Difference and Integration in Groups

"Sitting in the Fire"

Kay Ryan

Introduction

Many of us are called on to lead groups – seminar groups, business/organisational groups, therapy groups, support groups and what are termed growth groups, family groups, school groups and others. There are many ways of leading these groups. Groups can be challenging and also frightening, for both leaders and participants, especially larger groups and ones that are less easy to control. Many of us prefer peaceful behaviour in groups where one person speaks at a time, where one sentence is finished before moving onto the next, where staying seated in an orderly fashion is the norm, and efforts are made not to be too loud or outspoken and not to be too quiet as both attract unwanted attention, judgement and even analysis.

In this paper, I present a way of working with groups, group diversity and conflict, that provides a possible direction we could follow to fully harvest the potential of our turbulent and challenging times. I will draw on the work of Arnold Mindell, originally a physicist, then Jungian analyst, who developed the framework of what we now call Process Oriented Psychology or Process Work. His work became known in the 1970s and it has been in the last five years that he has focused on large and small groups developing what is called Worldwork. Mindell himself states:

> "My teachers told me to avoid large groups: they are unruly and dangerous. The only way work can be done, they maintained, was in small groups where law and order prevail. But the world is not composed of docile little

groups. Enforcing law and order can't be our only strategy for resolving problems." (1995, p 11)
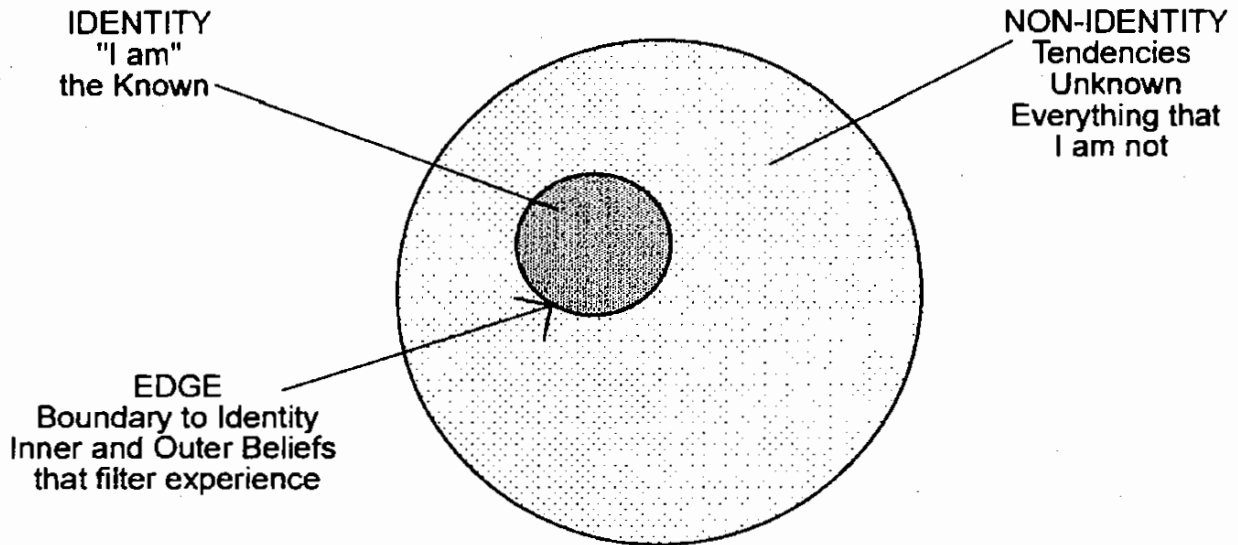
Mindell says that creating freedom, community and viable relationships has its price. It costs time and courage to learn how to sit in the fire of diversity. It means staying centred in the heat of trouble. It demands that we learn about small and large organisations, open city forums and tense street scenes. He says that if we step into leadership or facilitatorship without this learning, we may spend our time recapitulating the blunders of history. (Mindell 1995)

I want first of all to give a brief overview of the main ideas and philosophical base of Process Work. I will then focus on groups and group process. The second part of the paper focuses on the role of the leader, with an emphasis on the emerging role of eldership, and the notion of rank and privilege.

