KOODAM WORKING PAPERS

The Application of Group Relations in Family, Organizational, and Social Systems

GRI

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Preface

In December 2020, Group Relations India held Koodam 2020 - the 2nd edition of Koodam - a gathering of practitioners and those interested in group relations work, to delve into the application of group relations work in family, organizational, and social systems.

COVID 19 was the most significant marker of 2020, and accompanying it were many other developments in several spheres – social, political, economic that impacted the globe and us in India. The series of lockdowns put a halt to our plans to offer our annual Group Relations Conference and other programmes face to face and gradually the world moved online. At GRI we were not in a hurry to port group relations work online. Many of us individually participated in e-offerings internationally in staff and member roles - experienced the promise of the format in some cases and had reservations in others. However, as months went by, we were convinced that we should not close 2020 without some public offering and decided that it would be the next Koodam, offered online.

We worked in a model of a convening team, which itself was an experiment of working in a more collective way. GRI was in its 7th year, and we were sure that this Koodam could attract many who had early experiences of group relations and found it interesting, perhaps a bit intriguing, and hopefully valuable. We were keen to see Group Relations (GR) through their eyes and their voices, as members and hopefully some of them as presenters.

The theme of Koodam 2020: application in multiple spaces - organizational, personal, family, and social - in turn encouraged contribution from many roles and arenas.

Our task then shifted to encouraging each of our presenters to say what they wished to say, with slight nudges for clarity, focus on the task, or developing a hypothesis in order to take their own explorations further. Koodam, we believe, is not just the 3-day event; or the subsequent working paper series just a product. The whole process of each person engaging with and developing their ideas, with the process itself being a source of new insights, we believed, would be the GR way!

Koodam 2020 was a group of 44 members, and turned out to be a stimulating as well as invigorating process of engaging with what was on offer; building on it collectively through engaging with it in public. Given the coalescing of topics, and the tight timelines of an online event, we came up with different formats and combinations of parallel sessions including a live interview with panels from two systems where many members had in the past attended GRCs offered by GRI. Being online did mean that we missed the opportunity to physically meet and connect with each other. However, it also allowed for many more people to participate.

The practice of a working paper series continues – to encourage taking one's presentation to the format of a written paper as another valuable way of insight generation.

Many of the colleagues who presented and participated chose to take this next step and commit to writing. This series is the fruit of that labour.

We are glad to bring to you **Koodam Working Paper Series 02: The Application of Group Relations in Family, Organizational and Social Systems.**

The first set of applications is through **unpacking a theme**. The work the presenters did was to slice through, go deeper via their topic into a particular theme, using the lens of group relations. Gunjan Zutshi speaks clearly to the pull of frameworks and the complex process of choice making. While one's identity is also a function of one's choices, what is fascinating is her discovery of the transference, projections, and projective identification through this process of comparing frameworks. Sunitha Lal, while working through the storytelling and storyteller's journeys, both being informed by GR, also keeps her focus on the way patriarchy is constructed, and the processes that keep it thriving. Kavi Arasu's narrative of three moments of truth is a poignant and honest narrative of his own experience in a GRC. This is particularly valuable as there are such few narratives of the actual GRC experience in the first-person voice. Chandan Shamnani decides to beard the lion in its den by engaging with the complex topic of colonialism. He discovers that the process is not just of making sense of unconscious processes outside, but of engaging with them inside oneself as well, in order that real insights may emerge. Kiran Lalsangi had focused in his presentation at Koodam 2020 on how attending a GRC helped him to explore diversity in multiple ways. His paper takes his experiences further, continuing the application journey at his workplace and in personal spaces.

The next section is about application of group relations in **the places we inhabit**. Uma Ravikumar chooses the family system and is the only presenter in Koodam 2020 who did so directly. Family systems, the setting for our earliest unconscious feelings and scripts, are powerful because of the continued impact they have. Uma's is a courageous and thought-provoking foray into this complex terrain. The other contribution in this section is Sakshi Vaisahampayan's self-reflexive account of the development of her apartment's residents committee. Sakshi deploys her clarity of GR fundamentals such as task, role, and system to demonstrate that the GR lens is indeed useful in any everyday situation.

The final section, application in **workplace settings**, is where we see most of the writing in group relations. The set of contributions here are quite unique and refreshing. Vartika Jaini puzzles about a sector that she has engaged with for over two decades – the not-for-profit/development sector in India – and develops some powerful working hypotheses about its functioning using the lens of managing oneself in role. As can be expected the process of working on this paper itself shaped the hypotheses, a phenomenon that GR practitioners realise is one of the most powerful aspects of using a GR lens. Brigid Nossal brings her years of experience in consulting to organisations using a GR lens. She offers some 'tools' as a way to invite client systems to engage more deeply in what may be in store in terms of insights about what is happening in their system. Pradeep Singh writes candidly about how engagement with group relations helped him see group phenomena differently and changed how he took on the consultant role.

We also invited participants of Koodam 2020 to share their reflections – these were with varied focus – some reporting aspects of the event, others offering personal insights, and some others also puzzling about what the Koodam experience offered as food for thought. These contributions have been sequenced alphabetically. This section, we believe, would help you get an idea of what attending Koodam 2020 meant to them.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts and reflections as you read this Working Paper Series 02.

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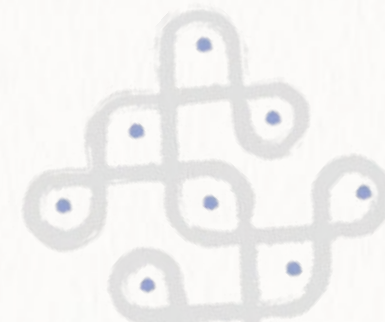
Unpacking a Theme

Group Relations and Psychotherapy: Learnings from Praxis
Gunjan Zutshi

Introduction

As an OD consultant, coach and psychotherapist, I am engaged in working with individuals or with small and large groups. The focus in each of these roles is to enable individuals and organizations to reach their full potential and be more effective in their roles and tasks.

My quest for a framework which provided a way to understand and effectively work with group dynamics in organizations led me to the practice of group relations (GR) after I attended my first group relations conference (GRC) in 2011. The focus on unconscious processes in groups and taking a systemic view to working with issues of leadership, authority, role, task, and boundaries in organizations has been hugely helpful in dealing with systemic dynamics and change.

At almost the same time, I was drawn to Transactional Analysis (psychotherapy) to have a deeper understanding of working with individuals and the process of individual change.

GR and psychotherapy became my frames of reference for understanding groups and individuals respectively. Each has strongly influenced the practice of the other and yet, oftentimes I have found myself comparing the two in an attempt to make meaning of what I was experiencing.

My Projections on the Frameworks

When I started writing this paper, I titled it 'GR and psychotherapy: how the twain meet'. As if it was somehow important for the two to meet - a need to find similarities and account for differences. I got in touch with the anxiety of dealing with seeming contradictions and a need to bring congruence between the frameworks, rather than being OK with holding the differences and working with them in service of task and role.

I also became aware that unconsciously, I had been holding one framework as better than the other and thus creating a competition / hierarchy of sorts in my mind where I had to somehow prove that in some aspects one is better than the other.

I realized that through this paper, I wanted to prove some points to my GR colleagues, so that I could feel a sense of OKness at proving them wrong. I got in touch with feelings of anger, inadequacy, and shame that I felt at times when I thought my point of view was not understood or not engaged with enough by my colleagues.

Getting in touch with that anxiety and the insight that I was projecting my own sense of "not good enough" onto a framework freed me enough to explore my experiences and make meaning of things as they are, without having to prove one as better than the other.

Hence,

The primary task of this paper is to articulate learnings from my praxis of the two frameworks of GR and Psychotherapy; how the practice of one impacts and informs the practice of the other, and make meaning of these experiences at a personal and systemic level.

The Individual and the Group

The way I made sense in the initial days of my practice of the two frameworks was that my training in psychotherapy will prepare me to work with individual change in a deeper way, while I saw GR as the framework that will help me understand and work with systems better. It created a sort of split between working with individuals and groups as if the two were so neatly separate.

An early experience of this split was in my therapy training group where the focus of exploration of what was happening in the group was almost always the intrapsychic or interpersonal processes. While we were learning to understand and work with such processes, the exclusion of exploration of group as a whole and its impact on the individual and interpersonal struck me as not being very helpful.

I remember many instances in the group where one of the trainees would bring up how they were feeling incompetent or anxious or envious and almost always, it was addressed in personal therapy work as if it was only an individual phenomenon and that the individual had to resolve it for themselves.

Any attempt to explore how the group may have evoked and impacted these seemingly personal feelings was brushed aside. And I would wonder how could it be all about the individual? What about this group evokes these dynamics? What about the context?

The outcome of this singular focus on the individual was actually about missed opportunities for learning and finding newer, more effective ways of being for the individual. An incident that comes to mind is of one of my trainee colleagues feeling quite frustrated and overwhelmed by what she thought was her inability to learn at the same pace as some others in the group and feeling incompetent and inadequate. There was also resentment expressed towards another colleague who it appeared was being favoured by the trainers. The way this was worked with was by encouraging her to work on her feelings in her personal work. While that was no doubt one thing to do and would have helped her, in not responding to this by looking at the systemic context we seemed to have missed the bus.

