

SWK 658

Integrated Paper

The Cognitively Analytic Centered Person

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Part 1

Introduction

Coming into this semester, I was eager to learn the theoretical approaches to groups I was unaware of. I have five years of experience as a group member, facilitator, leader of the men's ministry, and director of life groups at Fordham Manor Church. Each approach brought attractive and usable strengths, goals, and therapeutic strategies. However, the combination that best helped define my group approach is Freud's Psychoanalytic, Person-centered therapy, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. I believe that it is essential for individuals to recognize how the traumas, lived experiences, and bonds of yesterday contribute to the way a person deals with trials and connects with others. This knowledge can have a positive impact on tomorrow. So my approach to groups is helping the individual become the "Cognitively Analytic Centered Person." Below will explain the key concepts, the role of the facilitator and members, goals and techniques, and the facilitator's focus in group stages.

Key Concepts

Psychoanalytic, Person-centered therapy, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

The approaches mentioned above have vital concepts that will integrate well. The concepts that I resonate strongly with from these theoretical perspectives are ones that I have put into practice as a facilitator, but not to the extent of understanding the theory, goals, and methods. This is very effective for the community I serve, Men. This can be understood through three frameworks, the role of the past, present, and future.

The first framework to understand is the role of yesterday. Evaluating the past is a scary prospect for most. Especially men, traditionally trained to "take the pain and move forward."

Without disqualifying the strength this provides, it can become a maladaptive way of managing negative experiences. Evaluating the past is an effective way to recognize areas of difficulty today. Not appropriately managing past experiences produces negative attachment styles and grows maladaptive roots of anxiety and depression, to name a few.

The second framework is to help members understand who they are today. To do this difficult task, the facilitator must provide a safe space that allows members to feel secure in those neglected areas. Members will only develop the trust, honesty, vulnerability, and transparency needed to find freedom today if they feel safe or judged. Ground rules implementation being established in the early stages of the group can provide this if implemented effectively. This security can allow the person who digs into the past to interpret it correctly and safely and decide when and if they are ready to address the issue and make the desired changes.

The third framework is to help change tomorrow. When individual group members “develop program buy-in,” they will recognize areas of trauma from yesterday that have caused difficulties today. This is when the hope for a better tomorrow can partner with renewing the individual’s mind. After exploring and analyzing the thoughts and feelings that cause harm to themselves or others, the individual can challenge them and add interventions to bring change.

Role of Facilitator

Wingman, Modeler, and change agent.

This role is most effective in the early stages of group development. The role of the facilitator is that of a “Wingman.” A phrase most men understand well. The facilitator supports ensuring the mission is accomplished, but he is not the show's main character. The facilitator may act as the change agent by introducing Psychoeducation to the meeting but should abide by a 30/70 rule where the group speaks more than the facilitator. The facilitator must model

communication techniques for group members to remove resistance and barriers to healthy communication. The facilitator ensures group members' physical, emotional, and spiritual safety to develop trust, understanding, and respect.

Role of Members

Pacesetters and explorers

This role is most effective in the middle developmental stages. Pacesetting of the group depends on the group's capacity to bring context, life experiences, and interpretations of behaviors to meetings. Members can share their personal reflections using "I" statements to contribute to the group's health, transparency, trust, and growth. Members are encouraged to be active listeners and speakers. Members are challenged to evaluate their thinking, provide healthy feedback to one another, and explore their thoughts and feelings in the context of the session.

Tasks and Goals

Understand the past for a better future.

The Task is to better understand members as a group, individual past experiences, traumas, and relationships, and align them with current maladaptive behaviors. Additional tasks are for members to increase group responsibilities, co-facilitate, and monitor individual and group progress. Providing psychoeducation will increase awareness of past maladaptive behaviors or defense mechanisms and allow members to create individualized action plans. The goal is to increase the member's mastery of maladaptive behaviors. This can be done by implementing interventions that reduce anxiety, depression, and poor object relations. Cognitive reframing can reduce unwanted thoughts and behavior and increase hope.

