

## **Group Relations Conferences as an organisational intervention: the method and its value**

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Gordon Lawrence (2000) writes that:

*... (group relations) is the most potent of methodologies because it enables one to distinguish between phantasy and reality. It also enables one, among other things, to judge between truth and the lie; to come to grips between projection and Introjection, transference and countertransference, which are the basic “stuff” of human relations.*

Group relations (G.R.) is a method of study and training in the way people perform their roles in groups and systems. These can be work groups, teams or organisations, or less formal social groups like faiths, race and gender groups. A group may be said to be two or more people interacting to achieve a common task. G.R. theory views groups as tending to move in and out of focusing on their task and adopting a number of different defensive positions based on unarticulated group phantasy.

There are certain features of G.R. work that are held in common and are probably subscribed to by most practitioners of this craft. These include working with transference and counter-transference phenomena; skill in interpreting group unconscious dynamics; working within the boundaries of space and time as well as within psychological boundaries; being clear about working within role and task; working with group-as-a-whole, not individual, phenomena, and having the capability of generating working hypotheses about group and organisational functioning.

### **What is Group Relations?**

Group relations was the phrase coined in the late 1950s by staff working at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations to refer to the laboratory method of studying relationships in and between groups. This laboratory method had been developed at Bethel, Maine, from 1947 by the National Training Laboratory based on ideas of Kurt Lewin on intensive experiential learning. Lewin's group theories strongly influenced the thinking of the early Tavistock staff. This early group of Tavistock pioneers were social scientists and psychodynamically-oriented psychiatrists who had been using group approaches to tackle practical war-time problems, like officer selection. They later applied their group-based experiences and approaches to post-war social reconstruction. They drew on many sources – the work of sociologists Gustave le Bon (1895) and William McDougall (1920); psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud (1915, 1921, 1925) and Melanie Klein (1932, 1957, 1959); and social scientists Mary Parker Follett (1920, 1973), Elton Mayo (1933) and Kurt Lewin (1947).

Group relations is the study in real time of relationship and relatedness, where relationship is about actual relationships and relatedness concerns systemic relationships, say, as between parliamentarian and voter. It is the accelerated study of the connections and discontinuities of person and role; of role and group; of group and group; of group and organisation; of organisation and environment, and therefore benefits from drawing on other theoretical frameworks such as anthropology, architecture, existential and phenomenological philosophies and philosophies of practice and spirituality such as body work, Yoga, and psychotherapy.

Kurt Lewin's field theory provided a way in which the tension between the individual and the group could be studied: "*the group to which an individual belongs is the ground for his perceptions, his feelings and his actions*" (Lewin, 1947). Lewin considered groups to have properties that are different from their subgroups or their individual members. This finding, and the experiential workshop method of training which Lewin developed, influenced staff at the Tavistock Institute that ultimately led to the development of the first group relations conferences in the 1950s.

Melanie Klein's object relations theory was another important influence, which built upon Freud's theories, in particular, that people learn from early childhood to cope with unpleasant emotions by relying on the psychological defences of splitting and projective identification. The psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion influenced models of group work and group behaviour. In his work at the Tavistock Clinic and later at the Tavistock Institute, he established that groups operate on two levels - the work level where concern is for completing the task and the level of basic assumptions that are meant to ease anxieties and avoid the painful emotions that membership of groups might evoke. Bion identifies three types of basic assumption: dependency, pairing and fight-flight. He reported his work in a series of articles for the Tavistock Institute's journal *Human Relations*, that later appeared as the book *Experiences in Groups* (Bion, 1961).

Since the first group relations conference in 1957 at the University of Leicester, there have been developments in group relations by Ken Rice, Isobel Menzies Lyth, Harold Bridger, Pierre Turquet, Robert Gosling, Eric Miller, Mary Barker and Gordon Lawrence. In addition to the contributions made by these pioneers, there have been significant influences on the development of group relations made by group relations institutions around the world.