There was enough data that many others in the group were feeling anxious about their competence, that there was a sense of competition and comparison which was adding to the anxiety and projection of it was on those who were seen as more competent and therefore, the trainers favourite. It seemed that one person was set up on behalf of many in the group to challenge the trainers (BaF) and raise some of these issues which were unsayable by the others. By not working with these aspects and seeing it only as an individual/interpersonal phenomenon meant that this was made as "her issue" and the final result was quite unfortunate in that she left the group with a lot of bad feelings. The group members got some respite from the anxiety by ejecting the person who was raising it and thereby missed an opportunity to learn about themselves. Not looking at the systemic dynamics proved detrimental for both the individual and the system.

I would later experience it in my work with clients as I grappled with the question - in psychotherapy, where does it stop being only an individual process, and does one need to consider its systemic origins and impact if meaningful transformation has to take place?

Especially when there is oppression, power differential, marginalization – to expect clients to change in a context that is not changing nor supportive, poses challenges to personal change that I as a therapist I needed to be mindful of.

I was working with a client who was struggling to hold on to a job and came into therapy because she felt she was not confident and assertive enough and hence having this difficulty. We worked for a while on this but it wasn't making much difference. However, when we began to explore how as a woman from an orthodox community where it is not ok for women to work, and their role is seen as only that of taking care of the family, it was as if the system wanted her to fail again and again so that she would eventually give up and take on the more acceptable role of being a wife and mother. This realization about how she was setting herself up for failure brought some relief to her as she could see the systemic impact and not just make it a personal failure. And she was able to make progress in therapy.

Thus, keeping the systemic lens on even when working with the individual has been very helpful to me especially when it involves processes of gender, patriarchy, oppression, hierarchies, marginalization etc. The client who is struggling to find her voice and autonomy in a patriarchal system, or a client from LGBTQ community who wants to be able to own his identity, or a client who responds to the world with anger because he feels judged as being "low class", or the client who is anguished and feels anxious with what is happening in the country with Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) protests and rise of authoritarianism – all of them while being individual struggles, are rooted in the systemic context.

To not see these as outside the context in which the individual experiences them is important even when one is focused on individual change. Personal change cannot happen in a vacuum without paying attention to the systemic context.

At the same time, when I have been part of a group and exploring the unconscious group dynamics, I have also sat with the question of where does one stop looking at the group processes, and also consider what is happening at the individual and interpersonal level. The need for interpersonal connection, individual competence, accountability and responsibility in a group are all important to be held in mind. Else we run the danger of using the group as a defense in taking up personal authority. The very famous Indian saying "we are like that only" seems to be a classic example of using the collective to defend exercising individual responsibility and accountability.

In groups, we find it easy to personalize and not look at the systemic processes whereas when paying attention to the systemic processes, it's also possible to miss the individual and the interpersonal. It's easier to hold the polarities of individual and the group rather than integrate and balance and learn to pay attention to both, even if the intervention is aimed at one or the other depending on the task.

When a group is aware of some of the unhelpful dynamics but not much changes in the way members respond to those dynamics, I have wondered: where is the accountability for individual change which can impact systemic change? Are we to only become more insightful about the group dynamics or does it also require that we pay close attention to our own intrapsychic processes and change what needs to be changed? Berne's famous saying that insight is not enough holds meaning where a focus on group and trying to get insight into group dynamics can become the primary task instead of change that such understanding must surely bring.

And while individual and interpersonal are not the focus when working with group dynamics, ignoring them can also leave the individual feeling isolated in a group. For example, I was working with a colleague on some preparatory work for a GRC and some interactions happened that I wanted to process, because it had an impact on me. However, my colleague said it's something that belonged perhaps to the whole system and to bring it up in the staff meeting. I did and we explored what it meant for me and the system but it still left me quite dissatisfied. I realized that the need was to also connect with my colleague at an interpersonal level which was sidelined, leaving me feeling not heard, not understood, and isolated.

As GR practitioners, we pay close attention to projective transference especially when it is the bad object that is being projected. But how do we see and respond to the longings and yearnings for an attuned other which may manifest themselves as introjective transference (Hargaden and Sills,2002). In a group, they perhaps get lodged in as need for interpersonal relating and the danger I feel, of seeing these as defenses, or as representing a basic assumption mentality, is that it can leave the individual feeling not understood and isolated in a group, and have its own resultant dynamics of shame and resistance.

For example, two colleagues bantering with each other can be seen as trying to be one up, competition, and yet it could also be about the longing of one to be like other (twinship transference) and experience the joy of feeling connected to the other. Or looking up to and admiring a colleague is yearning for that "ideal" other (idealizing transference) which is not bad and not the same as "idolizing" which is a transference of projecting a fantasized internal ideal object on to the other. My own experience where I felt deeply misunderstood by a GRI colleague and kept fighting (Basic Assumption Fight in group settings) was because not only was I looking for an "ideal" other in that person, but I was also yearning to be understood and appreciated (mirroring transference). What I received was a lot of hypotheses and insights over emails but sadly, that was not of much help in the moment. And maybe became something that contributed to my projections that I mentioned at the start of the paper.

Meaning Making

All these dilemmas, questions, and experiences are a part of any learning process and have helped me have a deeper understanding of my own processes, projections and biases. At the same time, they have also offered an insight into what could be happening at a systemic level. I have a few hypotheses to offer:

Hypothesis 1

1. Splitting the frameworks as good/bad and thus creating comparisons and hierarchies

2. Because of our identification with a particular framework and that framework becoming an extension of who I/we are or believe we are! It then allows us to project our sense of good/bad, OK/not OK onto the framework and helps maintain a sense of okness for the individual and/or the group, as in my own experience.

Some further data for it is that one of my psychotherapy colleagues who attended a GRC and has been quite influenced by GR said that for a long time he resisted the idea because it felt like it would be being disloyal to the psychotherapy framework and way of working.

Hypothesis 2

1. Using the frameworks to maintain other splits – individual/group, knowing/feeling, insight action, hard/soft...

2. Because it is easier to deal with, manage things when they are split. I can focus on one at a time, identify myself with one and disown the other. Collapsing the polarities would require one to own up parts of self and learn to integrate, hold more than one thing in mind and build skills at different levels, even when working in a specific context, role and task. The anxiety of doing that is too much, and hence the need to maintain these splits.

3. Perhaps that is why, my many attempts to get colleagues from psychotherapy to attend a GRC or explore how GR can add to our work as psychotherapists have been largely unsuccessful. And I have never even dared to ask any of my GR colleagues if they consider being in therapy or any individual practice for self-development and growth as essential to their practice of GR.

4. At a more fundamental level, maybe it's the difficulty of accepting that I, the individual, am an extension of the group; just as the group is a reflection of me, that we are not so separate after all.

Post Koodam Reflections

What emerged during Koodam was in many ways further data for my hypothesis and also a reminder that what is experienced in the microcosm is also what is happening in the macrocosm. What had seemed like a personal dilemma seemed to be alive at the larger system level too.

It was evident from the very first session where the dialogue was around frameworks and methodologies and how we use them. The projections on GR as a framework and how we identify with it as a group of practitioners was insightful exploration. That GR is hard / tough work was often articulated and what that has meant is a split in what contexts it can be applied and where it cannot be. It's ok to look at unconscious group dynamics in a GRC but can we also do it in our daily lives, in all the systems we are part of, seemed a moot question.

While presenting this paper, what emerged was that our work is not to integrate frameworks, our work is to integrate parts of ourselves that are split and manifest as our projections. Only then would we be able to use frameworks effectively and work in our roles in service of the task.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I quote J Krishnamurti — "*We follow authority — if not that of a person, then of a system, of an ideology — because we want a result that will be satisfactory, which will give us security. We really do not want to understand ourselves, our impulses and reactions, the whole process of our thinking, the conscious as well*

as unconscious. We would rather pursue a system that assures us of a result. But that pursuit is invariably the outcome of our desire for security, for certainty, and result is obviously not the understanding of oneself."

That's what identification with a framework can do to us — stop us from understanding ourselves while using the framework to prove a point, project on, feel OK and secure.

For me, the process of writing this paper has been my gift of understanding a little bit more about myself and being more grounded in my practice of GR and of psychotherapy without having to prove one as better than other.

What I have also come to understand is the intricate way in which the I and the group are connected. There is no I outside the context of the group and many 'I's make the group. To be effective in bringing about change at any level, both have to be accounted for and attended to.

References

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Storyteller, Storytelling and GR

Sunitha Lal

Precursor

Elliott Jaques, psychoanalyst and social scientist, in the paper *Dynamics of Social Structure* talks about Social Institutions: "Social institutions, as I shall here use the term, are either social structures or cultural mechanisms. Social structures are systems of roles or positions, which may be taken up and occupied by persons. Cultural mechanisms are conventions, customs, taboos which are used in regulating the relationships among members of society."

My book '*Dotting the Blemish and Other Stories*' centers around women and attempts to capture the strong patriarchal system we sanction, and the unconscious biases we uphold as a society in India. All stories in the book are based out of India across a 90-year timeframe. The social institutions like family, marriage, and widowhood have been entrenched into the social system orchestrated by patriarchy. These stories reflect and comment on the inherent prejudices we have as a society. The characters in the stories accept the laid down norms and processes as normal, up until one point, and then begin to question themselves, or try to break free of, or recognize what these processes are all about: a construct holding them as prisoners. All stories are about women who lived ordinary lives, how they coped with life as it misplaced some lines. They capture the journey of each woman trying to explore her realities and finding her voice.

