# STRUCTURAL ASPECTS OF THE SOCIO - PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAINING

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*Abstract: The report presents the main points in the logical structure of the socio-psychological training. The underlying trends in its historical development have been explored. The concept of the socio-psychological training has been introduced. The basic structural components of the training have been annotated - such as: mutual presentation of the participants and the trainer; sharing expectations and concerns; creating working rules; conducting the actual training; sharing feedback. The idea is that the need for a tightly structured socio-psychological training is directly related to observing the logical development of the group process, so that the envisaged changes can be realized initially and later they can be consolidated in the behavior of the participants.*

*Keywords: socio-psychological training.*

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a progressive increase in the interest in applying active group impact methods in different professional fields. This is due to the fact that the modern lifestyle requires the processing of vast amount of information, increasing the resilience to stress, adapting of people to new, unusual conditions of the surrounding social and ecological environment. In this sense, the use of the socio-psychological training (SPT) as a system of specially organized intensive impact has the potential to help solve a number of current issues (communicative, motivational, personal, etc.) in a variety of areas of the everyday human activities. Its effectiveness is ensured by a number of group phenomena - an opportunity to get feedback and support from people with common problems and experiences; self-acceptance and active acceptance of others; assisting and relying on receiving help; experimenting with different styles of communication; learning and practicing entirely new habits and interaction skills; identifying yourself with others; accumulation of survival experience; getting intensive training for an active and fulfilling life among people, and so on. In the course of the training, there is an active exchange of experience between the participants, which extends their individual behavioral repertoire and the possibilities for solving different problems. The emotional inclusion in different situations allows the creation of high motivation to participate in the group work, and the formed habits and skills in an artificially created socio-psychological environment help to master the complex interpersonal relationships in the real world.

## EXPOSITION

Historically, the emergence of group training forms in the psychological work dates back to the 1940s of the 20th century and is mainly related to the names of K. Levin, K. Rogers, L. Bradford, R. Lipit. During this time, the Center for the Study of Group Dynamics was established in the United States. As a result of the study of intergroup relations, K. Levin found that most of the effective changes in people's attitudes were manifested not in an individual but in a group context. He affirms the idea that in order to develop new forms of behavior, people need to see themselves as others see them (Rudestam, 1990). The theory of group dynamics and client-centered therapy, developed by K. Levin and K. Rogers, appear as an immediate source in the practice of group training. Because of the successful work in the area of intergroup relations in 1947 a National Training Laboratory was founded in the USA. The newly-emerged T-groups

(training groups) at that time provide opportunities for the participants to experiment with their own behavior in an artificially created environment, in an atmosphere of trust and support that helps self-discovery and deeper changes. At the same time, they receive from the training coach the necessary psychological information and acquire habits encouraging their personal growth and more successful communication with others. The development of the T-groups leads to the appearance of many of their variants, which generally fall into three main directions:

- total individual development;
- forming and exploring interpersonal relationships;
- improving the organizational and team work by optimizing the labor relations (Bolyshakov, 1996).

In doing so, they become the forerunners of the modern types of psychological work with a group, most of which are united by the notion of *socio-psychological training*. As a field of the practical psychology, the latter was scientifically grounded in the 1970s of the 20th century at the Jena and Leipzig universities under the leadership of Manfred Forverg, who developed a number of programs designed to enhance the qualification of human resource specialists (mostly managers in industrial production) and aiming at developing their socio-psychological competence. The main tools of the training become the role-plays with elements of dramatization, creating conditions for effective communication habits (Fopely, 2003). The significant experience, gained by Forverg and his students in the training activity, is in the direction of five main types of SPT, namely:

1. Groups aimed at adopting patterns of social behavior that are necessary for a particular profession. At the root of the changes is the correction of the cognitive structures responsible for behavioral regulation. This kind of training is not aimed at processing the personal problems of the participants, with the exception of those that may be related to the immediate professional difficulties;