By the mid-1950s the basic design of the Tavistock group relations conferences had been established by the early pioneers (Ken Rice, 1958, 1961, 1965, 1969; Harold Bridger, 1964; Pierre Turquet, 1975, 1985; Eric Miller, 1990) and later workers like Gordon Lawrence (1993, 2000), Robert Gosling (1979, 1981), David Armstrong (1992, 1997) and Larry Gould et al (2001, 2004). Despite numerous adaptations and innovations to group relations conference design, the Tavistock Institute's group relations programme continued to be criticised for being intellectual, authoritarian and anachronistic – a reference to the Northfields military setting in which Bion's and Bridger's work originated (Harrison & Clarke, 1992). Nevertheless, group relations conference work has continued to provide opportunities for learning about the dynamics of roles, groups,

leadership and organisations. The role of Director of the Group Relations Programme is variously described as “preserving the tradition” and “innovating for change”. Despite regular changes in conference theme and design, the perception remained of a Tavistock fixed in old paradigms (Wasdell, 1997). The persistence of this projection was explained by Tim Dartington in a personal communication that the next generation of group relations practitioners seems to need to retain an image of an “old Tavistock” so that their own innovations and efforts at growth can be progressed without experiencing the feelings of guilt that often accompanies altering or abandoning a tradition. Therefore, the Tavistock’s vigorous engagement in continuing leadership in the field (Aram, 2012 in Aram, Baxter & Nutkevitch, 2012; Aram, Baxter & Nutkevitch 2009, Brunner, Nutkevitch & Sher, 2006), its vitality and innovation in group relations conferences is often challenged. In this chapter we demonstrate how Group Relations is relevant in role clarification, leadership development, organisational and environmental transformation and its impact on social issues, its influence in the research and evaluation; in clinical work; and in educational and professional development.

Bion's interest in pushing further into the primitive of the group was extended by his colleagues at the Tavistock Institute, working in particular on the challenge to memory and desire, to the very human wish that everything should revert to the status quo ante (Bion, 1961). Elaborating and working through the obstacles to group and organisational learning, formed the basis of much of the work of the Tavistock Institute (Rice, 1958, 1961, 1965, 1969; Miller, 1959, 1974, 1976, 1991, 1995, 1997; Miller & Rice, 1967). Rediscovering Bion's thinking in relation to the life of contemporary institutions, and specifically the impact of Bion's ideas, lie at the heart of Tavistock group relations conference work.

We believe that Tavistock-Leicester group relations conferences world-wide share in the guardianship of Tavistock Bion-Kleinian orientations in which the constructs of transference, counter-transference, splitting, projection and projective identification, the group unconscious, oedipal conflicts, leadership and authority are especially relevant. We realise the significance of this view when we observe the potentially destabilizing unconscious dynamics in intra-group and inter-group relations, where group members’ feelings and emotions are sometimes overwhelmed in relation to both the group’s task and the individual’s desire for security and safety. Group relations conference design provides a robust framework for experiential learning and studying the behaviour of groups as they happen in real time, often referred to as the “here-and-now”. Group relations conference thinking can be useful also in working with groups outside conference work where Bion’s constructs of the work group and basic assumption group apply to the interplay between conscious and unconscious dynamics in organisations. Directors and staff aim to develop and extend understanding of intra-group here-and-now experience and inter-group interactions between sub-systems and authority issues of the individual and the group (Lawrence et al, 1996). An example of this type of understanding is illustrated in the post-conference evaluation of a participant:

*“When I think of my group relations conference experience, the word ‘resistance’ comes to mind. It has always been hard for me to communicate with authority figures.*

*My most important recollections from the last conference are: (i) the large study group would leave me feeling like a child in kindergarten; (ii) the small group, where I took the role of 'mother' to other members whose families had had similar experiences to my own – children separated from their parents; (iii) the application groups, and the atmosphere of sincerity that prevailed there.*

*For me, the Tavistock Leicester method was a huge lesson in experimenting with different the forms of relating - listening, sharing, seeing connections, gaining insights - and welcoming everyone into this process. I have followed up my conference experience by applying this method in my work.*

*Interestingly, the experience and knowledge I gained from taking part in the conference has also been experienced in my personal life. Altogether I feel less alone now in my country where this kind of thinking is not common. I do sometimes feel alien in my job and in my studies because a sense of cooperation between individuals and organisations is often lacking. As a member of the conference, I learned that the 'problem' lies both in me and in my surroundings and that I need to take responsibility for my own efforts at cooperation. In fact, when I did this, people supported me in choosing roles, assuming authority and taking responsibility for facilitating change. For example, I decided to pursue a thesis on the role of HR managers in organisations in my country and explore the problem from a feminist perspective. People around me - my professor, teachers and other students - were interested in the topic. However, it is still hard for me to stick with my ideas and say 'no' to authority. For example, I was advised by my supervisor to do the research from a classical perspective and I automatically agreed. The result is I am bored and unmotivated and the most annoying thing is that, during the research interviews, HR managers are telling me about the problems connected with gender stereotypes! I feel ashamed for not daring to challenge my supervisor and say 'no'. I felt like a schoolgirl again. Instead of arguing, I started my research using a classical model, while secretly I kept on reading group relations literature that is more interesting for me. When I finally revealed my true aspirations to my supervisor he did not like the idea, but he eventually acceded to my request. The saying of my grandmother to her granddaughter (me) came to mind: "be lower than the grass".*