There are two threads I would like to explore in this paper: the stories, and the characters in them mirroring the social institutions, and my journey as I crafted these stories.

Journey

As I was crafting these stories, my GR lens was very alive. Bringing social context into the narration of stories and the lived experiences of the protagonists was almost like going into the deep underbelly of society. As a writer, I found that GR helped me look at the social structures and institutions more clearly and craft the characters more distinctly. The way they tried to find their voice in the roles they played; the choices made or not made - reflected the unconscious processes institutionalized in them and in us.

Stories, to me, are like a lens to zoom-in. To capture the dynamics in a frame for readers to observe, to experience, and to ponder over.

Thread 1

The stories stitched alongside each other are about the realities of women who worked through what they thought was their karma, to make a life for themselves and those around them. Confronted with their realities, they still searched for answers and their voices. The stories capture how family and society protect the social order. How anxieties are safeguarded and defenses are built by splitting and projecting - thus creating the 'other'.

For the thread regarding stories crafted, I will take three stories and discuss the social structures within which the women live in these stories and their search for both balance and space.

Story 1: The Bittersweet Pill of Retribution

Finding one's voice and exercising personal authority

The story of a woman set in 1930. After her sister's death, she gets married off to her sister's husband who is 20 years older than her. The underlying premise is that wealth should not go out of the family. Her stepson is just five years younger than her. The husband has an extramarital relationship, a fact known to everyone but never articulated in the house - a house where vegetables are cared for and placed in meshed almirah so they don't wilt. In an emergency, she is rushed to her husband's side as a caregiver.

What am I going to do in that room with him for days? I blinked, trying to ward off the sudden rush of tears, as apprehension tightly coiled around my soul.

In the hospital, she sees him and the 'other' woman. She looks at him on the bed and realizes at that moment that she really does not have anything to offer. She turns and walks away. She finds her courage to state her choice and claims her identity and space.

I nodded at her, the other woman, and said, "Stay with him, and once he can walk, send him home."

There is also that element of her recognizing the other woman who haunted her, and by asking her to take care of him, admitting to the intimacy the other woman shared with her husband. But there is also her anger, her rejection of him, and a display of power - a space and opportunity for her to finally determine an outcome.

Story 2: Lathi, Lungi and the Loincloth

Finding oneself in the role and finding personal authority to be in the role

Gender dynamics has many shades to it. Women buy peace in playing down their role. In most cases, they never question when someone minimizes their effort or role. Selvi grew up in a small village, and today she is posted there as a police constable. She is liked by everyone. She wears her police uniform but she is yet to locate herself or her role authority in it. The orderly in the story acts as if he outranks her.

Raju, the accused in a case, visits the station every day as part of the condition of his bail. Selvi wants to run and hide somewhere whenever he comes in.

Raju was laughing as he entered the station, his men swarming behind him. He slapped the head constable on the shoulders. On his way in, Raju slapped Selvi's buttock, giving it a squeeze.

"How are you girl?" he smirked.

She blinked hard, trying not to cry, and bit her lower lip. In the room full of police officers, everyone pretended that they did not see what had happened or had been happening every other day.

She struggles to name what is happening to her as 'molestation', neither does she find the courage to confront her abuser. It took a nudge and push for her to locate herself in the role and find her strength to stay in the role.

Story 3: Living with Loathe

Feeling damaged, from rejecting parts of self to become willing to accept herself, from finding courage to letting go of shame.

Vaidehi, a successful documentary filmmaker, was molested as a child by a family member. What do you do if there is a predator within the safety net called family? Hating her body, scared of any intimate relationship, running away from family - she threw herself into her work. But does success liberate one from the shadows?

"Today, at 30, I am still haunted by those hands."

Adrift in the ocean of her misery, she has moved further and further away from family. She loathed her body. She wore large shirts, big blouses, everything to keep the focus away from her body. The scars ran deep.

"I can't get myself to trust any man. If he is charming, I run for my life."

Her rejection of her family, the displaced anger, her work: none of this is making her feel complete. The road to healing starts with acknowledging parts of herself that she had been rejecting - not feeling damaged or dirty. One day she might leave the shame behind and find the courage to love and be loved.

Thus, all the 16 stories capture the protagonist's transition from being a receiver or participant in her realities to someone who identifies and battles the demons constructed by the society within herself and emerges self-aware.

Thread 2

The second thread I would like to explore is my journey as a writer crafting these stories and the characters in these stories. Interlaced in this thread is also my journey as a woman in this system and my experiences.

The stories in the book are those glossed over or omitted in the family system; stories that families want to forget; or pretend as if they have not noticed; or do not wish to recognize or understand what has happened or happening. I have heard these stories in my family, in my community, and in the social structures where I am within the circle, or have a clear ringside view. I wondered why these stories are told as if 'this is how' it ought to be: as if it is the natural order. How do we learn to see and listen to the omissions in a story? Uncover the crimes committed? And understand the feelings that were projected and introjected?

While discussing splitting and projection in the *Connectedness to Source: Our Collective Reality*, John Bazalgette says that "The "good" me is protected and defended against the "bad" me, who is, of course, "not-me". This process does not feed a state of disconnectedness; it feeds a state of negative connectedness - persons welded together by hate."

Thus, this splitting process of labeling women - as good-bad, pious-immoral, saint-sinner, virgin-whore, occurs to ensure we keep the patriarchal order intact. Anyone who challenges this hierarchical social order or blurs the carefully constructed boundaries is always labeled: as the one who has strayed, or is a sinner. And is punished. This is done not only by men but also by women. Women sanction these crimes by offering their unwavering support to patriarchy. This support is given for protection - the 'good/pious/virgin' is taken care of by the system, and is also sheltered from the 'bad/immoral/whore'. I feel it is this sanction of privilege and protection that prevents women from questioning the patriarchy.

This thread took shape as I observed and listened, watching the patterns - so that the stories can be stitched.

As a storyteller, I also realized I had to look at my role differently than that of an observer. I examined the unconscious processes I brought to my storytelling using BART. It helped me explore the struggles I had in staying true to my role as an author and not getting confused with my other identities or with the identities of my characters.

Task

My task as an author is to call out the unconscious processes of the family, or community, or society through the story. Hold up a mirror, hoping that we will recognize and own what is ours, so that shifts can happen. As a writer, it took a lot of focus to be with the story's primary task and not transgress into my ideas of revenge, anger, and justice, but stay the course on narrating the story to reflect my character's reality. To contain my anxieties of wanting to write a great story, or about how people will perceive my ideas. It is also very much possible that while containing, I could slip into being defensive in storytelling. It is thus easy to create a villain.

Role

The storyteller's role is at the intersection of: you, the person who is crafting the story with your likes and dislikes; the story you are crafting with its characters, narrative, assumptions, and biases; and the context you have in mind.

The watch out here is not to get entangled with one's desire to be omnipotent. The urge to make the characters behave like you is tempting. As the storyteller, you are the creator. But when you start writing, the story becomes the story of the characters. It is their story and their voices, not yours. The storyteller needs to respect and accept that.

Boundary

How can you, as a storyteller, build the story without being obtrusive? How do you maintain the boundaries of the roles of the characters you create, instead of claiming their language and decisions because you are crafting them? How do you use boundaries as resources to manage tasks? There are other boundaries of consciousness - between you and the character, between you and the audience, between the character and the audience. How do you allow space for exploration in each of these areas without overstating or overstepping?

Authority

As a woman, mother, professional, wife, daughter, and daughter-in-law, I experience varied shades of prejudice, judgment, and bias. It is a constant force one is up against. I use my personal authority in the roles I play to call out these patterns and, in the role of an author, to portray the many subtle ways in which biases are being played out. Being authentic to voices heard and unheard.

Black, White and a Myraid Shades of Grey

While examining the system as a whole, I also began to introspect on my journey as a storyteller and some experiences and emotions in that journey.

Envy

Envy was a powerful emotion that bubbled up in unexpected places. When I explored this further, two things became apparent to me. In some places, women envied 'other women' who were advancing (in personal or professional areas) or trying out different things. It felt as if the envy women had towards those who were advancing or trying new things, manifested in ensuring that they did not move ahead or try anything different. Also, in patriarchy, men use women as gate-keepers to keep the outliers in line - no one should stray; no

one can reach forward; no moonshots allowed. For me, while I was telling their stories, it is this that came alive.

Trust

In many places, I only stated a sentence. Almost like leaving a thought. Leaving it to my readers to muse. I felt there was no need to over-explain or take a masterclass about it. That understanding and sharpness came from my GR experiences. Let the reader experience and ponder. They will arrive at it at their own pace - it is also fine if they don't reach there.

Control

I feel folklore is told and retold to set the expectations and some ground rules in families and society. Andrew Szmidla (1975) explains four boundaries or four intersecting points to negotiate and transact. These are between me (my inline) and what I see as my reality, between you and me as you see me (my outline), between you (your inline) as you see your reality, and between me and you as I see you (your outline). As I have experienced it in patriarchy, it is my inline, which is my reality that the system tries to define and control by calling them norms. That is the tragedy.