2. Groups aimed at preparing for managerial activity and development of individual psychic qualities of the personality, solving of private psycho-prophylactic tasks through autogenous training. In this type of training, a targeted stimulation of group dynamics is applied in order to reveal its regularities and develop habits for its management;

3. Groups for psycho-hygiene and psycho-prophylaxis aimed at managers with an increased risk of psychogenic and mental illness. These groups were formed on a voluntary basis and were conducted by specialists in the field of psychotherapy and clinical psychology;

4. Groups for personal development and communicative competence. In this type of training the professional problems are only influenced in the case of a close connection with the individual characteristics of the participants;

5. Groups for development of social competence in working in particularly complex situations of interpersonal communication and partial formation of new life goals (Makshanov, 1997).

At present, there are different views in scientific literature in the definition of the concept of *socio-psychological training*. In general, they can be classified into three main groups:

1. Group form of work aimed at developing the communicative competence of the participants (Osipova, 2008);

2. A means of forming certain behavioral habits necessary in the educational, professional and any other activity (Romek, 2007; Ray, 2002);

3. Group method of active training for the formation of habits for self-knowledge and self-development (Vachkov, 2007; Nikandrov, 2003).

In summary, it can be assumed that SPT is an active group method of training and impact, realized in a controlled environment and aimed at deliberate change, which provides the

opportunity for development of the human personality from the point of view of its habits, skills, behavior, qualities in the context of mastering the practicable socio-psychological knowledge.

From the point of view of pragmatics, SPT is conducted in a group under the guidance of a specially trained professional in the field of the group work. The optimal number of the participants (in order to get the necessary time and attention from the others and the trainer) is between 8 and 12 people (Marasanov, 1998) who are involved in the classes on a voluntary basis through an informed choice. In the selection of the same (depending on the goals of the training and the target group for which it is intended), attention is paid to the educational and social status (Vachkov, 2007; Kochunas, 2000), gender (heterogeneous composition) (Thorne & Mackey, 2007), age and other criteria by looking for a balance between them. The course cycle takes into account a predefined thematic program with a distributed time duration.

The successful implementation of the SPT is based on some more important specific principles and rules for both group management and communication within the group. In general, they are limited to the following:

- *a unified form of communication to you and by name* - that allows closer communication between all the participants (including the trainer) regardless of the age, social status and life experience;

- *communicating by following the "here and now" principle* - talking about what the participants are currently excited about and discussing what is happening to everyone in the group;

- *use of self-speaking* - speaking only in one's own name (not on behalf of another), about the perception and the experience "here and now";

- *confidentiality of personal information* - ensuring open and safe communication within the group by not disseminating information about what is happening inside and outside of the group;

- *trust and openness in communication* - talking about what you really think and feel, not about *what* will appeal to others while giving adequate and sincere feedback;

- *respect for the speaker* - when one of the speakers speaks it needs to be carefully listened to, without interruption, and when one finishes one's thought, only then it is possible to ask questions and to make discussions;

- *participants' activity* - real inclusion through the active participation of each participant in the intensive group interaction. This principle is based on the known position of experimental psychology that one absorbs 10% of what one hears, 50% of what one sees, 70% of what one pronounces and 90 % of what one does alone.

In the SPT process as the main environment and learning tool is the group itself, skillfully directed and guided in the required context by the trainer. In this respect, the role of the latter is decisive both in introducing and maintaining the necessary norms for group communication (reflected in the basic principles of the training work) and in its functioning as a trigger mechanism and "group insurer" of the group process (through direct impact on its parameters and indirectly - on the individual participants in it).

The purposeful work with the group is based on a strictly structured logical structure, which contains several basic components - mutual presentation of the participants and the trainer (in the first session); sharing expectations and concerns; creating working rules; conducting the actual training; sharing feedback.

At the beginning of the first session, the objective of the trainer is to involve all the participants in the work, to provoke them to activity, and to gain initial impressions from them, as well. This is usually started with a *mutual presentation* (getting acquainted with each other) that does not consist only in learning the names but in a kind of a self-presentation of everyone, which in its turn provokes a desire not only to get to know others but also to self-knowledge. The ultimate goal of the procedure is considered to be achieved when the members of the group get curious and interested in what is to come.