Techniques

Helpful interventions

These groups can use many techniques to make the goals more attainable. Psychoeducation videos on YouTube, like the five Love languages, Brain plasticity, and Role-playing, can help normalize some members' feelings and thoughts in groups. These videos can be reviewed during downtime as homework assignments. Exploring ideas like interpreting feelings and thoughts, dream analysis, transference, countertransference, insecure and secure attachment styles, and developing healthier object relations can be great discussions and eye-openers for members.

Interventions include sleep hygiene, meditation or breathing- exercises, walking or running, mood journaling, or writing poems or stories have been proven to reduce anxiety and depression. These interventions can be reviewed in session with members to discuss their experiences, hits, and misses. The advantage of adding these interventions as a group is that they can breed accountability and comradery. The facilitator models behaviors, active listening, support comments, empathy, and adding furthering responses.

Focus of Group stages.

Pre-group- In this stage, it is decided what the group type would be and who the members would be. For the sake of this paper, the group would be an open men's group to overcome the past. Curriculum and group ground rules would be established with room to grow or reevaluate the group's development. Setting a solid foundation, preparation, contract development, dividing responsibility. and setting clear expectations is essential. Creating a

structure while leaving room to adapt and letting things go will create a sense of organized chaos, for lack of a better term.

Initial- This stage is when contract implementation is addressed, ground rules are explained, and modeling is established. There will be initial anxiety and fear that must be addressed by setting foundations of trust. The facilitator's efforts of laying down the foundations of the emotional health of the unit, goal established and definition, maybe goal additions.

Transitional- In this stage, contract review, reassessment of ground rules, and evaluation of group structure are essential when the group starts managing conflict, ambivalence, and resistance. A partial program blow-up may be necessary for minor areas, but this phase may be best to let people feel what they feel and be at their own pace while promoting fellowship health.

Working- In this phase, the group starts to take on a life of itself, hopefully for the better. Members are encouraged to explore the effectiveness of the techniques and evaluate goals. In this stage, leaders will emerge, and group responsibilities can grow. Transparency and open interaction will grow. The members who now have a more significant stake in the group will help set the agenda and direction of the group. The group will develop its form of accountability, and the original facilitator can become more of an overseer.

Final- Goals and attained skills will be reviewed in this last stage or group. This is when members gauge whether tasks were completed and goals were met. Self-reflection on personal goals and improvement can be expressed. The facilitator can gather information about what did and did not work so the next group can benefit from the current group's experiences. An action plan can be formed for the next few weeks and months when the group is not in session. The

final meeting can be a celebration, much like a graduation, where members can be recognized for changes that have been made.

Part 2

Learned

Something I am surprised to learn about myself is the willingness to play the antithesis of a particular viewpoint. When the opportunity came up in groups to play the “devil’s advocate,” so to speak, I jumped at the chance. I can see how this correlate to some fundamental realities about me. I ask questions that need answers and need to see what the other side says to trust any answer. I wouldn't say I like that I will follow an ideology and belief just because it is popular or fills my flesh.

I need to hear both viewpoints on a given topic. Because of this, I have heard multiple viewpoints on a given topic with an open mind and ear. This is one way I test what I hear to what is true. So, I find it easy to speak from an opposing view’s “talking points.” Because I try to be well-versed in it. I would like to know why Mohammad believed he was speaking to Gabriel. I like to know how Joseph Smith convinced people that Christ would return to America, not Jerusalem.

This attitude has been helpful for me as a group leader. People desire to be heard and validated. Even if you disagree, a good conversation can be had about why a person believes what they believe. As a therapist who loves to use CBT, teaching people to challenge their thoughts and views to hold them up against what is accurate rather than what an individual feels is valid.

