DEBRIEFING WITH SERIALIZED THEORY DEVELOPMENT
FOR TASK-TEAM LEARNING

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How spontaneous or structured should be the debriefing of an experiential exercise? An adequate response to the question is manageable only in relation to the facilitator's awareness of desired learning outcomes and the structural properties of the exercise. A position is herein advocated that the more structural debriefing form, emphasizing serialized theory development, is appropriate when (a) the exercise goals are to promote team development and learning of group dynamics more so than intrapersonal awareness and (b) the exercise requires work on a specific task, ideally one that involves object manipulation with differentiated member roles, that can be repeated (or serialized) several times.

An overriding objective of this approach is to promote participant learning _from_ current experiences with a carryover to future life coping more so than simply being sensitive to and involved in the experience alone. Affective realizations are thus useful as a means of cognitive stimulation to promote concept formulation rather than sought as a temporal end in themselves. Congruent with the cognitive extension is a debriefing process that moves outward from the individual toward strengthened concept patterns of both the structural and behavioral dimensions of task-team development. While data sharing or confrontation may enable a participant to center upon selected facits of his/her behavior so that there is new or reinforced learning about self and specific others in the group, the intended residual value is to transcend the individual so that one or more strongly held cognitions about performance factors in groups may be actively held as a patterned map for testing in future task group events.

Serialized theory development debriefing employs two instrumental processes. One is the structuring of the exercise so that there is a series of task activity followed by debriefing sequenced into three or four successive iterations. The second element involves a guided emphasis by the facilitator of the debriefing sequence so that part of the data observations at each stage feed into a single theoretical/conceptual construct. In effect, the facilitator plans (or second guesses) the types of issues or behavioral phenomena that will likely be encountered and establishes a selective series of theoretical "mind-holds" or referencing points which facilitate centering part of the data observations generated after each task phase. Depending on the exercise and the facilitator, the synthesizing concept need not be rigidly bound by time frame (i.e., concept B might be developed after phase 1 rather than 2) nor is free-flowing participant spontaneity discouraged. Rather, some portion of

each debriefing phase centers on flushing out the cognitive map the facilitator foresaw as relevant to and supportive of the exercise.

The cognitive theory-development process can be used either to dramatize and reinforce previously introduced "theory" and/or to introduce for the first time as an outgrowth of data feedback a meaningful descriptive or predictive "theory." The theoretical components can range from basic identification of conditions which impact on a particular phenomenon, to propositional statements indicating causal/probabilistic association, to models which identify key variables and specify the nature of relationships.

Illustrative data is presented comparing learning results from a treatment group (using the method) and a control group (with general debriefing alone) using a blindfold tower-building exercise with four task repetitions. Advantages of the prescribed method are realized in incremental leaning, developing an organized frame of reference by which lessons of the activity can be remembered, and encouraging development of spontaneous insight as will as linear sequential problem-solving styles (i.e., right and left hemisphere modality) through self and peer-assisted debriefing discovery.