*Taking part in the group relations conference was an opportunity for me to experience a different way of relating, especially as a woman from a country where women automatically defer to men. Instead of conforming, we had opportunities for hearing different thoughts; we could hesitate, have doubts or simply reflect. However, I still feel inadequate in the face of authority (male and female) in real life. So, during the next conference, I need to explore my fears and try different behaviours that will foster collaboration in me and encourage it in others."*

We believe that what differentiates Group Relations conference work from other group constructed events is its solid theoretical underpinning; certain structural and design elements, including elements of the primary task; that the staff of group relations

conferences adopt consultative stances; and that conferences extend over a period of days.

## **Theoretical Underpinning**

The theoretical underpinning of group relations conferences derives from the adaptation of concepts from at least two bodies of knowledge:

From *psychoanalytic theory* we derive knowledge of conscious and unconscious processes; consciousness being the presence of feelings, emotions, desires, or the absences of these, and a reasonable degree of awareness of their reasons and their consequences. Conversely and in parallel, we understand that unconsciousness is the presence of feelings, emotions, desires, or lack of these, and their reasons and their consequences are outside of awareness, i.e. individuals and groups do not have access to or the ability to understand their dynamics, nor are they able to take action based on that understanding.

People working as staff in group relations conferences have had training and manifest understanding of the concepts of transference and counter-transference. Transference is defined as the attribution of feelings, emotions, behaviour, attitudes, fear, love, eroticism, envy, jealousy, competition, rejection, attachment, etc, onto figures of authority in the present that have their origins in relationships with previous earlier figures of authority, e.g. parents, teachers, doctors, bosses. Countertransference would be the feelings, emotions, attitudes, behaviour, etc, aroused in the figure of authority, e.g. the teacher, therapist, consultant, boss, political leader.

Projection is part of a normal process of interpreting sense data of the perceptual system. It is based on instinctual impulse to take into the self or one's group all that is good and eject from the self or one's group all that is bad. It is defined as the attribution of certain states of mind to someone else or to another group; where internal conflict is projected into the external world. Projective identification is used to avoid having to experience negative feelings, e.g. unwelcome anger, in oneself or in one's group. Projective identification is usually regarded as projection that results in the "other" actually changing against their will, i.e. getting caught up uncontrollably in someone else's or another group's drama.

In a Large Study Group, a member says:

*"Individuals have no value in this group; we're always defined as part of something else – nation, gender, race or faith. My individuality is being killed off. I'm looking for my small study group; I can't find it and the consultants do nothing to help with my fears."*

Resentment and the wish for revenge arises in the Large Study Group that feels injured and wronged. Often what begins as a demand for fairness (protection) becomes inflamed into a hatred, as other motives such as envy, recruited to create a hatred and a quest for revenge, cannot be restrained and everything feels likely to be destroyed. Such unopposed destructiveness is terrifying and, in most cases, restraining forces are mobilised to protect the group, the learning and the self from the devastating effects of

the violence. Consequently, wishful revenge may be denied or bottled up and is expressed as grievance. Instead of being directly acted on, destructiveness is controlled and expressed in indirect and often hidden ways. This is attested to by a member of the Leicester conference:

*“Group Relations conference experience was described by a recent participant as: “a ‘here and now’ experience - not in the past or in the future, involving struggle in naming and working with the experience of self, others, the system and its environment. In the conference it often happened that someone said something and then another spoke, adding another remark, a reflection, dream or story, but other members did not refer to them. In organisations and environments it seemed difficult to be of service to people where there is little relationship. Isolation and indifference – springing from consciousness and unconsciousness - happens at the personal level, between pairs, groups and whole systems. The conference experience is a whole cycle of life and death. Boundaries of time, around events, structures and roles, named and unnamed, enable underlying assumptions in the person, between persons and in the system, to be explored.*