One thing I did learn about myself this semester that could be better is my ability to dominate a conversation. I do see moments of lacking patience in expressing my views when I am passionate. And I am passionate about many topics. God's word tells me to be "slow to speak and quick to listen," My problem is that I am sometimes quick to jump in while actively listening to someone in the group. I can see how this may frustrate someone who wants to speak.

I have also been known to be bold with my speech. Bold in the sense of not having an ear to speak the truth in a conversation. My boldness does not come off as conceit or superiority but as the wiliness to engage with having love in my heart and tongue. I pray to the Lord to help me with this. I recognize this will be the instigator in one class and another where I opposed the view of Confederate statues.

Goals

I was very excited when I saw that part of the curriculum was clinical groups. One of my goals is to function better as an individual facilitator and as a more knowledgeable director. Considering how informative and helpful the individual class was in the previous semester, I expected that the group portion would be just as good for me as a director of groups in my church. I have read a few books about the function's goals and stumbling blocks of church groups, but I was more interested in theory and practicum. This class was good. The class interactions and guidance gave the weekly text a greater context and reality. These goals have been met. I can now look at how my groups are being run in a different context, beyond just "doing life" tighter, but to be more goal-oriented. So, when our group watches a series for men about living as a godly man, I can apply person-centered strategies and CBT (for example) when developing reflective questions and a supportive curriculum. This new skill level and education

can help me become a better ministry leader and expand our group's activities. I am now thinking of creating anxiety, and solution-focused groups in the church. Lord willing.

Countertransference

Some potential countertransference issues could potentially come up in two groups in particular. Parenting groups and groups focused on spousal abuse. As a father of two children diagnosed with Autism who has kept a close bond with my children, I could have some countertransference with fathers who have chosen not to be with their children. My countertransference will be with the abandoned child in a way where I may invest more than I would intend. Also, for the spousal abuse group would be difficult because of my exposure to abuse in my home growing up. I have been addressing these issues for some time, so it may not be noticeable to the client, but emotionally may take a toll. I know this could be a blind spot where accountability would be necessary.

Skills Refined

One of the skills I refined was becoming more self-aware of biases. I have been someone who tries to evaluate my feelings, thoughts, and motives, but through class, I see that there is more searching to do. Another skill I picked up is realizing that to get a group to hit a goal, and interventions must be put into place that match the person in their environment. My group's goal was to learn to live life as a Christian better and grow in transparency and fellowship. I see now a more significant opportunity for change in these groups. My eyes have opened up to other groups available to the body. This could be an exciting possibility and asset to the church.

Learned and group personality.

I came into this class expecting that the way I have seen groups run and develop was different than what would be taught in this class. I was pleasantly disappointed in this area. It gives me confidence that what I have been doing and seeing was mostly on the right path. Some small examples are using “I” statements, developing contracts, letting health subcultures grow, monitoring negative ones, and recognizing the stages groups were in. I learned about some of the difficult stages of groups and how it was ok if the initial stages were difficult. I learned that the facilitator is less critical when the group is healthy than in the beginning. I learned that the building of subgroups is not necessarily a negative.

Our group started from the first meeting being vulnerable and transparent, allowing us to hit the ground running. We behave much as a family does but healthily. We had fun in our discussion even when it got serious, which I very much value, making the room feel safe enough to speak and loved enough to laugh about things. Because we have shared classes for a little while, we had some understanding of one another, so we skipped some roadblocks in the initial phases. And this is where I learned an advantage could come when members understand one another. This can be used to the advantage of the whole group.

Stages

Our group’s initial “Forming” stage did not last very long. That lasted maybe a week. “Storming” jumped into weeks 2 and 3, but we were put in forced storming behaviors in some situations. Some members were initially nervous about running groups because it can be tricky, even with much support. Even the beast group takes something out of you if you need more preparation as the facilitator. We got into a place of “Norming” and transitioned into

"performing, "which felt seamless. We have a cast of characters that I initially thought would be class, but everyone showed humility and patience, and some showed so much love and support that being a part of the group was enjoyable. The only thing that would hinder our group was when key members were absent.