Denial

While I was researching specific customs, I observed an interesting pattern. For example, do women remove the marriage markers after the husband dies? Many told me such things do not happen anymore. Everyone dismissed it and said stuff like that happened many years ago but now things have changed. In reality, the truth was very different. Many were not willing to recognize them. There is more interest in knowing and talking about the marriage customs - the happy and celebratory stuff, but the scary, hidden and ambiguous symbols/rituals are pushed under the carpet. Rejecting quickly, denying, and not wanting to engage, seems to be high.

Collusion

There is a story about domestic violence. It was tough to write at various levels. Instead of portraying one woman, I wove together two stories about two different women. I used a stream-of-consciousness narrative style to explore the subject. When I wanted to write about domestic violence, I spoke to families where there is an incident of domestic violence. I probed onlookers, and family members - immediate and extended. The stark reality that hurt deeply was the collusion by family members and the extended family. And how in many cases they acted against the victim - starting from their unwillingness to name the perpetrator. The blind hope that one day magically, the violence and its memories will disappear.

When we know/hear of abuse, what do we do? Think that they are two adults and they will figure it out? Or think it's just a couple's thing? Do we weigh the abuse and justify it? - Something like, "It was in the heat of the moment", "she deserves it"', "it was not such a big thing". There are also the deeper and darker visible colluding that happens - abusing the victim, threatening the victim. The invisible ones are the ones that cut the confidence of the victim: not recognizing the crime, not speaking up, not calling to say we are there, acting as if it is normal, hoping time will heal it, generalizing that it happens everywhere, forgetting about it, or keeping it hidden.

Self-deception

Stories in the section from 1930 to 1980 needed me to go back to families that had similar themes/experiences. I was trying to understand the folklore in that family - about their great-grandfather or great-grandmother, their lives, and how the family processed it. To my surprise, the fourth or fifth-generation granddaughters' standard answer was, "In those days it was common". I grappled with that response. While in those days, it might have been common but does that stop one today from standing up and articulating what they feel about it. Maybe even recognize it as 'not ok', to start with.

Dysfunctional relationships

In one of the stories, the protagonist thinks of her earlier manager and remembers how he was like a father to her. However, when there was a crime that was being committed against her, right in front of his eyes, he never questioned it, nor did he give her the strength to fight it. The special bond being thought of was strange, but you see this play out in organizations. These confused feelings result in entanglement of the role with the relationship, thus subverting the task, making the role dysfunctional.

Reminiscence

In *Connectedness to Source: Our Collective Reality*, John Bazalgette concludes: "Every action I take expresses a level of commitment and motivation to some form of truth. In this way, the extent to which it is for me to be authentic can be judged, and to the extent that I take my internal dynamics seriously, I can judge myself."

The stories from the book reflect certain realities from society and also some possibilities to deal with the depressive position of anxiety and guilt we carry for creating and sanctioning a social order in such a fashion.

When we speak of patriarchy, people jump to abuse, rape, and violence. But before all of that is the matter of control - in so many ways, and in so many shades. Control manifests as norms, beliefs, folklore, rituals, ensuring that the society stays within predictable patterns and thus within defined boundaries. Control leads to coercion.

When I started writing, I did not consciously begin with wanting to look through the GR lens. But this insight dawned on me slowly as I embarked on my journey as a storyteller, in many subtle ways. Application of GR is possible in any context we are in and in any of the roles we play. It is there for us to engage with, if we are willing to.

I think we all get magnetized when we work in whatever capacity with GR. It just seeps in; it is a lens we can always wear to enrich our lives, gain clarity, work on ourselves, work with others, accept reality, reduce anxieties...the possibilities are plenty.

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The GRC Experience and Three Moments of Truth
Kavi Arasu

"We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are."
- Anaïs Nin

I cut my teeth in people & change all through my career in the corporate world. First in marketing and then in Human Resources. I had grown on a steady staple of words like data, bets, shifts, mind share, change, growth, transformation.

Sometimes it seemed to happen easily. At most other times, things would slip back to where they were, or get much worse despite the best of intention and effort.

Whatever the world said or data pointed to, I was growing increasingly aware of one aspect. I needed to work on myself. With a bagful of hopes, ideas and dreams I ventured out and set up a niche consulting firm a few years ago. In the stumbles, struggles and successes of everyday work, the imperative to learn what was cooking in my own mind was clear.

Attending the GRC had been on my mind for a while. Very good friends who had been part of earlier GRCs had good things to say about it. More than what they said, the changes in them intrigued me. Most times, subtle. But change for sure. To invest that chunk of time was an imagined (sometimes real) constraint in the corporate world. That excuse was untenable when I was out of the corporate world!

I got to the GRC in Mumbai.

At The GRC

I was late. I stumbled bag and baggage into the opening plenary of the GRC. It had begun just then. Or so it appeared. I sat in the last row, half panting after sprinting between floors to find where the opening plenary was happening. I caught my breath. That's how it started. Days later I left the place breathing easier than ever before.

The ready panting reminded of an indulgence of mine at that time: Long distance running. When you run marathons, the energy at the start line is always good.

Most times. So was it at the finish line when you are done with the running? Between the start and the finish though, the mind is at war with itself. Like the 37th kilometer of the Mumbai Marathon when spent legs find Peddar Road to climb.

When Peddar Road arrives on the horizon, there is one self that asks the other, "why do you do this? Are you out of your mind?" And if the other self that commands the legs to keep going listens to this for a second, the race is over. It has happened to me a few times. But if the other self-ploughs on, the finish line does arrive.

I digress. I didn't have much time to stay with other pursuits like running while I was sitting at the opening plenary, panting. For the plenary came to a rather abrupt end. Or so I thought. Those on the dais had got up and started leaving.

One after the other. My watch and the timetable provided the answer. It was time. I looked around to see bemused faces. I had a tinge of relief. It wasn't just me who was wondering what was happening!

"This is going to be something" I told myself and looked for familiar faces!

Small to large. In and out.

"In chaos, there is fertility."

- Anaïs Nin

The next few days of the GRC was a blur. From the intense energy of the small group and the vague but compelling vagaries of the large group task, everything went quick. There were other elements to add more colour and richness. The threadbare narrations of dreams. The conversations. The art. Yoga. It seems like a pleasant blur. Now. But for the first few days in the GRC, it was chaos.

The instructions were clear. The time table laid everything out well. Sessions began on time and ended on time. Usually, by the staff member walking out exactly on time. Structure seemed to reign. But beneath the defined calm that the structure seemed to offer there was tumult within. I struggled to settle in.

My small group was a motley eclectic mix. It moved in fits and stops for the first two days, but every conversation was intense. Pretences withered. I could look within and stare deeply. This time around, I was staying with that reflection of me for a while. Most people were.

I remember a lady who just refused to speak and a gentleman from the corporate world that kept looking into this watch for messages. By day two, it wasn't them that I was noticing. It was the 'me' in them! I became present to my standard behaviour: the flights of fancy, when reality offered a bitter pill

in the form a difficult conversation. Or how some strange glue seals my lips when the rest of me would yearn to call out a wrong. Or a right!

If the small group was a motley eclectic mix, the large group was a giant cocktail that was heady. I sat in the outer circle on the first day. "Here's where I am going to sit everyday", I told myself. I didn't say a word. I watched as others spoke.

From pointless ramble to brilliant exchanges, it was quite something. I thought I had something to say. Of course, I didn't.

The one thing that I remember doing was to sit in silence every evening and scribble. Every night, what I said and didn't say would emerge from nowhere as I put pen to paper. An occasional monsoon shower would break free from dark clouds and form silly puddles on the crowded road below. One of my notes from then has this entry. "What does disagreement do to me? What about conflict?

What happens when it's about things that I hold dear? What groups have I been a part of? What did it do to me?"

It's not as though the answers were elsewhere. I had to clear the cobwebs of the mind and come face to face with my answers that were always present within me. It was not easy; nor was it pleasant.

There was one factor though that kept me going. It wasn't just me. Everybody in the GRC was on their own journey. Some more actively than the others. But everyone was at sea. In the same sea. The articulate. The quiet. The loud. The arrogant. The humble. The intense. The superficial. The man with the fancy watch and the lady with a steady smile. I saw traces of everything I saw in them, in me too.

I remember borrowing an umbrella and going out on a walk as the rain relentlessly pummeled. My own envy. Insufficiencies. Arrogance. Wins.

Losses. They came alive and the umbrella was of no use to hold back the wet streaks on my cheeks.

When the GRC was done, I left the place a much better person than the one that went in. I thought I knew more about myself than ever before. But I was more energised by the thought that I could live a better life. Maybe a different life!

Besides I had made peace with myself and had found a clutch of new friends. I harboured notions of beginning all over again and living happily ever after.

But first, some moments of truth.

Moments of Truth

"It is always quietly thrilling to find yourself looking at a world you know well but have never seen from such an angle before."

- Bill Bryson

The phrase 'Moments of Truth' has its origins in the airline industry. At Scandinavian Airlines they figured that after a long journey the chances that a customer would or wouldn't recommend the airline depended on only a few crucial points in time! Moments that stayed. Moments where 'truth' stays unwrapped. Every journey has Moments of Truth. My journey at the GRC did, too.