The Origins of Process Work

Process Work began with individually oriented dream and bodywork and has grown to include family and group work. It has its philosophical roots in physics, alchemy, Shamanism, Taoism and Jungian Psychology. From Shamanism it draws a basic concern with the potential of unexpected and unintended events, thoughts and perceptions for producing solutions to problems. Alchemy contributes the insight that raw experience gradually yields meaning and becomes useful when it is "cooked" or processed in a manner appropriate to the situation, as determined by constant observation of the effect which the "cooking" produces. Taoism points the way to an appreciation of the nature of all things and faith in the inherent "rightness" of events, no matter how painful or pathological they may appear at first glance. The Taoist view of life assumes that the way things are unfolding contain the basic elements necessary for solving human problems. Physics contributes analogies with concepts such as Field Theory and Quantum and Holographic Theories. Jungian Psychology provides some of the basic techniques to amplify and reveal the meaning of human experiences. It also provides a teleological view of reality - that human processes and external events are patterned towards a final unfolding of meaning.

Individuals usually find it difficult to give equal value to all aspects of their experience. We tend to identify ourselves in a particular way: we may be strong or weak, spiritual or worldly, social or more solitary. In so identifying ourselves, we tend to disavow those parts of our experience which conflict with that identity.

IDENTITY
"I am"
the Known

NON-IDENTITY
Tendencies
Unknown
Everything that
I am not

EDGE
Boundary to Identity
Inner and Outer Beliefs
that filter experience

To live all aspects of our wholeness may bring us into conflict with the culture in which we live, it may violate our basic belief systems, or we may lack the skills to live these parts of ourselves in a particular life situation. The reluctance to live the less valued parts of our experience is called the "edge" because it is in a sense the edge or boundary of our personal identity. Edges are experiences of confinement. An important goal of Process Work is to help the individual explore the edges of their identity and to experiment with ways of gaining easier access to those parts of ourselves which are beyond that edge.

Process Work With Groups

Just as individuals may disavow parts of their experience which conflict with their identities, groups also are disturbed by their disavowed parts. To find a group's identity, ask it "who are we?" Members of a group who got together to work for world peace might say, "We are a group of peace-loving individuals". Students at University might reply, "We are here to learn and to respect our teacher's wisdom". The "We" of a group's answer tends to define its identity.

A group which identifies itself as peace-loving might then find itself in a heated and nearly violent debate between *two* factions that disagree about the proper path to world peace. University students may become dissatisfied with their teachers and express strong opinions about how they should be taught.

In the first case, a group which says "We are Peaceful" is experiencing

something close to war. However, it typically does not perceive this part of its experience. Conflict is beyond the boundaries of the group's identity and is disavowed by its members, even as it is occurring in their midst. The students in the second example may actually be trying to teach their professors how to be better teachers, but teaching staff may see this as a disturbing and unwanted rebellion. Both groups are having experiences beyond the edge of their identities that are therefore disavowed and are experienced as a disturbance which, if not processed, may lead to the destruction of the group.

Applied to Psychology, Holographic Theory implies that the whole can be found within each individual and that any person in a group setting is potentially capable of taking up any role in that group. Seeing the world through this analogy suggests that we change individual difficulties by working with world issues, and change world issues by working with an individual. Process Work gives us the concept of the "Global Dreambody", a multi-channeled information system, which like Jung's collective unconscious, and the anthropos myths of various cultures, assumes the fundamental connectedness of all things. It is from this base that we can make interventions at different levels of relationship – individual, couples, small or large groups. Mindell says that if we experience the world only as a disturber of our fate, we will never have that feeling for the world which is necessary to change it through changing ourselves. (Mindell, 1987, p 92)

Field Theory is also an important concept for understanding the Process Work way of working with groups. Imagine this organisation of NZAP as a large iceberg. Imagine that it floats in a sea or field, sometimes freely, sometimes connected to other groups and organisations. The leading people are placed high in the organisation, above the water, and they look to the future in order to direct the iceberg's path, while the members live below, supporting the whole group. Organisational development is based in part upon helping the whole iceberg work as a single unit. When trouble comes, the whole organisation is affected. A consultant is called in to analyse the problem and recommend solutions. The organisational development model works well for many situations, though some of its methods are based in the assumption that people behave in a mechanical fashion like parts of a machine.