*I learned that to experience membership of an organisation involves managing feelings like fear, anger and joy; tolerating changes in the system; taking up many membership roles, involvement in relationships and relatedness; understanding systems; group and inter-group behaviour. Topics explored cover relationship between men and women; parent-child roles; sexuality, cultures, nationalities, language; service; respect and desire, race, faith, technology and dynamics; espionage and counterespionage (especially relevant to me as a German); mourning and joy; hate and love; silence; communication; integration and disintegration; creativity and chaos; positive energy and waste.*

*The conference helped me to understand why working in an international environment is difficult, why caring is important and why failing to ensure that members understand each other’s language leads to destructive behaviour. I now know a little more about potential and fear in global work.*

*The conference introduced me to the concept of “projection”: to feel them, name them and then work with them. I never before understood what they meant. Everybody learned how we use projections and why understanding them is so important in organisational and social environments. This importance is underlined because projections can be so destructive, particularly in the globalisation of everything.”*

Defences are paradoxical in that they are an essential part of human developmental activity; they can foster development or they can hinder it. Projection and introjection are the mechanisms involved in building up the internal world and are the basis of all cognitive and emotional activity, exploration, knowledge and symbol formation. Klein (1932) views defences as directed specifically against the death instinct, and the introduction of her theory of the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions led to the

understanding that defences in the paranoid-schizoid are directed against anxieties of annihilation, and defences of the depressive position are directed against feelings of loss and guilt about damage to the “object”. Defences are steps taken to preserve the status quo or a state of equilibrium or to prevent being overwhelmed by anxiety, e.g. rigid hierarchies in situations of life and death, e.g. in medicine and the military. This idea is supported by the experiences of a member who wrote in his evaluation:

*“I have never learned as much about organisations as whole systems as I did at the Leicester conference. I learned that if I want things to happen in my organisation I have to take responsibility for my feelings and actions. Additionally, I never realized how easily and how strongly groups set up defences to avoid the painful realities about their task, their relationships with other groups and their performance. Despite my ten years of university studies in psychology and business, leadership & strategy, attendance at many courses and much working experience, my participation in group relations conferences has been the most powerful learning experience ever.*

*It is difficult to specify key learning moments, but what stands out are the opportunities for reflection of emotions and frustrations. I cannot imagine working life now without using the paradigm of cycles of action, feedback, reflection, planning, second-level actions, feedback on those, more reflection and planning and so on. Creating designs and interventions in every aspect of my working life is strongly inspired by my group relations experiences and learning. The combination of psychodynamic thinking and the Tavistock open systems approach is the most powerful tool I have ever come across and used. I would be a poorer and less qualified organisational consultant without my group relations learning experiences.”*

A key concept borrowed from Open Systems Theory is *Primary Task* - the single most required thing that groups or organisations have to do in order to survive. Rice (1958) and Miller (1993) wrote that each system or sub-system at any given time has one function which may be defined as its primary task – the task which it is created to perform. In making judgements about any organisation two questions have priority over all others: what is the Primary Task? How well is it being performed? Rice compared his definition of “primary task” with Bion’s definition of “sophisticated task” as the specific task for which the work-group meets (1958, p. 229). The primary task is essentially a heuristic concept which allows the ordering of multiple activities. It is possible to construct and compare different organisational models based on the different definitions of its primary task; and to compare the organisations of different enterprises with the same or different primary tasks. The definition of the primary task determines the dominant import-conversion-export system. Lawrence (1975) added clarifications by expanding the definition of primary task to include its explicit distinctions:

The *normative* primary task – the task that people in an organisation *ought to* pursue.

The *existential* primary task – the task that people believe they are carrying out.

The *phenomenal* primary task – the task which is hypothesised that they are engaged in and of which they may not be consciously aware.

Boundary, a key concept derived from open systems theory, forms a significant part of our understanding of group relations conferences. In Western society a high value is placed on individuals developing maturity in controlling the boundary between their inner worlds and the realities of their external environments. (Miller & Rice, 1967, p. 269). This idea is central to the concept of open systems in which all living organisms exist in relation to their environments by engaging in continuous transactions with it; individuals and groups each has a boundary region exercising a regulatory function mediating between the inner world and the environmental systems with which it interacts. Hence a boundary is not necessarily a line; it could be a region, like an accident and emergency unit is to a hospital; or an intake committee is to a university.