I write of three of them here. All from events that happened at the GRC. One, which brought a hidden side of me to awareness. Another that forced me to deal with a known side that could not give the slip as it usually did. And the third, something that didn't physically happen at the GRC. But yet it did come alive!

1. A new side

A new side showed up in a large group conversation. Contrary to what I had promised myself that I would sit in the same place, I had forced myself to move. I kept going closer to the inner circle each time mounting a challenge for myself.

That conversation was on 'Privilege'. Much got discussed on caste, religion, reservation.

I hadn't said a word in the large group conversations before. Someone said something that was obnoxious and I was riled enough to speak. After I said what I had to say, I remember the room going quiet for an arresting set of seconds before the conversation resumed. In those brief moments something changed in me.

The simple everydayness of the moment was disproportionate to the churn it did to me then and later. The moment was indescribable then. It continues to elude a befitting set of words. That large group deliberation shook up the foundations of a 'self-made' me! It was as though one hidden piece called "privilege" was removed from a well-built Jenga puzzle.

Suddenly, I was deeply aware of aspects that gave me a head-start! Education. Social status. Gender. People. Money. Positions. Genes. Some of it wasn't as clear. But any notion of "self-made me" stood dismissed. My arrogance iceberg melted to form a sea of gratitude! I slept light in the knowledge that my ignorance of other people's lives would make me more kind!

I realised that I had been running a wind assisted race. Since then, there are a number of experiments that I have taken on. Including backpack trips across patently racist places in other geographies just to experience what it means to be lesser privileged. I wear my wins lightly. I am conscious of my natural tendencies to evaluate and analyse. I am rebuilding a 'kinder' more compassionate me. It's work in progress. That day at the GRC is where that started.
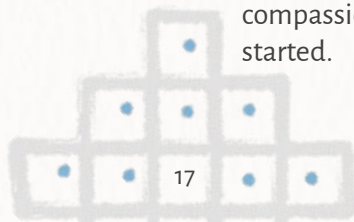
2. A known side

The second moment was at the Institutional Event. As far as I can recall, there was a collective task and people could choose different ways to go about doing it. I recall chaos and different voices clamouring for attention. The din dwarfed my own needs and I stood transfixed deferring to the company of people that I knew rather than an idea that was compelling.

That night, it tore me apart to face the fact that this is how I lead life. Did I go with personal equations and lived in a filter bubble of convenience and familiarity, all the while believing that it was ideas that powered my action? That I was asking myself the question was answer enough. I stood diminished in the mirror.

I needed courage to go beyond the comforts of settling to be 'liked'. I have been at it since. The GRC's format made it difficult for me to let it slip. There was a smaller group (RAAG) where we could discuss progress and change. That group held me to my promises. Awareness can be gnawing. This awareness has made me look deeper into the mirror very often.

If there was one clear piece of action that I needed to work on, it was this! I had to cross the easy lands of familiarity and seek truth. Not for the riches it offered but for deserving my own respect!

3. Did not happen. Yet it did!

The third and important moment that has stayed with me in mind did not happen when the GRC was on. I mean, it didn't happen when the sessions were on. It was a dream.

Let me explain.

My dreams, when I sleep, are always snatches of images and most of it is gone when am awake. I would know that I have had a dream but will have nothing coherent to narrate. In the GRC, I listened to some rather compelling narrations of dreams from a group of people.

One of those nights I woke up to the steady pitter patter on the window and realised that a snatch of images were making a quiet exit. I grabbed my phone, and in a half droopy voice narrated my dream into the voice recorder! I drifted off soon and woke up with a voice recording of a fleeting memory. I had a dream that I could coherently narrate. More importantly it held clues to what was on my mind.

The contents of the dream had me running away backstage while the lights were on and an audience in waiting. There was more to it which I will leave out for now. Suffice that the dream held a piece of the puzzle that I was attempting to find.

There were clues strewn everywhere around me. And all I had to do was to be present to it. Staying curious to life and the experiences that it offers makes it all worthwhile. That night's dream reminds me of it all.

Those were my moments of truth!

Life after the GRC

"And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom."

- Anaïs Nin

I left the GRC a lot lighter than I had come in. I was breathing easy and relaxed. I had come face to face with my warts and carefully constructed beliefs of convenience. I was present to my own emotions. Envy. Prejudice. Cowardice.

Privilege. Humility. Knowledge.

I discovered new troughs where I thought none existed. I felt relieved. The proverbial cat was out of the bag. I had seen it texture, knew its moves, and

seen the company it keeps, and its prance in disguise. I had to tear it out of my skin and it hurt.

One thing I was sure of. Life would not be the same again. My life and work have shifted. Not in fits and lurches. But in stumbles and picking myself up.

The Importance of Context

The organisational change practice that I lead always placed a lot of emphasis on context.

Since the GRC, context is even more important and fundamental.

The HR manager at a large client place introduced me and a colleague on a project that we had signed off on. The line manager who we asked for a meeting with, was dismissive from the word go, to the point of being insulting. In an earlier time, I would have been livid. We sought a meeting with her and all we did was to listen to her, prod her to talk about her life experiences.

She had a dim view of 'training' and to her it was insulting to even think someone else could 'just instil' a way of thinking by attending a training programme! We were on the same page and we heaved a sigh of relief! That context helped us settle down to examine her position.

Every design since the GRC leverages privileges and context. Personally, I live life lighter and sleep easy at night. The arrogance iceberg continues to melt. I know it's made of stern stuff. But it's easy to cause a swell in the sea of gratitude!

Roles and Tasks

"Roles and tasks" were another element that seemed to mesh with every assignment. Holding the space for people to take on tasks and stay true to their roles, helped them notice much more than just the task or the roles. They saw themselves too!

Assigning roles and getting people to look at each other through different lenses of roles and tasks has been useful. This was extremely useful whilst designing the induction programme for new leaders as part of an organisational change exercise. New employees and their teams exchanged their roles and tasks for periods of time with support groups to assist them. They saw their own expectations and beliefs from a new light.

Helping groups wrestle with their choices and consequences gets them to own their action. The shift from individual solutions to help collective choice-making for change, is real change for me.

The underlying meta structure of the GRC has provided a chassis for developing many change experiences. These consist of helping participants have real experiences, observing themselves whilst doing so, and having them help themselves.

Slowly but steadily a large chunk of my practice has moved from an 'interventionist" mode to helping people to "observe' themselves mode. I rely less on my assumed prowess, and more on the realities of what exists with the group, their pasts, their collective hopes and desires.
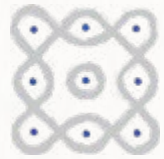
Exploring Colonialism at Work

Chandan Shamnani

With independence in 1947 we may have managed to put an end to the era of colonialism in India's history no doubt, but the legacy of colonialism persists in the India of 2020 in more subtle forms. This paper focuses on the insidious ways in which the colonial mindset persists among and within us, with a particular focus on how it gets played out in present day Multinational Corporations (MNCs) operating in India, and the implications of it for us as Indian citizens.

Let me start the exploration with a few ready-to-access examples in urban India; with a few generalizations that, in my experience, are not far from the truth:

1. The word MNC, in our country is associated with "highly paid", "reputed brand", generally taken as a company outside India. It is a weighty addition to a matrimonial ad. Though I am no fan of matrimonial ads in newspapers, I do not recall ever seeing "working in Indian company" being mentioned as a selling point.

2. The craving to relocate to white countries like US, UK, Canada etc. has generally been high, and it may not be an exaggeration to say that many upwardly mobile Indians would put in a lot of effort to take the legal route to move out of India. Much of this craving could well be the result of an unexamined picture of "white is good" in our minds. Anything white or foreign (from the West) is generally seen in a positive light in India.

While more examples can be added to the above list, I am making the above points to emphasize the extent to which the Indian psyche is infested with the colonial virus, and to set the context for the reader as we unpack it further.

The idea behind this paper is to revisit some of those instances when I encountered colonialism or a variant of it, with the hope that:

1. There is something to be unpacked and learnt for me from re-visiting the past

2. Sharing it with others will spark new thoughts, associations, and perhaps dormant feelings in others

3. The reader may be able to find some solace in resonances to their own experiences, and hopefully courage. to move out of what could be a very suffocating experience.

While the title of this article mentions colonialism, I adopt a broader definition of the term. At the core is inequality of status, opportunities etc. in organizations, and it's usually a mix of colonialism and racism.

Organizations are not islands; they are less layered than nations, and an immediacy or tangibility to their mission. Organizations, like individuals, have a part of their identity tied to the country of their origin. Organizations, like individuals, can be carriers of colonialism, consciously or unconsciously.

A Bit about Myself

My father was a teacher of the English language, M.A gold medalist (he graduated about 48 years ago), he was a celebrity of sorts due to his ease with the colonizer's language. I got the message quite early in my life that English was not just a language (a means to communicate), it was much more. Many people around me still live with the fear or regret of not being able to communicate in this language. I had the privilege of learning it to a manageable level (enough to keep my goofs out of my peers' reach!).

A few years ago, half my wardrobe was from Marks & Spencer (a UK brand). Most of their manufacturing is in developing countries, largely Bangladesh. They make good clothes, but that's not the only reason I used to buy from that place. The polish, service, ambience, and the origin of that brand fulfilled my desire to be like my colonizer.