Mindell proposes another approach, one that takes into account the jungle in which we live, a jungle of inexpressible emotions, and unnamed forces – the field or atmosphere Within which all our activities and communication take place. In order to depict the reality of a group or organisation, a new dimension

needs to be added to the iceberg. It should also include the influence of emotions, feelings, moods, spiritual visions and even paranormal events that permeate group life. These invisible influences have been described as shadow energies in physics, as the collective unconscious in Jungian Psychology, and as a morphogenetic field in Rupert Sheldrake's concept of the universe. The disavowed, dreamlike feelings that create currents and undertows under the surface would be included. Organisations need to be identified not only by their overt and identifiable structure, purposes and goals, but also by their relationship conflicts, jealousy and envy, as well as their altruistic drives, spiritual needs, and interest in the meaning of life.

We need to deal directly with these currents and undertows, with the atmosphere of the group – is it thick, jovial, tense, still, avoiding? A field can be felt or someone can make a picture of it. The field is made up of the issues we all bring, our moods, our background feelings, and our environment.

Fields are natural phenomena that include everyone, are omnipresent, and exert forces upon those in their midst. We think we manage or organise our lives and groups, but actually fields create and organise us as much as we organise them. Fields permeate everything and can be perceived through a variety of senses and experiences. They are in our dreams, body experiences, relationship problems, synchronicities, in the group and in the world around us. This multichanneled manner in which fields manifest means that when we work with fields and help them evolve, we must do so on many levels: through feelings, visions, movement, innerwork, relationship work and large group interaction.

If we are going to work with conflict then we need to have an appreciation of chaos. Chaos Theory, or the theory of non-linear, dynamic systems, has recently gained wide attention in the Social Sciences. Prigogine states that the ideas from Chaos Theory of instability and fluctuation are entering the Social Sciences. Human beings, groups and societies at large are "non-linear dynamic groups". Chaos Theory talks about "attractors". Attractors organise and make sense out of chaos. Attractors predict what type of order will appear out of chaos. For example in groups, the drive toward balance, freedom, and harmony, may be an attractor for our individual development. In Worldwork, conflict and moments of chaos are valued within group process because these can quickly create a deeper sense of community and a temporary resolution. Indeed Worldwork sees conflict as a profound teacher. Worldwork stresses recognition that we ourselves are part of every conflict around us and it utilises

our self-awareness skills to become part of the solution.

Following the Process

Some of the main ideas that help us follow a group process include first of all, the idea of roles and different polarities, through which the field expresses itself. We may feel strongly on one side, and then another. You may find yourself fluctuating between many roles. Another way to describe roles is timespirits which attempts to show that roles come and go over time. A role can indicate a more static state, but once we get into it, it flows and develops and changes, frequently disappearing after a time, especially if it has been fully expressed and represented. Viewing roles as timespirits means that during a group process we can move from role to role as the process 'cooks'. At times we can identify with one part of ourselves and at others times another part. Process Work states that the role is always bigger than the person and the person is more than the role. This means roles may be occupied by any individual in the group. It also means that the individual need not stay locked into one role but can move in and out of several roles according to how the individual is responding to the group process. Switching roles is a group intervention based upon the individual's awareness of their own changing experiences within the group, and is a means of awakening individual awareness and fluidity.

The term Ghost Roles means those roles that are not directly represented in the group. They are like ghosts or spirits which hang in the atmosphere and which the group finds itself reacting to. For example, when people are afraid of speaking up because they may be criticised, there Will be a Ghost role of a critic in the field that, if not represented, will continue to disturb the group.