*Roles* are sets of expected behaviours, rights and obligations as conceptualized in boundary situations that are concerned with mediating relations between inside and outside. It is commonly understood that the normative primary task of the group requires of people their contribution of activities, their roles. The roles that individuals bring to the task belong inside the boundary of the enterprise; the individuals who provide the roles belong outside. This implies therefore that there is a relationship between the enterprise and the individuals who supply roles within it. Role-taking involves a relationship between the enterprise as a system and individuals and groups of individuals as systems.

The primary task of *Leadership* is to manage relations between an institution and its environment so as to permit optimal performance of the primary task of the institution. At an unconscious level, the leader expresses on behalf of the group the emotions associated with the basic assumption, i.e. the primitive unconscious emotions with which groups identify and which may undermine the group and prevent it from working effectively.

*Authority* is the claim of legitimacy, the justification and right to exercise power and the ability to influence others to do something that they would not have done. Authority is the capacity or a relationship, innate or acquired, for exercising ascendancy over others. It is sanctioned, institutionalized power.

*Sociotechnical systems (STS)* is an approach to complex organisational “work design” that recognizes the interaction between “people” and “technology” in workplaces. The term refers to the interaction between society's complex infrastructures and human behaviour insofar as society itself, and most of its substructures, are complex sociotechnical systems. The term *sociotechnical systems* was coined in the 1960s by Eric Trist (1981), Ken Bamforth (1951) and Fred Emery (1959). Sociotechnical systems theory is concerned with the social aspects of people and society and technical aspects of organisational structure and processes. Sociotechnical refers to the interrelatedness of *social* and *technical* aspects of an organisation that seeks *joint optimization* - a shared emphasis on achievement of both excellence in technical performance and quality in people's work lives through designing different kinds of organisation in which

relationships between sociological and technical elements lead to the emergence of productivity and wellbeing.

*Environment* is a later extension to the theory of individuals and groups as systems. Socio-ecological theory includes the evolution of the environment and the consequences of this evolution for the constituent systems that involves going beyond the concept of motivation and the question of sufficient conditions of behaviour. The theory of socio-ecology asserts that the conditions of motivation and sufficient conditions of behaviour are in continuous flux between the individual and the social field. Sometimes the individual freely chooses goals, purposes and ideals and the means to pursue them, at other times, individuals choose the means and the ends because the social fabric has left them little choice. The system and its environment have their own identities but are mutually determinative and hence are changing each other's identities. In group relations, we are concerned with the conditions conducive to creativity and the micro-climate required to develop and nurture creative minds.

*Representation/delegation*, i.e. exercising authority on behalf of others lies at the heart of the democratic process, i.e. the assignment of authority and responsibility to another person or group to represent views or carry out specific activities. The person or group that delegates remains accountable for the outcome of the delegated work. Delegation empowers the person or group delegate to make decisions, i.e. shift decision-making authority from one organisational level to a lower one. Delegation is regarded as good, saves effort, helps in building skills and motivates people.

### **Structure and Design Elements of Group Relations Conferences**

Over the years, group relations conferences in their design have comprised some or all of the following elements: Small Study Groups, groups of up to twelve people and a consultant, studying the behaviour of small groups as it happens; Large Study Groups, groups comprising the whole membership of a conference that may range between thirty and seventy people working with three or four consultants whose purpose is to study the behaviour of large groups as it happens; Inter-Group Events, events in which the conference membership independently sub-divides into smaller groups to work on themes of their choice and to study the nature of the relationships and relatedness of each of the groups to each other; The Inter-group Event is sometimes called the Visiting Exercise which is designed for exploring inter-group dynamics and issues related to communication between groups; Institutional Event, an event like the Inter-group event in which established independent groups examine their own inter-relationships as well as their relationships with the staff groups, thus making the event fully institutional. In recent conferences, this event has been termed the World Event or the Sustainable Society Event.

All group relations conferences will have Review and Application Groups which provide members with opportunities for reflecting, firstly, on the conference experiences and, secondly, on the application of their conference learning to their back-home organisations. Review and Application Groups are sometimes called Consultation Syndicates in which members give and receive consultancy about their current leadership

work in teams, units and organisations and across organisations. Finally, group relations conference will have Opening and Closing Plenaries and sometimes plenaries at mid-points in the conference. These plenaries allow for the exploration of experiences of entering, joining and leaving the conference.

