GROUP RELATIONS GLOSSARY OF TERMS[1]

Authority: The right to perform work, utilize resources, and make decisions; the right to make decisions which are binding on others. We differentiate between three types of authority: 1) *authority from above*, formal authority derived from a particular role in an external structure or system (e.g. an organizational hierarchy) and exercised on its behalf; 2) *authority from below,* informal or formal authority given by subordinates or colleagues; i.e., one's authority is sanctioned or withheld from below; and 3) *authority from within,* one's individual capacity to take up one's own authority (formal, informal, and/or personal).

Basic Assumption Group (Bion): The latent aspect of group life that is comprised of unconscious wishes, fears, defenses, fantasies, impulses, and projections. It is that aspect of the group which avoids the primary task by acting *as if* a certain group assumption was true. The purpose of the Basic Assumption Group is to survive as a group, where the group becomes focused on its relations to the leadership rather than to its task. The next five basic assumptions have been identified in groups.

Basic Assumption Dependency (Bion): The group acts as if their task is to obtain security and protection from one individual – either the designated leader or a member who assumes the role. The group acts as if they must saved by an omnipotent leader.

Basic Assumption Fight/Flight (Bion): The group acts as if its purpose is to preserve itself and that this can be done only by fighting (such as active aggression, scapegoating, and physical attack) or by fleeing the task (such as withdrawal, passivity, avoidance, and ruminating on past history). Action is essential whether for fight or flight. Leadership is bestowed on anyone who can mobilize the aggressive forces of the group or facilitates moving away from the task.

Basic Assumption Oneness (Turquet): The group seeks an undifferentiated state of wholeness – there is no sense of individuality, only oneness and homogeneity within the group. Members seek to join in a powerful union with an omnipotent force, unobtainably high, to surrender themselves for passive participation in order to feel existence, well-being, and wholeness. The group commits itself to a "movement," a cause outside itself, as a way of survival.

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[1] Compiled from various sources by Sarah Brazaitis, Ph.D. and Evangelina Holvino, Ed.D. Not for citation or reproduction.

Basic Assumption Me-ness (Bain, Lawrence, and Gould): The opposite of basic assumption oneness. In this mode of functioning, group members act as if there is no group – each member is an individual with no connection to the whole. The denial of the group serves to defend members from the destructive aspects of group life and is in accordance with modern Western values of individualism.

Basic Assumption Pairing (Bion): The group acts as if their survival is contingent upon reproduction; that is, in some magic way a Messiah will be born to save the group and help it survive. Toward this end, the group puts forth two people to pair with each other, with the hope that they will produce this unborn savior.

Boundary: A physical or psychological demarcation, observable or subjective, used to distinguish members of a group or system from outsiders. Boundaries can be underbounded or overbounded, permeable or impenetrable, enmeshed or disengaged. Typical boundaries to be managed in systems are time, space, task, and role.

Followership: The capacity to collaborate with a leader in working on a task or goal. Both leadership and followership require recognition of where one's role ends and another person's begins; the scope and limits of one's own authority; and a readiness to sanction the authority of others.

Group-as-a-whole theory: A group is more than the collection of individuals and greater than the mere sum of its parts. In a group, individuals are bonded together in an interdependent, symbolic, tacit, unconscious and collusive nexus in which their interactions and shared fantasies create and represent the group-as-a-whole. Using a group-as-a-whole framework requires an examination of how one uses and is used by the group, an understanding of how individuals are unconsciously and inextricably bonded, and a commitment to reclaim disowned parts of oneself. In their fantasy, group members relate to the group as an infant relates to the mother.

Interdependence: Individuals are intertwined to each other and to the social context. Individuals are mutually impacting one another and the surrounding environment.