Deep Democracy is a respect and love for nature in its deepest sense. It recognises the importance of representing the disavowed parts, the minorities, in order to make the situation whole. We support the parts of ourselves and our groups which we know well, but we need also to support the parts which we do not know and which we fear or reject. Deep Democracy, with its metaskills of compassion, love and respect, creates a safe container for all parts to come out.

Hot spots are extreme moments and emotionally charged encounters that come up again and again. They usually occur at the edge of the group's identity and way of operating. They are moments in a group when something is trying to happen and it doesn't. Instead a sudden, and sometimes subtle, disturbance comes and goes quite quickly. After the group the gossip might sound like "did

you notice what happened when so and so said that .... ?". The basic identity of the group remains unchanged and the unknown, disavowed aspects remain outside most of the participants' awareness.

Consensus means that all people present agree to go along with what the group is doing, for at least a short period of time as long as they later have a chance to disagree. Consensus accepts disagreement. However the disagreement is put off for the moment and can be picked up again if it hasn't been resolved by the previous process.

The methods of worldwork have been applied in city debates around political issues, in international conflicts, in businesses struggling for economic survival, in educational and spiritual organisations. They have been tested, changed and taught in more than thirty countries, in organisations including the military, multi-ethnic groups in conflict, and indigenous groups. They have had a surprising success with children under five and with people in psychotic and comatose states. Worldwork can be applied in groups ranging from three to a thousand.

Leadership

What then are the requirements of a leader in these non-linear, dynamic groups that we are part of? What skills and metaskills are needed for a person to sit in the midst of often turbulent and chaotic situations in group processes without getting destroyed, or the group disintegrating? By metaskills, I mean the feeling skills and attitudes that the leader brings to the group.

The majority of people deal with tensions in a group in three ways:

1. They repress the tensions and try to be nice to each other
2. They analyse the tensions and try to change themselves and others
3. They get into the tensions and hurt one another

Worldwork comes up with another way which calls for the following requirements in a leader. First of all we need information about the group we are facilitating. We also need awareness. Awareness of the field, its communication edges and hot spots. Over and above information and awareness we need metaskills. They are crucial. It is not so much what we do that brings success, but how we do it. Mindell points out that those of us who do worldwork, do it because we have an interest in people and a love for them. We care about who they are and what is happening to them. This is, he says, the metaskill of the Elder (Mindell 1995).

The traditional role of the leader is that the leader leads. In the Process Work model there are a number of different things about a leader:

1. The leader is the follower of the process. The process itself is the leader. "New order can always be discovered in apparent chaos if we have the tolerance and patience to follow instead of programming nature, if we learn to live with the moving ground instead of pressing for solutions" (Mindell 1992).

2. The leader needs to bring awareness to the process and to help it to unfold.

3. The ability to do this depends on the degree of awareness that he/she has.

4. Leadership within this model is a role that can be shared and occupied by anyone who happens to have the awareness at the time.

5. The leader must have the well-being of the whole at heart and have a feeling of compassion for all the parts, those that feel alienated as well as those that alienate. The meta-skill of compassion is developed through such things as inner development, outer role models and personal gift.

Mindell likens training for leadership to that of training to be a martial artist. It is basically about awareness training – learning to follow a field's energy, ki or process. This training enables the leader to sense the field in order to discover hidden and ghost roles. It takes practice in reading signals and fine-tuning intuitive powers to discover those roles.

Allied to this is the leader's ability to do inner-work. Without the ability to process our own complexes and conflicts on the spot, we are likely to contribute more to the problem than to its momentary solution. Inner work also enables us to develop the abilities of tolerating chaos and metacommunicating in the midst of it. It also helps the leader to develop the capacity for detachment. It is difficult to remain detached if we want to be loved, correct or successful. The Process Work concept of Detachment refers to the ability to remain neutral in the heat of conflict. This ability comes from being "shot at" several times and is a result of having worked through my own unresolved rage. This brings about a natural detachment from my own identity that enables me to respect the courage I see in the most impossible person and be open to what he/she can teach me. When we have something personal to achieve we cannot be neutral and accepting of the group's process.