An important element determining the effectiveness of the training is the *expectations* that exist at each one in the beginning of a new activity. In this sense, the participants are given the opportunity to share the goals they have set themselves, what they expect from the group work,

what they want to get from it and what concerns they have. In the process of such information flow, conditions are created for respecting the personal opinion, which provokes a sense of significance and increase of the personal responsibility in the course of the forthcoming activity. In addition, the information received allows the trainer, if necessary, to make adjustments to the proposed program in view of its adequacy in the context of the situation.

Each group has certain norms and rules of existence. Already with the launch of the mutual presentation, the trainer begins to introduce *the working rules* and norms of behavior based on the above-mentioned specific principles. From the point of view of the practice, it is possible to organize a special procedure, but by all means it is necessary to define them, the rules must be understood and accepted by the participants. In the beginning it is sufficient for the trainer to introduce the main working rules in response to all the questions that have arisen, and subsequently to add the others (in accordance with the necessity for them in the context of the current situation) in the presence of group discussion and subsequent conciliation.

*The actual training* according to its objectives is based on selected interactive training methods (brainstorming, role plays, behavioral games and exercises, working in small groups, etc.), supporting activities (energizing, "ice breaking", finalizing, etc.) with a detailed plan of conducting. The successful completion of the exercises is directly related to the accuracy, comprehensibility and laconism of the instructions given to the participants. After their conclusion, it is of utmost importance to discuss what has happened in the direction of:

- description of the performed activities and their interpretation;
- description of feelings with an interpretation of what they are related to;
- feedback from the group and the trainer.

In this way, it is possible to understand the impact of the particular exercise on each participant and to anticipate their further potential development during the process.

*Feedback* sharing is an important structural component of the SPT, defining to a great extent the successful self-knowledge and self-development of the participants. It should be as informative and constructive as possible to provide real insight into how the behavior of a particular person is perceived by others. In this sense, the role of the trainer is to direct the speeches to:

- expression of the emotional response induced by a particular behavior without being related to its criticizing and assessment;
- those characteristics of the behavior of the other, which one may change if one wishes so;
- the personal feelings that arise from the alien behavior.

In the second and subsequent sessions the beginning starts with a *reflection* from the previous one. The group ranks in a circle, and everyone shares what exactly from what has been learned and how it is applied in real life situations, what problems one has encountered, how one has overcome them, what one would like to do differently at the present time, and what expectations one has. Then the group's work continues in the upcoming session.

At the end of the last session, together with the sharing of the fulfillment / non-fulfillment of the initial expectations, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the work done (to what extent the initial goals of the training have been achieved, how useful it was for the people in the group, and so on). One of the good ways to achieve that is getting feedback from the participants. In this sense, the trainer can provide them with a pre-prepared anonymous questionnaire, which in a meaningful aspect will include interest in certain indicators (criteria), related to the group process and the behavioral changes associated with it. The obtained information can also be useful for the improvement of the further activities.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion it can be pointed out that the need for a strict ordered structure of the SPT is directly related to observing the logical development of the group process, so that the given changes can be initially realized and subsequently to be strengthened in the behavior of the

participants. Thus the latter have the opportunity to participate in different games and exercises, to be engaged in discussions, to formulate and defend their own point of view and position, to ask and answer questions, and as a final result to learn how to apply the acquired knowledge in practice. Each competence is derived from the relationship knowledge-skills-behavior. In the SPT, the dynamics of behavioral changes is mastered (acquiring knowledge of how to solve a specific behavioral task and under the leadership of the coach, testing of the solution) and learning (transforming behavior under the influence of new knowledge and the possibility for solving the problem independently). In this sense, the training group is a place where everyone can best understand and accept themselves and others, heighten their quest for self-knowledge and self-improvement, take personal responsibility for what one is in reality and get the opportunity to become a sculptor of one's own personality.

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