

Generative Groups

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“The next Buddha will be a group” (Thich Nhat Han) – if the development of collective intelligence is successful! When we work in or with groups, the question always arises how the various individuals impact each other, how they connect, and what kind of social creations result from these processes. No matter whether we are dealing with families, work-teams, rock-bands or groups of stakeholders – the moment we stumble into a group, we experience at first hand that from diversity, which in the face of uncertainty strives to turn into something specific, both nightmares as well as mankind’s dreams may come true.

1. What Are We Here For? A Group is Many Things – All at the Same Time

Groups satisfy various human needs such as a longing for security and belonging, kindred spirit, a fulfilling collaboration or the possibility to change the world. As an alternative to hierarchical organisations, groups offer the possibility of cooperation amongst equals, both at work and in life. This makes them attractive. Into some groups we are born, such as family and blood relations; some we join voluntarily and leave them again, for instance work-teams or rock-bands; or we become part of them by chance as in a community in fate – in a school-class, for example, or by getting stuck with others in an elevator... Thus our ability to leave a group may vary.

2. A Group Is That Which Is In-Between: The Connection is Decisive!

Groups are formed in a creative process between human beings, face-to-face. With the powers of consciousness, volition and ability, its members create a web of thoughts, feelings and actions connecting each other as well as linking the group with its environment.

Intention as well as networks of interrelation join together and speed up change – depending on the “what for”, the group-members self-organise these networks of relations. If the intention or the reason for their existence changes – consciously or unconsciously – sooner or later the network of relationships - that’s to say: the group as such – also must change. For instance, if the interest in a cooperative peer-consulting-group wanes, it is time to accept that it has come to an end and to allow the group to dissolve. The birth of a child, or a conflict regarding a person’s position in a rock-band, pose different questions concerning direction and order: What kind of music are we going to play? Will we move to a different apartment? Should we separate?

3. Flow or Flaw?

A positive collaboration comes about whenever the flow – that’s to say: the connection between the individual parts – is intact. If it is not, disturbances occur. Flight, a blind rush into action, conflict, torpor, constant friction, endless empty talk or exclusion are typical symptoms of disrupted or rigid processes. The flow comes to a halt. – At this point, mediators or consultants are frequently called upon to help.

At first sight it is often not very clear between whom the tensions are created and what their impact is on the group as a whole. For instance, individuals, a couple or a sub-group may raise a topic which concerns the whole group. When a disturbance occurs, the question is what this might mean for the group as a whole. Individuals necessarily function as a mouthpiece for the group. Disturbances are like a fire alarm of the social body; they indicate where development, healing, renewal etc. have to take place.

3.1. Therefore...

The question that follows next is: where is the flow disrupted? What is happening in the underlying levels?

3.2. Consciousness: At Which Level Are We?

Knowledge of the structures of consciousness – that's to say, the various levels which exist in every social system in the form of diverse but connected layers of reality – can be helpful in this matter (see Gebser, Ursprung und Gegenwart 1986, Novalis). In human evolution as well as during each person's ego development we pass through the stages of the so-called vertical development and come up against thresholds and transitions which have to be mastered either individually or collectively. Depending upon circumstances, different layers indicate either disturbances or impulses for growth. Light nougat follows dark nougat – just like Ildefonso sweets. Below I'd like to sketch a short outline of various phenomena which are typical for each level and highlight several issues which might help towards a possible diagnosis and intervention.

In **archaic consciousness**, humans live in innocence, in a kind of paradisiac all-encompassing unity, feeling sheltered like in deep sleep. At this level, a human counterpart does not yet exist. There is no group; individuals are connected by a primordial, pre-lingual communication of their bodies.

Questions:

- What does the pre-lingual communication of the bodies reveal?
- What is already said before anybody utters a word?
- Has innocence, self-forgetfulness been lost? And if so, where?
- May pure perception and direct expression of the perceived actually exist?

In the realm of **magical** consciousness, a group as unit without ego holds together as if glued. Here, the core issue is a feeling of belonging by means of successful bonding with the clan (e.g. family). If the bonds are disrupted, if for instance a part is excluded, all the other parts pay by expressing symptoms that aim to integrate what is excluded – pars pro toto. Light: connectedness, vitality, protection against the powers of nature or intruders. Dark: impulse-driven fealty, uniformity, manipulation.

Questions:

- Is everyone allowed to be present?
- Are the group boundaries palpable, clear?
- Who is missing?
- Are there sustainable relationships; is there trust?
- Is everybody who belongs also acknowledged?

In **mythical** consciousness, a system of regulations and roles connects all inherent parts – it is still without ego but belongs to a “we” that is built of rules, sequences, processes and the necessary roles which follow the principles of action and repetition. Order is an additional value. Light: sustainable systems of order which are more complex than magical ties. Dark: torpor, myth before man.

