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EFFECTIVE T-GROUP COUNSELOR IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

This article focuses on the essential elements of leading effective groups in T-group counseling. T-group has become increasingly popular in our psychologically oriented society. Currently, the purpose of T-group activities is to help participants become aware of their own emotional reactions, to understand group interaction and to appropriately modify their own behavior based on experience gained. Nowadays, T-groups are often identified with therapeutic ones, although there are significant differences between them both in terms of group dynamics and in terms of the personality requirements of the leaders. Accordingly, the problem of empirical study of the personal and professionally important qualities of the leading T-groups does not lose its relevance. Empathy, personal warmth, courage, flexibility, inquiry, encouragement, and the ability to confront are vital skills too. Counseling group leaders must wear many hats in helping their groups make progress. The more skills within the counselors' repertoires the more effective they will ultimately become. T-training is defined as a constellation of content (the specific knowledge, skills and attitudes that underlie targeted group competencies), tools (task analysis, performance measures) and delivery methods (information, demonstration and practice-based learning methods) that together form an instructional strategy. It is outlined the major assumptions and key concepts of the defining effective T-group counselors properties. The features and the variety of studies, including several recent studies that extend T-group theory are outlined. It is established that the main characteristics of an effective T-group counselor: cognitive complexity, tolerance for uncertainty, and a positive attitude to oneself, to other people and to their work, emphasizing that the latter is the key to conducting training - both educational and therapeutic. That is, relational qualities of professional competence can be considered as the most important for the personality of the leading training groups.

Keywords: personality, training, T-group, counseling, authenticity, facilitative skills, professional competence.

Introduction. In the last few decades, the focus of many researchers has been on identifying the complex factors that go into effective T-group counseling. The fundamental assumptions that expertise exists for counselor and that it develops as a result of training and experience have been the subject of considerable debate. These topics are of importance given questions of competence and credentialing, as well as the extensive training required to become a counselor. Group counseling involves individuals who are having difficulties they wish to resolve that are of a personal, educational, social, or vocational nature. These groups are primarily run in educational institutions or agencies. They deal with specific, non-pathological problems that members are aware of prior to joining and which do not involve major personality changes. Although some researchers distinguish between the T-group, which is primarily associated with National Training Laboratories, and sensitivity training, which is often associated with Western Training Laboratories, the two approaches were almost in distinguishable in practice. Therefore, we use the term T-group to encapsulate all management-related sensitivity or encounter groups. T-groups involved small unstructured groups of managers engaging, typically off-site for as many as 3 to 4 weeks, in honest and open communication in what was commonly referred to as the «here and now.» These groups were devoid of any content or subject matter, except for the

immediate experience of the group members. Thus, the focus of the T-group became the behavior of the group members struggling to deal with the lack of structure. This struggle was exacerbated by a passive facilitator. The primary mechanism for learning was the feedback received by each individual from group members. Resistance to self-examination was broken down, and an atmosphere of openness to change often emerged. The assumption that has worked to maintain this interest over the years is that certain personality variables are associated with, or are the cause of, the different degrees of counselor competence that seem to exist. In addition, many persons engaged in the training of counselors have found that some students appear to adapt readily to the counseling role, whereas others seem to be confused, in conflict, and generally ill-suited to the educator's expectations.