Elders have more than leadership abilities. They have the feeling skills and attitudes needed to be of service to others and the process. The following is a summary of what differentiates elders:

- The traditional leader follows the rules of order; the elder obeys the spirit.
- The leader seeks a majority; the elder stands for everyone.
- The leader sees trouble and tries to stop it., the elder sees the troublemaker as a possible teacher.
- The leader strives to be honest; the elder tries to show the truth in everything.
- The democratic leader supports democracy; the elder does this, too, but also listens to disturbers and ghosts.
- Leaders try to be better at their jobs; elders try to get others to be elders.
- Leaders try to be wise; elders have no minds of their own. They follow the events of nature.
- The leader takes time to reflect; the elder takes only a moment to notice what is happening.
- The leader knows; the elder learns.
- The leader tries to act; the elder lets things be.
- The leader needs a strategy; the elder studies the moment.
- The leader follows a plan; the elder honours the direction of a mysterious and unknown river. (Mindell, 1995, p 184)

Rank and Privilege

I cannot talk about leadership and Worldwork without mentioning the concepts of rank and privilege; power and abuse. This is an important aspect of our work. I once facilitated a personal growth group with a colleague. In that group were some very outspoken and strong men and women as well as some quieter ones, as is fairly typical. This was in the early days of my learning about leadership of "growth groups" and I was apprehensive about the whole experience. I was first of all somewhat intimidated by my colleague even though he was a good friend and we were both experienced therapists. He was more outgoing, more engaging than I and I found myself becoming more and more reserved in the group as the weeks went by. I was also scared of the strong people in the group and feared being attacked by them. I found myself supporting the quieter subgroup. I did not feel good about the job I did there but it has taught me so much. I realise now that I was unaware of my rank as

a leader and a therapist, and so left myself open to attack from the group and from my own inner critic. I was also caught up in my personal abuse story which involved long term public shaming and attacks from parents and teachers that I had no way of defending.

"Rank" refers to a person's power position in any given system or social/ interpersonal context. There are different types of rank – economical, social, psychological, spiritual. "Privilege" refers to the benefits and advantages of a person's rank/power position. Thus rank is the sum of all the privileges a person has. One of our central tasks in creating sustainable change in our communities is to become aware of our rank and privilege, to value it and share it. Everyone who belongs to the mainstream has in some way certain rank and privilege. We might ask what are some of the privileges of a Psychotherapist? Appreciating our privileges means that we are less likely to abuse our rank.

Being unconscious of our rank and power, means we are less effective in leadership and more vulnerable to our own roundedness and the roundedness of others by tapping into our own abuse stories which leaves us very one sided and unable to support the whole. This is what happened to me in the group. It can also lead us to keep out or ignore those who are different, or difficult, anyone whom the mainstream feels is too angry, radical, crazy, vengeful or weird. Worldwork includes helping individuals and groups embrace these disavowed parts of themselves against these labels. Thus, racism, sexism, homophobia, for example are given the opportunity to do more than look for legal and political solutions, that are opened up to do the identity work, the healing and the education required for sustainable change.

Process work focuses a lot on issues of abuse in order to secure the participation of all groups and members of groups, knowing that deep democratic change requires the participation and consensus of all. Abuse is "the unfair use of physical, psychological or social power against others who are unable to defend themselves, because they do not have equal physical, psychological or social power." (Mindell 1995, p 107). My experience in the above group and in other consequent groups has also taught me the importance of doing my own abuse work to enable me to support all parts of the group field and when necessary to "sit in the fire" of the group's conflict.

In Conclusion

Mindell says: "New patterns are trying to emerge, but if we are not prepared for turbulent situations, these patterns will create pain and chaos instead of new lifestyles." (1992)

I believe, as therapists, we need the courage, the discipline and heartful metaskills as facilitators so that new patterns can emerge which care for and honour difference and work towards at least temporary integration in groups.

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