I worked for a hi-tech multi-national organization that was headquartered in the UK and later in the US, and thus got opportunities to travel to the US, the UK, Philippines, Australia, Germany, Israel, Cyprus, Singapore, and Canada, and also had the opportunity to interact with people in Japan and ASEAN countries. I was very happy to get these opportunities, and I have almost always experienced great pride in rattling off the names of countries that I have visited.

A Bit about the Organization I Worked for

A cybersecurity (IT product) company, a firm with its roots in Gujarat, it was acquired by a UK based company a year before I joined. The Indian firm had a solid product and also a good reach in the Middle East and Africa market. As with any other acquisition things change, and in this case, it was not one big swoop but a series of incremental changes over a period of time that resulted in a new organization altogether.

The old organization was a whole system in itself, as there was a product team, an IT infra team, admin, HR, finance, payroll, purchase, sales team etc. People used to set their targets and set out to achieve them. The new organization was a big but invisible shift... how? The people from the old organization now started to look at themselves as 8% (as India was now 8% of the total revenue) of the larger organization. All the corporate functions slowly started moving to India, and all of the clerical/transactional work, be it purchase, IT, taxation, parts of Finance, was now being done for the globe from one place – India. The product teams globally worked together on refurbishing the Indian product and sold it with a new brand name. The new organization thus added the new product to their existing line, added additional customers globally, and of course added the existing customers of the acquired organization. There is nothing wrong in this legally, morally, financially or from any other angle. But in the same breath I would add that it had a deep human impact.

The old organization was performing exceedingly well in terms of revenues. There were about 500 employees and it was quite a close-knit unit, there was a certain pride that was visible – of not just being the most well-known cybersecurity brand in India but also an Indian name, with its roots in a tier 2 city, with a well-established presence within and outside India. The loss of this stature, though felt deeply, is a difficult thing to articulate.

Imagine the sales head of the old organization who has been selling a range of products in about 40+ countries being told to stick to a specific geography with a limited set of products. Well, tasks come first, things change, and organizations move, with time.

There were many good changes that followed – the attendance system was done away with, work from home was not a problem anymore, flexibility was encouraged, the erstwhile India senior management of course made good money because of the acquisition, the Indian teams started working with

their global counterparts, and so on. So, the "work culture" certainly saw an uplift.

The fundamental shift was:

1. The old company never looked at itself as "low cost"

2. They didn't look at themselves as a "region"; but they were now one of the other regions

3. From a fully functional organization, it became primarily a hub of all the clerical / process- based work for the rest of the company

4. Imagine an advertisement for hiring a software developer, here are two scenarios:

5. Looking for people who are proficient in XYZ technology

6. Looking for people who are proficient in XYZ technology and who are proficient in English

In a tier 2 city in India, point 2 above will cut down a number of potential candidates. The old organization was doing quite well without anyone from Oxford, Harvard, or IIM-A. But now in the new scheme of things where people will be interviewed by managers from outside India, and with people interacting with counterparts from different parts of the world, especially those who speak English fluently, there was an entry of shame and inferiority. While there is nothing wrong with brushing up one's English and communication skills, as I said earlier, it's not just about communication; there's an entry of the class dynamic here which was not so prominent earlier. German speaking employees who do not speak fluent English do not look at it with an inferior-superior lens, unlike their Indian counterparts.

Some Encounters with Colonialism (and Racism?) at Work

My counterpart: the learning manager in North America was invited from the US to India to conduct a four-hour workshop that could have been easily done by the India learning manager. I never got the answer to my 'why?' from my UK based manager. When I insisted for an answer, I was threatened with termination of my job for not being a "team-player". The message was clear, and emphasized through more such instances: only the employees from first world countries can come and conduct sessions in third world countries, and not the other way round.

The itinerary of my colleague from North America looked something like this:

Day 1 – Monday - Reach Ahmedabad, take rest

Day 2 – Tuesday - a four-hour workshop, followed by dinner with the participants

Day 3 – Wednesday – kite festival with the participants of workshop – noon to evening

Day 4 – a two-hour session with the said group and another dinner with the same group

Day 5 – Travel from Ahmedabad to Agra (the Taj Mahal)

Day 6 – Agra to Delhi and local sight-seeing (Saturday late evening flight)

The irony is that a random employee in the India office will not be able to make out what's odd with this itinerary. It is expected and accepted that people from the West should get to see a bit of India and we must do our bit to make their stay comfortable and enjoyable. It seemed as if the burden of cost saving in the organization was only on India's shoulders.

When I met my team members (from the US and UK) outside India in their original habitat, I was made to realize that they are quite busy. We had more team lunches than dinners. I was happy with my quiet dinners, but also wondered what happened to my sociable, eager-to-interact travelling colleagues who met me 2 months ago in the India office!

When I visited the US or UK offices, I was never escorted by people from admin or by anyone. My friend Google guided me around the place. The lady at the UK office reception would take my request and book me a cab and hotel, and I never faced any issue. But the story was different when anyone from the US, UK or other offices were visiting India. They were given great attention and VIP treatment. For people traveling to the UK office it's quite simple: there's a cafeteria in the office, and there's food available there. If it suits you, you eat. Period. In India, the admin team would arrange food separately for visitors, and a separate buffet table was laid out for them (which meant 16 less seats for the regular users) in a 50-seater cafeteria.

In a span of five years, I got a chance to meet my team members (the learning & development team) three times, each time in the UK office. We were a team of four, three learning managers from different regions: Europe, North America and APAC, and the head of learning who was based out of the UK. Individually we got along fine, and were able to have transactions (if not friendship or intimacy). But the moment we got together in a room, there was intense competition to prove who's the best and brightest of all. In one of our meetings, we were sharing our plans for the region. I participated and asked questions when my colleagues were presenting, but when it was my turn to speak, the UK lady walked away from the room; the lady from the US was typing something on her system. Only my manager was listening, and he asked me some questions.

At the end of the day my manager said he was concerned that I was not being "positive", and that I challenged ideas. He defended my colleagues' behaviour, saying that it was not intentional. And I agreed: of course, it was not pre-planned and certainly not by design. I asked him what was his inference of what happened and he struggled to answer. I think both of us had an idea of what happened, and both of us wanted to hide from that difficult reality. Many months later I read about micro-aggression and micro-invalidation, and I could understand.

By the time we had our third face-to-face team meeting, I had lost interest in making a real contribution, and I played along with what was happening.

We had a new team member in North America and she frequently challenged me (a refreshing change from the usual drudgery and fake harmony). At the end of the day she asked me if I felt offended. I replied that it helped me to think, but also that I was intrigued that she didn't pose a single question to our colleague from the UK. What is there in me / about me that made it easy for her to interrupt me quite easily? Her eyes welled up, and she acknowledged the hierarchy that she was operating from. At the end of this trip my manager thanked me, saying: "you were quite measured, and let the UK lady take more air time. I appreciate this team work." I didn't try to search for words. I learnt then that being unaware, immature, transactional, and superficial serves those who are "up"; whether it is the colonizer; the high caste; or men in relation to women.

Some examples that are common for most MNCs in India is the time slot of meetings. Employees in India pace their day as per the routine of their global counterparts, and meetings are generally scheduled keeping in mind the convenience of team members from HQ (generally US/UK). It is rarely questioned, just like the international flight timings. We in India have got used to red eye flights, as the scheduling system is designed for the needs of the first world.

My Own Ambivalence when I think of Indian Companies

While writing this paper I had to face my own ambivalence towards Indian organizations. I have worked with Indian companies and my own pictures are that people work harder in Indian companies. I experienced a good deal of servility in Indian organizations towards the promoters/owners, and a hierarchical mindset in most Indian managers. Most people I know who have worked in a UK/US MNC environment would not like to work in Indian companies. I enjoyed the benefits of working in a flexible, less micro-managed environment in non-Indian companies. I belong to that group of people who did their MBA when the Indian economy was (and still is) open to foreign investment, and also fortunate to land a job as it was a time of economic boom. Probably there is an unconscious desire in this group: the new age professionals like me, to escape the social and political condition of India by becoming rich and working with white bosses, and living in a bubble of one's own. So, between my Indian-ness and economics, it is economics that I favoured. And despite the good economics, the Indian voice in me protests at the absence of equal status. This is work in progress and I have not found a place of peace yet on this continuum.

My Emerging Insights

The structure of colonialism is kept intact by the colonizer with collusion from the colonized

1. It serves the colonizer to look at the colonized through antiquated, stereotypical lenses. My experience says this is a much more conscious exercise than what I would like to believe. The colonizer, the racist, will never let go of the past as doing so will disturb the existing hierarchy. Projective identification becomes a reality for the colonized and he is trapped in his

self- loathing. In trying to impress the colonizer and to be like him, the colonized loses touch with his own soul.

2. Whether it is colonization, or patriarchy, or the caste system, or racism – these are tenacious structures that keep adapting to their environments, and their main goal is to survive and protect the privilege of those that are privileged. The main goal is that the difference of privilege, and the hierarchy should remain intact.