Inter-group embeddedness: Within a given system, the relationship between two groups depends not only on how they deal with each other, but also on the relationship each one has with the group in charge of the larger system. Applied to race relations, for example, embeddedness refers to the extent to which power differences between racial groups at the suprasystem level (society) are mirrored in the relations between these groups at the system (organization) and subsystem levels (workgroups and dyads). Inter-group embeddedness can be congruent (power differences between groups are the same across all levels) or incongruent (power differences vary across levels).

Introjection: The unconscious mechanism by which individuals internalize feelings, attitudes, and values that belong to the external environment by transferring them into their inner world.

Leadership: To manage and direct self and others in the service of a specific goal or task; to exercise authority in pursuit of the primary task.

Levels of group analysis: The different types of processes by which we can observe and explain social phenomena: 1) *intrapersonal/intrapsychic*, dynamics within and internal to an individual; 2) *interpersonal*, dynamics between individuals taken two at a time; 3) *group-as-a-whole*, dynamics at the group level; 4) intergroup, dynamics between two or more groups; 5) *inter-organizational*, dynamics between two or more organizations; and 6) *societal,* dynamics in society as a whole.

Projection: The attribution of a feeling, attitude, or trait of oneself or one's group to another person or group. The projected attribute is usually unwanted, disowned, denied, and/or unacceptable and unrecognized in oneself or one's group. It is the process by which individuals and groups deposit undesirable or ambivalent held aspects of the self and/or group onto other individuals or groups.

Projective Identification: The process by which the individuals or groups receiving projections are subtly and often unconsciously encouraged to behave in ways that are consistent with these projections, since they are expressing these aspects *on behalf of* those who projected them. Individuals or groups are chosen to express others' feelings because they have an unconscious disposition, or "valence" for such expression, and/or because of their social identity characteristics.

Role: One's position or function in relation to the task; one's formal role. There are also informal roles, determined by one's position or function in the group based on one's valence (e.g. personal predispositions) and group dynamics like projection.

Social defense: A group dynamic that helps people contain the anxiety of working while reducing their ability to work safely. Social defenses may be expressed in relationships, procedures, or organizational rituals to help members cope with the anxiety they feel while working at difficult or risky organizational tasks.

Social identity group: A group whose members share some common physical or biological markers (e.g. gender), have participated in equivalent historical experiences (e.g. immigration), are subjected currently to certain social forces (e.g. oppression or increased prosperity), and as a result have similar world views.

Splitting: The process of dividing the world – individuals and subgroups – into all good and all bad. The polarization of specific characteristics as contained within

individuals or subgroups, whereby all of a particular quality is perceived as being contained in one and its opposite in another.

System: The pattern of relations among key components. The system always influences how group members can take up their authority, implement their roles, accomplish the task, and manage boundaries. In an organization, groups are affected by the larger system in which they exist.

Task: The primary task of a group is what the person or group is supposed to be doing or is paid to accomplish or deliver. The task may be defined differently by different members in a group or in different parts of a system. For example, what the group members think they are doing may be different than what they should be doing, or what they should be doing may be different than how they seem to be behaving – the "as if."

Task identity group: A group whose members share approximately common positions, participate in equivalent work experiences, and consequently have similar organizational views. Members are assigned based on division of labor and hierarchy of authority.

Transference: The response to someone or to a group "as if" that individual or group actually was the person or group of whom one is reminded. Group relations focus on the qualities that are projected onto authority figures "as if" they were one's parents.

Transubstantiation: The act of transforming one cultural substance into another. It occurs when one group interprets the symbols, norms, and traditions of another culture into the group's own meaning and epistemological system. The effect of transubstantiation is to distort essential qualities of another group.

Valence: The tendencies to internalize, collude with, and respond to the projections of others. It is the propensity of an individual to occupy a similar informal role repeatedly in groups. It depends on one's object relations and social identities.

Work group: That aspect of the group which is prepared to engage in the primary task of the group. It is the conscious, overt, rational level of group life; an aggregate of individuals who have consciously come together to pursue a common or agreed upon task.