Questions:

- Is everyone in their right place?
- Where is order disturbed?
- Are rules and regulations clear – appropriate / rigid / vague?
- What are the rules and what is my role in order to belong?
- What are the formal power structures?

On the dimension of rational, differentiating **mental consciousness**, the ego arrives on the group stage. Let’s make way for intellect and conflict! The search for balance becomes an added guiding value within consciousness. More complex forms of coexistence arise as a result. The unity of earlier stages is enriched by the ability to say: “I”. A wide range of perspectives is developed – division and patching things up, the possibility deliberately and rationally to pursue a goal. Light: diversity; rationally creating a future by following goals and objectives. Dark: the part imagines itself to be the whole. “I am the group.” The illusion of feasibility; fragmentation owing to diversity of perspectives; paralysis as a result of analysis, too much thinking, dissociation. Ego without wholeness.

Questions:

- Are differences visible and allowed? How much „I“ does the „we“ allow? (colourful vs. uniformity and constraint)
- Are competition and cooperation possible?
- How is balance achieved – and where is it disturbed?
- Does reflection exist as basis for self-control?
- Are rules and roles flexible, can they be adapted to the goal, can they be varied – for instance through reflection and the aimed-for goal?

The leap into **integral consciousness** allows for the possibility of creating ego-free, role-free, new, open and differentiated entities in which we can connect with but also transcend the

source, a new horizon and each other in a meaningful and rational way. Just like a transparent “Ildefonso”, this consciousness contains all that has been achieved before and integrates it into something completely new. Transparency means that the members are aware of how important the integrity of innocence, connection, order, balance and individuality, of meaning and wholeness are; and that they can jointly locate possible disturbances on any of these levels reflexively (by thinking) and somatically (by feeling); they can substantiate and eliminate them. Based on this ability – to travel up and down, like in an elevator, to pay appropriate respects to each of the levels – essential action in relation to the whole becomes a reality.

Questions:

- Can the group pause for a moment? is an anxiety-free emptiness possible from which new impulses may arise?
- Can something new come into being between us?
- Does everyone know their place and their connection to the whole? Integration of formal roles and characters, of special contributions and the ability of the individual within the whole.
- May subjective truths be uttered?
- Are mental concepts and assessments, formal rules and roles consciously known – and can they be transcended?
- Is somatic intelligence awakened / active? (Think – feel – “feel-think”)

Evolution demonstrates that the current of life flows through groups; it is filtered, specific to each layer, by intention, webs of relationships and meaning. If the flow is disturbed we can work with the filters; that’s to say: with consciousness and with what’s between us. What can possibly be solved, joined, caught up on, clarified, healed or exposed in the undercurrent so that positive results can again be found on the performance-level? (Surface structure = matter, achievement, peaceful coexistence).

Conversely: anything that doesn’t work within the deeper structure has an impact on the surface performance. If a member of the group is dismissed in discord, this can have a negative effect on the collaboration between the others because the process of splitting up, of balancing (mental) and of acknowledging the affiliation (magical), despite possible discord, has not been handled with awareness, neither within the individual nor the collective consciousness, and therefore cannot come to rest. Or, to put it differently: If a fire breaks out on the second floor of an eight-storey building, or if there is some water-damage on the fourth floor, the other floors will also be more or less affected, unless the problems are solved locally.

Recognising the paradox – that in the process of raising consciousness nothing can be skipped over and everything exists or comes into being simultaneously – the last question remains: How many layers does my own behaviour and my repertoire as counsellor have?

Postscript:

If we are successful in opening up consciousness, we can experience the unique power and special nature of the “group”. In terms of atmosphere, it becomes palpable as subtle shell, as

spirit, which encloses male and female existence, supports it and exerts its influence. Just as in a hologram, the members are both entities in themselves as well as part of a whole, which in its turn forms part of them all: I am part of the group – and the group exists in me (and this applies to all members!) Inspired by the diversity and complexity of the others I can grow – and they with me. This is the creative potential of the group.

Whoever has personally experienced this, knows that such groups are cells of innovation, greenhouses fostering creativity, healing and growth within its members and that they are contagious for their environment. The spirit cannot be intentionally enticed to leave the bottle or simply poured out. A necessary requirement seems to be the measure of truthfulness with which the members are present and communicate with each other; how they nourish their diversity and combine to create something new, even despite great differences. This cannot happen by volition and thought alone – that's impossible; but it has to be nourished by an aware and truth-giving "feel-thinking", a somatic intelligence which takes all the achievements since archaic times and makes them into something completely new.