3. I found it easier to play victim at times and not ask difficult questions to myself about how I played a role in running away from confrontation or exploration. When I was threatened with termination, I was dumbstruck. It was not a question of survival, there was money in the bank. Even if I lost this job, I would easily get one in six months. The key factor was that this job gave me a great opportunity – to work with my colonizer. I wanted to be like them; hence I tried hard to speak English that was as good as theirs. There was also the perk of having a certain superior status amongst the fellow colonized, who know me. The colonized in me ran away from exploration as I will then have to face my own dark reality of how I have colluded and helped to keep this structure intact.

4. I learnt that it is not my niceness that will get me equality. It is not my competence that will make me equal in their eyes. These will only help to keep my job, and that's about it. It is futile to look for equality from the outside.

5. The colonized has to work on the shame and guilt within. The colonized hides his shame and inferiority with the hope that equality (in the eyes of the colonizer) is not far. The colonizer has a good sense of this, and will tap into it to keep this hierarchy alive.

6. The colonized leads a dual existence. His inner world speaks a different language, and on the outside, he is trying to assimilate into the world that is made to suit the needs of the colonizers.
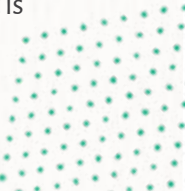
Inner Work as a Way to Dismantle this Structure, and GR as a Methodology for it

A few months ago, I watched the movie 'Marshall'. It is based on the life of Thurgood Marshall, a lawyer who fought against racial prejudice. The movie, besides being a solid drama, is an excellent portrayal of a man who has vanquished the internalised aggressor. He is someone who has pricked the balloon of racism.

The real-life Marshall has the following quote attributed to him: "The Ku Klux Klan never dies. They just stop wearing sheets because sheets cost too much." I think the same can be said about other forms of systemic discrimination.

I participated in a group relations conference in Leicester in 2018, and was overwhelmed by the extent and intensity of the white and first world supremacy that I experienced there. It was the microcosm of a world that was not touched by time.

It is up to the colonized to find his soul and dismantle this structure – starting within. It is like pulling out an arrow that is deeply stuck in one's body. The colonized's shame and internalized inferiority is a strong pillar for this structure and it is only consistent deep inner work that will work.

Participation in GRCs (two with GRI and one with the Tavistock Institute), and being a part of study groups by GRI, and the group relations framework has been a prominent lens for me to see these dynamics. I have at times found the courage, and also found the words (from a bunch of convoluted feelings) to articulate what I see. In the large study groups I have experienced it first-hand: how I have never let myself think of caste discrimination, even though it is around me all the time. I have had the chance to look at how I am the aggressor or perpetrator, and also a victim at the same time, and how I can hold my role and work to the task in the here and now. It is easy for me to take a higher moral ground and be self-righteous, but it is the voice of GR and the voice of my GR colleagues that helps me challenge the stand I take. The conceptual understanding and experiential work with "group as a whole" theory and the unconscious have enabled a lens for me to see and articulate the dynamics I have mentioned here.

Reclaiming our Humanness

Racism and colonialism are taboo words at work. The key is to acknowledge that there is silence on this front. It is worth reflecting in our systems: what is the nature of this silence? What is the related pay-off and price? How can a system transform itself by taking the lid off these isms and make space for the repressed voices? These are anxiety and shame provoking thoughts and conversations. There are no easy answers to these questions. A GRC is one such temporary organization where individuals and the temporary system get a taste of working with these differences and thus find intimacy and allow individuals and the system to uncover our innate humanness. Despite its temporary nature and its primary focus being learning, a GRC is still a tangible experience of what is possible when people try to work with differences.

Anxiety is a constant companion on this journey of being real as an individual. However, with some practice the threshold for anxiety can be pushed. Every little thoughtful and empathic act creates its own ripples, and that is enough hope to start: be it in self, groups, or systems.

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Learning to See Diversity Dynamics in Multiple Systems
Kiran Lalsangi

In Koodam 2020, my presentation was on **Role of GR in Understanding and Exploring Diversity.** I got an opportunity to share how attending a GRI conference helped me apply my learning in understanding and exploring diversity. The process of writing a paper itself was a great learning opportunity, where reviewing the drafts of the paper by the Koodam Convening Team was explorative. Instead of suggestions there were questions that led me to reflect on my own experience; learning from it; and its applications and putting it down on paper. The way the Koodam event was designed, as well as the feedback I received on my presentation from members attending Koodam were both so encouraging and empowering, that it boosted my confidence about further application of GR learning. I never thought that within a few months there will be one more opportunity to share the impact of Koodam and engage in further explorations of diversity.

When I presented my paper at Koodam I was working as a freelance consultant. I didn't have the environment to study and understand the organizational system closely. However, in Jan 2021 I joined the Learning and Development (L&D) department of an organization and in my role, I have to handle two hospitals. In this paper, I am narrating some examples of my encounters with the theme of diversity, in my role, and how my experience of preparing for and presenting at Koodam helped some of my later insights and application.

Gender

Just after I joined this organization I started meeting with people of all departments and understanding training needs. While talking to them, I was also understanding how gender dynamics are getting played out. The patriarchal social structure ensures that both women and their contribution remain invisible in the organizational hierarchy. In my interactions, I heard that recently one woman employee who was from a rural area left her job because she couldn't understand and adjust with the urban culture. As the L&D person, I then met with new joinees from rural areas, and made sure that every woman who joined should get support to cope with the new environment, new system, and new place.

During all my other training, I have started giving a message to everyone that we should make sure that we should be aware about gender sensitivity and should do hand holding of every new joinee. And that we should be aware of women employees coming from rural areas. I could acknowledge this dimension of diversity and could work on increasing awareness in the system. My interaction with newly joined women who were first generation working women in their families led to many new insights. When I started language training for them, I realised how tough life was for them, and how many struggles they have faced to learn and get a job. This experience gave me lots of inspiration as well to play the role of a L&D person, to be a catalyst and support these first-generation working women.

During our daily meetings in the unit with managers and housekeeping staff, I used to observe how gender dynamics are getting played out. I gave my observations to my boss. She is also a well- trained ABS expert. I gave inputs on how gender biases are operating. Listening to my feedback she told me that I have to design and deliver training of gender sensitivity to all 18 units all over India. This is how my understanding of gender diversity got acknowledged and appreciated. I could design and deliver programs, and got positive feedback for the sessions.

While discussing women's day celebration in our meetings, I raised the question why for women's day celebration women are planning events and activities and men are the audience? Can we men plan all activities and events and make them celebrate and enjoy the day? My unit head also agreed that all men will plan activities and serve on women's day. The program was planned by the men and we all served the women, and thus broke the patriarchal pattern during women's day celebration. Our event went so well and we got feedback from HR:

"On behalf of all the Women of the organization, I would like to extend a Big THANK YOU to all MEN who organized such an amazing event for all of us. Indeed it was a memorable and a very special day for all of us! Kudos to the entire team"

When my Unit head gave feedback to my boss, she forwarded the same to CEO and CEO said pass on this idea to all 18 units to see how gender patterns get broken for the first time in the history of business. This is how observation and actions around gender diversity could bring the beginning of change in the system.

Language

A Russian doctor was working in our hospital. We were celebrating a festival. She was the only one from another country. During the celebration she was attempting to talk in Marathi. People around were laughing and making fun of her. Our unit head was also there. I appreciated her for talking in Marathi and asked how many people from the hospital had attempted to learn her language. With some anger she said no one had tried, no one had ever cared about it. Because of diversity consciousness, I could pick up the process and bring it to notice. During our women's day celebration, while anchoring I shared this experience in front of all units. It was impactful and many members started acknowledging her efforts and more people started acknowledging and appreciating the diversity sensitivity element.

This incident also made me realize that a few staff members came from different states. I started a regional language class, where we could learn each other's language.

Religion

There are great religious biases in India. Minority religions are treated with bias and prejudices. I too was carrying biases because of social conditioning. But having recognized it, I have started taking a stand wherever possible in my personal capacity. I studied and collected facts about bias and prejudices and started discussion with friends, relatives, and people around me. By asking questions such as what facts do you have? And sharing the facts I have collected with them and discussing it.

Recently in my society building where I live, I saw the following message on the Whatsapp group:

Dear All,

Just a proposal - A temple in society.

Can we have a small religious prayer place (for the religion of majority) somewhere near to the Garden. Please think and let's decide. At least it will give positivity to all society members including children as well.

Immediately there were many likes for this proposal. An interesting fact was that the person who sent the message was from a minority religion and it was my assumption he might have got set up by people of majority religion. My reply to the group on Whatsapp was:

Good proposal. Just a point: in our society people with different religions are also there. How to consider that point? Can we make a place where photos/symbols of different religions can be there? It will give positive energy as well as our children will get exposure to diversity in religions.

For this message I got support from only one person. I am still glad that I raised the question and I got one reply supporting diversity sensitivity.

Class

When my family got infected with covid, I realised during that difficult time, all those who I saw helping on the ground were from the underprivileged class, who were there to serve in a difficult period. I also noticed during the peak of covid that the corporation cleaning staff did their work every day, taking garbage from apartments. Observing them for me wasn't just about seeing the cleaning person; but seeing the person as a representation of someone working for us, for our wellbeing at the cost of low wages and high risk. When we visited the hospital for COVID treatment, I realized that all ward boys, nurses, and cleaning staff were there to serve us, at high risk to themselves and for low wages. Coming back home, I began to notice all those who were selling vegetables and fruits on the road. They also were serving us at high risk and low

profits for themselves.