Analysis of literature data and problem definition. Numerous studies demonstrate T-group counselors characteristics are a unique predictor of therapy outcome. In practice, training appears in many shapes, sizes, and form sand is called by many different names and labels (e.g., assertiveness training, crew resource management, cross-training, group process training, problem-solving training, task-focused simulation training). What has long been needed in this domain is a taxonomic integration and empirical investigation of the utility of these interventions based upon the content or focus of the interventions, rather than upon the myriad of names given to these strategies by researchers. Three main types of unstructured training groups crystallized 30 years after the first T-groups appeared [2]. Traditional T-groups or laboratory training groups – emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships and the development of communication skills in an unstructured environment with an understanding of group processes and group dynamics by each member of the group. Organizational development groups or trainings of interpersonal relationships used T-groups to solve problems in the interaction of employees of organizations, the formation of the so-called organizational culture, and subsequently – organizational identity. Since the participants of such trainings were also colleagues, the dynamics of interactions had a long-lasting positive and / or negative impact on the social and psychological climate of the working groups. Self-expression groups or personal growth groups aim to change attitudes, prejudices, and beliefs; in fact, they are now synonymous with sensitivity training. Their key feature is that during the training, participants can open up to each other, share their own hidden emotions, experiences, be genuine without fear of public condemnation [1]. First of all, in the scientific and practical literature, training and psychotherapy groups are usually identified (we discussed their differences in the previous section), and therefore the roles of leading therapeutic and T-groups are also considered common. J. Edwards [4] differentiated according to counselor effectiveness, for differences on cognitive flexibility; tolerance of ambiguity; and attitudes toward self, most people, most clients, and counseling. Apart from T-group counselor efficacy, another potential factor in being a master counselor relates to the knowledge and skill base of the counselor and the cognitive processes that help organize and access that knowledge base. Although the literature on therapist expertise is limited, interest has increased in this line of research. E. Hillerbrand [5] defined he expert counselor as a person who is able to conceptualize clients, integrate factual information into performance, and recognize interpersonal processes. Expertise consists of the cognitive skills of comprehension and problem solving. T. J. G. Tracey, B. E. Wampold, R. K. Goodyear, J. W. Lichtenberg maintained that there is no evidence that experienced therapists achieve better client outcomes than do inexperienced therapists. They further proposed that therapists overestimate their clinical and diagnostic abilities, and an important reason that therapists do not improve in their clinical work is that they do not seek or receive adequate feedback about client outcomes [9]. Initial efforts at associating particular counselor behaviors with counseling outcome have yielded rather optimistic results. For instance, clients of high-facilitative counselors engaged in significantly more self-exploration than clients of low-facilitative counselors. Furthermore, numerous investigations have succeeded in demonstrating the significant influence of high counselor facilitation on other, more direct, indices of counseling outcome (information-seeking behavior, ward behavior, rated improvement, work level, employment). In addition, a primary way of

gaining feedback is through supervision [6]. During their graduate training, student counselors receive feedback on a regular basis from their supervisors who observe their sessions. Other studies have attempted to avoid or to minimize such deficiencies by invoking one or both of the following strategies. Leaders of effective counseling groups need to employ a variety of interpersonal skills. Among the most important of these are: active listening, where leaders are sensitive to the language, tone, and nonverbal gestures surrounding members' messages; linking, where leaders help members recognize their similarities; blocking, where leaders keep unfocused members from disrupting the group by either redirecting them or preventing them from monopolizing conversations; and summarizing, where leaders help members become aware of what has occurred and how the group and its members have changed (E. Salas, S. I. Tannenbaum, K. Kraiger) [7]. Counseling competence may be rated on some limited dimension such as empathy or communication effectiveness. The other tack, often taken concurrently, is the use of some formal rating device in order to specify, to some degree, what is being evaluated. In an effort to avoid the criteria problems encountered in the previously discussed studies, some researchers have attempted to use a more objective criterion measure. The only significant finding was that effective counselors were more positive in counseling-related attitudes than were those who were least effective. However, it is suggested here that these positive attitudes may be a consequence of, rather than the cause for, being effective (T. L. Sexton, S. C. Whiston) [8]. Unfortunately, since the labeled traits involved (time competence, capacity for intimate contact, and self-acceptance) do not correspond with any clear subset of self-actualization, without closer analysis it cannot be determined if we have effect or artifact. Conversely, research demonstrates that variables such as therapist emotional adjustment and certain aspects of counselors personality (e.g., dominance) predict outcome with moderate effects [3]. These empirical findings highlight the need for studies that move beyond measuring counselors' demographic characteristics and general traits to include measures of counselors characteristics that have a more solid theoretical and empirical link to client outcomes.

The purpose and objectives of research is a need to analyze the key aspects of effective T-group counselor.

Main material and research results. The procedures used for this study included a phenomenologically grounded, qualitative and quantitative research design. In our study 76 facilitators of training groups (42 – male and 34 – female) with higher psychological and pedagogical education, working in schools, colleges, universities, social services, where the activity does not involve conducting psychotherapy of clients but aimed exclusively at clients, participated in our study psychoeducation and formation of certain specific skills; the average age of the subjects is 46.5 years.

For the empirical study we used a semi-structured interview (D.J. Burks, R. Robbins), questionnaire on the professional competence of leading training groups, The Authenticity Scale (A.M. Wood, P.A. Linley, adapted to Ukrainian sample by V. Zlivkov, S. Lukomska). In the empirical study of authenticity, there has been definitional confusion regarding the construct. As a result previous research has either asked people to rate themselves on a false-self to true-self continuum or used less direct measures, such as the extent to which people's behavior varies across social roles. In the person-centered conception, authenticity is a tripartite construct defined by G. Barrett-Lennard as involving consistency between the three levels of a person's primary experience, their symbolized awareness, and their outward behavior and communication [2].