I learned in labs that everyone has an opinion, even if they have not fleshed it out. And people want to be heard but not judged. I learned how much the group is affected by your leadership style. This correlates with parenting styles. So, if a group is to perform, everyone must develop a healthy communication style, and the facilitator must earn trust.

Group Processes

Trust and Process

This group had a level of trust developed before the start of this class. Previous engagements such as Zoom and in-person classes contributed to this trust; some went on the mandatory retreat, and some were in WhatsApp groups. Trust was the easiest step in this group. Our group was a closed group composed of 6 random members. Our goals were to grow in competence as facilitators while trying different group theories. In addition, we did a lot of role-playing, which was surprisingly fun. Almost therapeutic.

Impact of Leadership

Our weekly meetings were impacted by the person running the group each week. As a group member, it was easy to see what group leader could be taken off track. It was also easier to be controlled by someone who knew how to handle different personalities. This is where looking at the different leadership styles helped give a soul to the group that had its spirit and flesh. Some had a leadership style that did not seem natural for them to start, but over time, the natural style

came to the forefront, giving better stability to the group. For example, “Lucy” tried to bring order to a fighting group by being Authoritative, and it was not believable to members, so it brought no change. So, when “Lucy” spoke with a natural nurturing tone and brought a more natural Democratic style for her, the group bought into her leadership and direction.

Shifting co-leaders initially was difficult because we needed a set schedule on who would be leading when so the leader needed more time to prepare under the theory they would be leading on. We should have spent more time deciding who was up for it. Sometimes this was difficult because some members needed to fully grasp the theory or technique at that point because of a lack of focus or distractions. However, one of the benefits was seeing different types of leadership styles and recognizing the merits of each style. It is easy to look at one style you prefer and think the others are lesser versions of leadership. I could see other effective styles and decide what skills I want to improve. It was just as informative to see what techniques could have landed better and choose to avoid them. It reminds me to stay close to my natural leadership style, but I also can expand the boundaries of my leadership. I have a natural anxiety that comes with letting go of control. This class has helped relieve some of that natural anxiety.

Conflict and resistance

When conflict arose in the group is when the leader was most effective. Across the board, the leader would give time to see if the conflict would resolve itself, and many times it did. However, when interjection and mediation were needed, most leaders did so. This was when uses of the “I” statement were reintroduced, and even some rephrasing and summarizing to help eliminate communication barriers. Each group ended in peace and did not force a resolution. Sometimes the answer was to agree to disagree in love.

Now and then, a member was respectfully resistant for various reasons. Resistance was managed according to the style the leadership presented. The laissez-faire leader was likelier to leave that resistant person to their own space. The democratic leader seemed to follow the lead of other members and address the resistance as a team. The authoritarian would be more proactive with resistance by evenly incorporating members into the group. I learned that an individual's resistance in the group must be addressed explicitly by the type of individual expressing resistance. It is also good to speak with the individual outside the group parameters to understand the issues that bring resistance. Resistance was a crucial component in bringing the group closer together. This group was constantly able to deal with differences and resistance to meet the group goals. These are vital characterizations of a strong group and individual.

Theory and Technique

There was a surprising aspect of applying each theory to our group sessions. The surprise was applying what was successful from previous theories on a small scale to the presenting theory. Not only did the facilitator grow in comfort, but they grew in skill. This comfort is something I have seen in my experience as a director, in which modeling, time, and experience become the best teachers.

I have run groups for a few years, and this semester helped as a developer of the curriculum. As a developer, I initially wanted to develop a member and group's spiritual growth. But with all these theories and interventions, I have been open to broadening the group's goals. I could make goals for the group more specific and testable. This excites me, and the various ways what has been learned can help so many people. In a way, I have been challenged to use what I have learned here for the sake of Christ. So, I am in anticipation of the fruit this bears.

