries are leveraged and optimized. Systems can not function in isolation and in order to ensure sustainability boundaries must be permeable.

4.2 DYNAMIC DURING THE PERFORMING STAGE: WORK

The group is ready to study group dynamics. They explore their own emotions feelings toward certain issues. They stick to the here and the now. The consultant doesn't play an active role during this stage at all. The group functions on their own and works with the unconscious behavior draw conclusions and integrate ideas. Feedback is honest and direct and often very useful and valuable.

The quality of the outcome of the Afrox-group was surprising and if utilize effectively, the co- creation thereof will ensure validity.

The group performed brilliantly – they created good outcome whilst engaging in a tiring, irritating and frustrating process. The consultants are of view that the inherent drive of the group will ensure that task is implemented brilliantly – the question is on the sustainability and the amount of energy in the group.

5. TERMINATION

Often in the true application of Tavistock, no formal termination process takes place. It is however worthwhile to include a 30 minute session to create a sense of understanding.

- During this session the process is explained. It is important to realize the following:
- It is a conflict model
- It focuses on own patterns towards authority
- It works on how one will react under chaos
- Group members often are angry when they leave
- Group members sometimes never understands the process
- As individual complexes and dynamics play a role one can merely normalize emotions felt, but work to be done is the task of the individual

- The group is viewed as a micro system of the bigger Afrox system and therefore the same dynamics that will play out here, will play out there

The questions that an individual must post him- or herself are

- “What in the process caused conflict in me?”
- “How did I respond to that”
- “What can I do in the future to manage my reaction”

They also work with their own issues of authority and diversity and with unconscious behavior and group processes.

It is healthy and indeed very normal for group members to feel “robbed” of a nice playful teambuilding and being “manipulated” into a group event which challenged thoughts and is very much alike organisational life. The more people verbalize discomfort – the better. However care must be taken that the blame is not put on the facilitators, the manager or the organizer of the event. This can be done by acknowledging frustration, normalizing it by ensuring member that the emotion is part of the event, and facilitating the cause of the emotion in the individual to create emotional self awareness.