### Consultative Stance

The *consultative stance* of the staff of group relations conferences adds an important defining difference to other conferences that are centred on groups. Consultant staff in the main work in the transference and counter-transference for which an extended training is required; they are skilled in interpreting group unconscious dynamics, mindful always of working within psychological boundaries and within the boundaries of time and space; clear about working within role and task and working with group-as-a-whole, not individual, phenomena. This point differentiates group relations from other forms of work with groups: staff are capable of generating working hypotheses in group and organisational contexts, i.e. a tentative working hypothesis based on what is known so far; staff are in a position of curiosity and "not knowing", following Bion's advice to eschew "memory and desire", i.e. not to influence the learning process by imposing one's own agenda; and they would be able to tolerate "negative capability", i.e. tolerating not knowing or accepting inaction while learning is going on, i.e. giving up the need to have brilliant students, adoring clients, etc.

### Applications and Innovations

An analysis of the group relations field reveals the presence of several different forms of group relations conferences. Group relations conferences, events, approaches and elements around the world naturally have altered, re-shaped and developed over time. The dynamics evident in conferences depend on where in the world the conference is located ([www.grouprelations.com](http://www.grouprelations.com)). Whatever is current in the organisational, social and political contexts comes into the conference and the conference therefore informs about the state of the members' own institutions and society and their particular preoccupations. In addition to the contributions made by the early pioneers, there have been significant influences on the development of group relations as a method of investigation that come from the purposes, cultures and values of different types of institutions that sponsor group relations work.

Group relations - the experiential study of group and organisational processes - has influenced social science research. It offers additional ways of collecting and analysing data and knowledge-creation and dissemination. Especially relevant is group relations' understanding and working with unconscious processes, (e.g. Menzies Lyth's 1960, 1988, 1989 and Jaques' 1951, 1955 conceptualisation of social defences against anxiety). "Learning from experience" methods are now applied to many forms of social science investigative processes (Abraham, 2011; Child, 2009, Hills & Child, 2000). Group Relations work has been introduced to organisations like universities, clinics, institutes and membership organisations leading to cross-fertilisation of ideas and other mutual beneficial influences. In some cases, these institutions, by sponsoring group relations conferences, hope to re-shape them and their societies – politically, culturally, economically and socially.

Group relations as a movement tends to be self-authorising and it has a poor record of critiqued analysis. As a force for change GR requires more published critical research. It rests on sound investigative traditions, but is criticised for its attempts to bring different worlds together – the mystical and the organisational (Tarnas, 1991). Consequently, conversations in the group relations network often sound like people talking to themselves, perhaps as a reaction to the general suspiciousness towards it by traditional research investigators.

Conferences on group relations conferences have been held in Belgirate, Italy, since 2003. The first conference was organised by Avi Nutkevitch of OFEK, a group relations organisation in Israel and Mannie Sher of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and continues today to be managed by OFEK, the AKRice Institute and the Tavistock Institute. The primary task of this conference was to review and explore the theory and design, taking up roles in group relations conferences and the application of learning derived there from. The Belgirate conference, as it came to be known, was intended to be a space that is not normally available during group relations conferences themselves to review and explore dilemmas and questions that lie at the heart of group relations work. The Belgirate conferences have produced three volumes on Group Relations so far (Brunner, Nutkevitch & Sher, 2006; Aram, Baxter, & Nutkevitch, 2009, and Aram, Baxter, & Nutkevitch, 2012). They attest to the vibrancy of group relations conference work around the world. The question of how this conference came into being reverberated throughout the conferences. It was understood that the organisers of the Belgirate conference took their own authority and made the conference self-authorising, signalling that the authority to act in the arena of world group relations would lie within its network.

## **Conclusion**

Over the years innovative elements have been introduced into the group relations conference design notably William Halton's *Marketplace Event*, and the *Resource Management Event* (Halton, 2004, 2010); Gordon Lawrence's *Social Dreaming Matrix (SDM)* (see chapter seven of this book) and many others which are mostly published in the volumes of the Belgirate conferences book series. . These and other innovations underline the importance in the GR method of integrated experiential and action learning approaches to group, organisational and environmental challenges. They are based on learning derived from here-and-now experience and future-oriented action-based learning that participants implement in their home institutions and societies. GR as a method, like others, may be prone to processes of institutionalisation, but we hope we have demonstrated here the responsiveness of the GR method to the learning needs of individuals and organisations for new ways of understanding and dealing with uncertainties, anxieties and attacks on authority on leadership roles and membership roles at work and in society. Traditions have weakened as they have strengthened. The GR method provides opportunities for developing new meaning in changing and paradoxical contexts.

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