The results of a semi-structured interview revealed that facilitators of training groups associate authenticity primarily with the sincerity of a person's emotional, cognitive and behavioral reactions («he says what he thinks, feels, and does only that which seeks to do «), that is, authenticity is the coherence of different social roles of a person, his or her internal and external« I «At the same time, the researchers stated that authenticity is always situational, because every time a person is in the «authentic (present) moment», however, the choice of authentic or non-authentic behavior always leaves it: «our profession requires strong masks, to be authentic immediately means to lose authority», «Sincerity with the client - an indicator of the weakness of

the psychologist», «if I will be authentic in training, then why can I teach clients who consider me a specialist in this field?». In fact, coaches believed that authenticity is not only unnecessary but often harmful, in order to effectively manage the training group. The researchers emphasized the concepts of «tactfulness" and «tolerance», which are more important in working with a group than authenticity and, in their view, are an antonym of authenticity. That is, on the one hand, authenticity as authenticity, sincerity is a professional quality of the psychologist, and on the other – it is in the training that interferes with effective work, in particular when leading a group. Authenticity is expressed both verbally and non-verbally, if the participants of the training group understand non-verbal communication, they can assume that the trainer is dishonest with them, however, according to the facilitators, the correspondence of verbal expressions to their non-verbal expression is important in psychotherapeutic groups. Hence, it is obvious that the facilitators of training groups consider themselves more educators, rather than psychologists, whose task is to transfer knowledge, not to influence the personality of the participants in the groups. The researchers noted that leading trainings for successful work is sufficient to have a moderate (often below average) level of authenticity.

Opinions on the authenticity of leading psychotherapy groups are of different opinion. It is there that the therapist's authentic self-expression contributes to the self-disclosure of participants in the therapeutic group, the sincerity of some becomes a pledge of sincerity, the authenticity of others thereby causing the rapport necessary for psychotherapy. Facilitators of the training groups noted that authenticity is increasingly related to the emotional and less to the cognitive realm, which is why authenticity in interaction contributes to the psychological comfort of the participants of the group, but it has no meaningful influence. Some call communication between the client and the therapist «authentic dialogue,» so it is more relevant in psychotherapy than in psychoeducation or psycho-correction in particular. However, according to leading psychotherapy groups, there are client groups in communication with which a lower level of authenticity should be identified, in particular individuals with borderline, narcissistic, and hysterical disorders, as well as children and adolescents with too much self-disclosure may reduce psychotherapists' authority. The researchers noted that they are authentic only when the discussion or group exercises relate to their personal experience, but whether or not they share their experiences, it is situational and concerns each specific context, a specific training group. That is, the conduct of both training and psychotherapy groups requires a moderate level of authenticity of psychologists, too low will not promote emotional contact, a sense of security and comfort in working with a group, and too high – will reduce the authority of the leader and also will not contribute to a positive psychological group (table 1).

Table 1

Authenticity of T-group counselors
(A.M. Wood Authenticity Scale, P.A. Linley, 2008)

Age	Authenticity components		
	Non-restriction to others	Knowledge and acceptance of self	Authentic self-expression
Less 30	9,68	7,72	20,94
31-40	20,73	12,58	16,12
41-49	15,08	15,90	18,22
Over 50	8,95	14,38	21,97
At all	13,61	12,65	19,31

Thus, the respondents less 30 have the highest scores on the scale of «authentic self-expression», and the lowest ones – on the scale of «knowledge and acceptance of self», leading the training groups over 50 years most typical «authentic self-expression», and the least – «non-restriction to others». Professionals between the ages of 31 and 49 have balanced indicators of authenticity, they characterized by a moderate level of non-limitation of others, knowledge and acceptance of self and authentic self-expression. Analyzing the results of all age groups by

indicators of authenticity suggests that they are most characterized by authentic self-expression, and least by knowledge and acceptance of themselves. That is, the professional activities of leading (non-psychotherapy) training groups are consistent with their awareness of their own experiences and experiences, of their ability to influence other people, but there is a certain inconsistency with the true self, flexibility in using different roles, often neglecting one's own needs for others or for the sake of preservation own authority among participants of training groups.

