THE FORCES INVOLVED IN BEING A MEMBER
OF A SMALL GROUP

by

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PROMOTOR: PROF J.S. BASSON

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Letter of Declaration

I, Jean Cooper, hereby certify that this dissertation is a bona fide report of research conducted by myself under the guidance of Prof. Johan Basson.

The content of this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted to any other institution or university for the award of any other degree or diploma and all the source material that I have used have been duly referenced and acknowledged.

Jean Cooper

April 2012
Vir Fransie
I would like to acknowledge the following people for their contribution to the completion of this study:

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Abstract

THE FORCES INVOLVED IN BEING A MEMBER OF A SMALL GROUP

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There is a general lack of in-depth research into what it means (and takes) to be a member of a small group. Firstly, research is often focused on leadership rather than on membership and, secondly, empirical research tends to focus on studying group outcomes rather than group process. The purpose of this research was to explore the forces involved in being a member of a small group and to develop a research method for doing so. A postfoundational philosophical stance was adopted in terms of which the need both for discovering universal truths as well as gaining in-depth understanding within context, was pursued. A constructivist grounded theory design was adapted by developing a theoretical lens with which to facilitate the coding and analysis of the data. This theoretical lens was based on an integration of Kurt Lewin’s field theory; Wilfred Bion’s psychoanalytic group-as-a-whole approach; S.H. Foulkes’s group analytic approach and Yvonne Agazarian’s theory of living human systems. The data consisted of transcribed video material of ten 90-minute sessions conducted with a training group of 9 members; written reflections by the group members on their group experience as well as field notes taken by the researcher during the training group sessions. Through the application of the theoretical lens to the data, member
behaviour was coded both deductively and inductively, thus allowing the data to speak for itself whilst maintaining a rigorous analytical structure. The result of this exploration was an emerging field theory of group membership which postulates the group member as existing within a field of forces (both pro- and anti-group) operating between the triangular ‘polarities’ of belonging, individuality and task. The theoretical and practical implications of this field theory are discussed in terms of their relevance to both grounded theory research methodology and group psychology. Finally, it is shown how this research can be used as a foundation from which to conduct a multitude of future studies into group processes from the perspective of the group member.
Opsomming

DIE KRAPTE WAT INWERK OP ‘N LID VAN ‘N KLEIN GROEP

deur

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Daar is ‘n gebrek aan navorsing oor wat dit beteken (en verg) om ‘n lid van ‘n klein groep te wees. Eerstens fokus navorsing gewoonlik eerder op leierskap as op lidmaatskap, en tweedens konsentreer empiriese navorsing gewoonlik eerder op uitkomste as op die groepsproses self. Die doel van die navorsing was om die sielkundige kragte wat inwerk op ‘n lid van ‘n klein groep te ondersoek, asook om ‘n navorsingsmetode te ontwikkel om hierdie ondersoek uit te voer. ‘n Postfundamentalistiese navorsingsperspektief is ingeneem ten einde die spanning tussen die soeke na universele waarhede aan die een kant, en die behoefte aan ‘n konteks-spesifieke verstaan aan die ander kant, te oorbrug. ‘n Konstruktivistiese ‘grounded theory’ kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp is gevolg. Hierdie navorsingsontwerp is aangepas en verryk deur die ontwikkeling van ‘n teoretiese lens vir die kodering en interpretasie van die data. Die teoretiese lens is gebaseer op ‘n integrasie van Kurt Lewin se veldteorie, Wilfred Bion se groep-as-geheel benadering, S.H. Foulkes se groep-analitiese benadering en Yvonne Agazarian se
stelselsbenadering tot groepsgedrag. Die data het bestaan uit getranskribeerde videomateriaal van tien 90-minute sessies van ’n opleidingsgroep met 9 lede; geskrewe refleksies deur die groeplede oor hulle groepervaring; sowel as veldnotas wat geneem is ten tyde van die groepsessies. Groeplede se gedrag is beide inductief en deduktief gekodeer deur die aanwending van die teoretiese lens. Sodoende kon daar in diepe op die data gefokus word terwyl daar ’n sistematiese en analitiese struktuur gehandhaaf is. Die resultaat van die ondersoek was ’n ontluikende teorie wat stel dat die groeplid homself in ’n kragveld bevind tussen drie ‘pole’, naamlik, ‘individualiteit’, ‘om te behoort’ en ‘die groep se taak’. Die teoretiese en praktiese implikasies is bespreek beide met betrekking tot ‘grounded theory’as navorsingsmetodiek en groepsielkunde. Ten slotte word die hoop uitgespreek dat hierdie navorsing die fondasie kan lê vir vele toekomstige studies rakende groepsprosesse vanuit die oogpunt van die groeplid.
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7.1 Introduction
7.2 The main research outcomes

7.2.1 A method for exploring the forces involved in being a member of a small group
- Positioning the research in the postfoundational philosophical tradition
- Adopting (and adapting) a constructivist grounded theory research design
- The theoretical lens

7.2.2 The forces involved in being a member of a small group
- The forces can be observed on different systemic levels
- A force has different meanings on different systemic levels
- The forces can be broadly classified as having either pro-group or anti-group qualities that, in turn, follow an alternating pattern within the group
- Apart from having ‘pro-group’ or anti-group’ qualities, the forces within the group impact on the group members in ways that drive their behaviour towards or away from individuality, belonging and task
- The quality of the forces in the group change as the group moves from one developmental level to the next
- One impact of the forces on group members is that the members assume roles within the group

7.3 Implications for existing theory

7.3.1 Group theory
- An integrative approach – drawing on different theoretical traditions – is demonstrated as opposed to a loyalist approach – adhering to and being loyal to one theoretical tradition only
- A coherent framework for understanding the forces involved in being a group member is proposed
- The theoretical framework mentioned above is, in essence, a ‘field theory’, which has important implications
- Our understanding of forces within the group is furthered

7.3.2 Qualitative research methodology
- Implications for research philosophy
- Implications for research design

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7.5 Suggestions for future research
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