The results of a survey on professional competence revealed that the facilitators of training groups consider themselves «hungry for knowledge» students, who are constantly improving their professional level. Content analysis of the answers to the questions showed that most often the words «thirst for knowledge», «thirst for knowledge», «knowledge as a source of development», etc. were used to characterize the professional psychologist trainer. At the same time, the majority of respondents consider that their most important resource in their work is the accumulated life and work experience, that experience determines the effectiveness of conducting a training group, according to even a young facilitator who is just starting out as a group trainer, it is necessary to develop his own experience of participating in training groups including during training, including psychotherapy. In order to be effective in conducting trainings, the leaders need to have cognitive complexity and be tolerant of other people's actions; personality and behavior both within and outside the group. An important component of a professional psychologist-trainer is reflexivity, emotional receptivity, and the ability to perceive and provide feedback. As noted by the investigators, these qualities they have mastered during training in similar trainings and / or in psychotherapy groups. An important characteristic of professionalism is the psychological well-being of leading trainings, in particular the congruence of their professional and personal life, self-confidence, and the value of their own achievements. Psychologists who provide psychotherapy training in addition to psychoeducational training have noted that the best way to maintain psychological health for them is to participate in training, exercise and spiritual practices, including mindfulness. According to the researched, it is impossible to conduct effective trainings without developed skills to listen, observe and care for the well-being of people, so-called sensitivity to others, sincere interest in people, knowledge of their inner world is an important quality of a professional psychologist-trainer. It should be noted that psychologists who do not conduct psychotherapy training do not usually consider the work alliance as the key to successful work, but the coaches of the so-called personal growth or therapeutic groups consider the ability of the psychotherapist to establish a working alliance as the basis of the clients' therapeutic changes. Willingness to resolve conflicts, perception of strong negative emotions of clients are also important indicators of professionalism of leading training groups.

Conclusions. It is concluded that leaders of training groups consider as cognitive components of professional competence the necessity of continuous self-improvement by mastering new knowledge and skills, accumulation of professional and life experience and cognitive complexity; emotional – reflexivity, psychological well-being and high level of emotional intelligence; relational (manifested in interaction with others) – sensitivity to other people, the ability to form a working (therapeutic) alliance, the willingness to resolve group conflicts and to perceive strong negative emotions of the training participants. The main characteristics of an effective T-group counselor: cognitive complexity, tolerance for uncertainty, and a positive attitude to oneself, to other people and to their work, emphasizing that the latter is the key to conducting training – both educational and therapeutic. That is, relational qualities of professional competence can be considered as the most important for the personality of the leading training groups. Applications of the results from this research are numerous. Those who design and administer training can benefit from these findings in order to improve the effectiveness of their team training interventions. Additionally, further research in this area would help clinical supervisors understand and identify the relative importance of competencies for therapist training.

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ОСОБИСТІСТЬ ЕФЕКТИВНИХ ВЕДУЧИХ Т-ГРУП В КОНТЕКСТІ СУЧАСНИХ ЕМПІРИЧНИХ ДОСЛІДЖЕНЬ

　　Дану статтю присвячено аналізу професійно важливих якостей особистості ведучих Т-груп. Встановлено, що, починаючи з 90-х років ХХ століття, Т-групи набувають все більшої популярності в українському суспільстві, втім у США та країнах Європи історія тренінгового руху сягає 30-х років ХХ століття. На початку своєї історії до Т-груп залучалися невеликі неструктуровані колективи менеджерів, які навчалися чесної та відкритої комунікації протягом 3-4 тижнів в ситуаціях «тут і зараз». Нині метою діяльності Т-груп є допомога учасникам в усвідомленні власних емоційних реакцій, розумінні групової взаємодії і відповідної модифікації власної поведінки на основі набутого досвіду. Натепер Т-групи часто ототожнюються із терапевтичними, хоча між ними є суттєві відмінності як відносно групової динаміки, так і стосовно вимог до особистості ведучих. Відповідно, проблема емпіричного дослідження особистісних і професійно важливих якостей ведучих Т-груп не втрачає своєї актуальності. Констатовано, що професійна діяльність ведучих Т-груп вимагає чіткого усвідомлення власних переживань та досвіду, можливостей впливати на інших людей, гнучкості вживання у різні ролі, помірного рівня автентичного самовираження, особливо у контексті професійної взаємодії. Визначено основні характеристики ефективного ведучого Т-групи – когнітивна складність, толерантність до невизначеності та позитивне ставлення до себе, інших людей і своєї роботи, саме остання є ключовою для ведення тренінгів – як освітніх, так і терапевтичних. Тобто реляційні особистісні якості (такі, що стосуються міжособистісної взаємодії) професійної компетентності є найважливішими для ведучих Т-груп.

　　Ключові слова: *особистість, тренінг, Т-група, консультування, автентичність, навички фасилітації, професійна компетентність.*