I realised that based on class and caste bias, housekeeping staff remain unacknowledged in our office. Through my experience of undergoing COVID, I realized that cleaning and housekeeping staff exist. I have made it a practice to talk informally to all housekeeping staff at my workplace, and to try to connect as human beings. I also get valuable feedback from them about where the loopholes are, which helps me to understand issues in the work system.

When I asked the Housekeeping (HK) manager that I want to conduct training to understand issues of HK women, he said yes, and that generally training happens in parking areas for them. I said I will conduct training in the activity room the way I conduct training for managers. When I called the HK staff, all the women attended. It was an hour of training. I started with sharing how I work at home in cleaning, and how tough it is. I asked them what issues were they facing. For 45 minutes all women were sharing their issues. At the end, the HR representative asked them why didn't they come to her? One lady staff member replied: "You never called us. He is the first person in the last 8 months who has listened to our problems". I got valuable feedback from that meeting that is helping me to understand the system.

To Conclude

Diversity exercise helps me to connect and work with understanding of the issues in the system. For me working on diversity issues has become similar to walking on a treadmill. You cannot stop suddenly. You need to remain open to seeing it in its multiple forms, and use your personal authority to work on it continually. A quotation that has impacted me greatly is what I would like to close with:

> *Questioner: How are we to treat others?*
> *Ramana Maharshi: There are no others.*
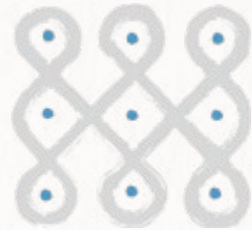
The Places We Inhabit

A Systems Approach to Making Sense of Family Dynamics
Uma Ravikumar

Context of the Paper

Being part of a family can be both joyous and messy. I have often wondered how to make it less complex, the contradictions between personal choices and collective resources, hold inter-generational differences and inter-family dynamics due to marriage, the sometimes frustrating but often real conscious and unconscious links in roles between family members, etc. While family systems have their own complexities, one's endeavour to grow and integrate multiple social identities also has its consequences in and on family systems. This paper is an attempt to look at the family as a system and make sense of some of the dynamics through the GR lens

The paper explores three aspects through a systems approach:

1. Exploring families as a system and a sub-system of the larger socio-economic reality

2. Recognising different social identities and its consequence on family systems

3. Relating individual primary task with the primary task of family

Family as a System

From routine everyday occurrences such as who takes what roles for the functioning of the family, to more complex decisions about what to do with the unused stuff, some of which may need to be retained for later purposes, to even more complex decisions about religious affiliations and rituals and how family finances are managed for spending and investment, there could be some amount of systems thinking dynamics at play, even if unconscious, in families. By systems thinking I mean recognising the interconnectedness between different parts of/members in the family, and being able to see the family as a unit of the larger social system. When there is refusal or neglect to consider the interdependencies amongst these aspects and its consequences, one can more obviously notice the consequences: the resultant confusion, repeated disappointment, nagging conflicts, infantile reactions, splitting of roles that are anxiety provoking, etc.

Primary Task of the Family System

When I started to write this paper, I had defined functional tasks - care giving, learning and growth of members of the family - as the primary task. Upon reflection, the picture in my mind of the family seemed to be one of a mini enterprise that needs to be managed, and my role as a 'manager' of the family system to ensure its smooth functioning, a defensive avoidance to face complex emotions and experiences that accepting the primary task evokes, and the messiness in the roles one has to take up. During the process of review of this paper, I realised that the real primary task of the family is 'creating an environment of love and nurturance' for its members. The task is

primarily emotional in nature and throws light on the nature of engagement between the members of the family.

In retrospect, I think recognising this primary task made it simpler to accept the multiple roles that are needed to live the task, provide clarity about what to do in conflicting situations, feel happiness in living the task without quickly feeling persecuted. It also challenges the supremacy of narcissistic needs; shifts the internal place from which members of the family inevitably negotiate and navigate between their individual needs and aspirations and systemic prerogatives; recognises how much one is nourished by family systems; exposes the need for self-work; nudges towards some spiritual orientation, etc.

Context of Family as a Sub-System

Family is often the immediate organizational context within which we live and grow. Family endeavors to uphold and represent certain norms/standards and carries certain tasks on behalf of the larger society — norms like who constitutes a family, tasks like bringing up responsible citizens in service of the society, etc.

The socio-cultural-economic values of society reflected in public policy and infrastructure decisions around uniform healthcare availability, child-care support, senior-citizen support, mental health support, disability support, etc. could influence the key functions of the family. Western societies which are more individualistic in nature with higher public investment in care-giving may only 'delegate' the task of 'producing mature adults' to the family whereas the Asian/eastern collectivist societies may tend to also include 'care-giving and mutual support' as part of 'delegating'. Economic prosperity of families, globalization and opportunities for members of families to migrate to other countries, the outlook and options available for senior citizens,

increasing number of women in the workforce, are a few demographic changes that may have blurred the strict boundaries between the nature of western and eastern societies today, but these broad categorizations still seem to stand.

Family Structure under Dual Functional Tasks

With aging parents and growing children living together as a family of 3 generations, sometimes the functional tasks of the family get more complex. Care-giving for the elderly may become one functional task and supporting the growth of young children to produce mature adults may be another.

In my family, prolonged co-holding of care-giving and development tasks led to the family system self-organizing into more workable structures. Sharing of resources and finding a place for individual values which may not be shared family values, are better achieved through these evolving sub-structures. For instance, the dual functional tasks in my family converted to two subsystems within the family especially during Covid and related work/study from home compulsions. One sub-system working towards 'care-giving and well-being of the older members' and the other sub-system working towards 'development of the younger members'. Some of the indications that they are separate subsystems are that they choose different boundaries for space and time that is more conducive to the sub-systems' task. I would say in a lighter vein to my kids that they operate at a time zone that is 4 hours behind my parents' and I am continually jet-lagged shuttling between the two!

Care-Giving as a Primary Task

This needs special mention and study due to feelings of guilt, shame, resentment, envy, anxiety, etc. that prolonged care-giving can evoke in both

receivers and providers of care. Care-giving includes physical, mental and emotional aspects and draws on similar resources. The picture in the mind of what is 'good care-giving' varies, and dependence in itself evokes complex feelings. Emotional care-giving can sometimes extend to managing trans-generational wounds, and where either professional support for emotional health is not available or not taken, can be tiring.

The guilt evoked by receiving care could lead to compensation by pampering, affecting the development task of the family. Care-giving also raises aspects of envy: for the provider about the extent of care the other person receives which may or may not be available to oneself in old age, and envy at the productivity and abilities of the younger generation by the older generation. I sometimes find the day-to-day rigor eclipse the purpose of care-giving, the mutual love and affection and the desire for the well-being and healthy life of our loved ones. This is possibly because of my holding it as a 'primary task' of the family, rather than a function of the actual primary task of love and nurturance, and in the process forgetting the interdependence and the mutuality of care, and the emotional satisfaction and fulfilment in care-giving.

Identity in Family Systems

Our sense of self called 'identity' often begins with our family system. Gender norms, language comprehension, and religious rituals/practices that may be different or similar with those in our immediate environment all work towards experientially introducing the concept of social identity. The implication of these identities – for instance, the systemic and political privilege, the hierarchies among them and the intersectionality of those struck me subsequently. Based on my experience, I tend to think that families and social structures around which families exist, consciously or unconsciously prevent us from learning the systemic hierarchies. There is

sufficient indoctrination and any dissent/curiosity is curbed either with the lure of reward for ideal behavior appropriate to the hierarchy, or with the threat of excommunication.

I recognized the systemic aspect of patriarchy only in my work space, while I had experienced it all my life. It led to an active participation in initiatives for self-determination and equality for self and others. I brought this newly owned identity as a feminist into the family too. With a supportive partner willing to work on gender dynamics, it was a productive and helpful growing together, particularly in the professional choice and freedom, and sharing of familial responsibilities.

Political Identity

The more challenging aspects were yet to come. One is the political identity where to my shock I discovered that my husband and I stood at different sides of the center. What could have been recognised as opinion differences and lived with began to convert into conflicts, triggered by many passionate arguments which were vociferous, as compared to our other differences. Apart from the general environment of polarity in society which seemed to play out, this seemed to hint at something deeper.

In family systems, apart from rational roles, we also take on irrational roles. My husband almost always takes on the role of the structured, disciplined, and orderly one. I take on the role of the understanding, empathetic, pacifying, etc. As a couple, we had projected those aspects of us which we had some ambivalence about, on to the other partner. And the other had owned it as it suited our valances.

This collusive process built on the edifice of projective identification was useful for the smooth delegation of work. In our parenting roles however, there were unexpected consequences of these irrational roles, where I would

find my husband too strict and he found me too lenient, especially when there are challenges with the child's performance and this is a nagging source of difference and irritation, that is never really worked with completely.

In a heated moment of argument around politics, I realized that in a critical part of our family life, we had actually taken back our projections. Due to a sudden health crisis, my parents had come over to live with us a few years back. In the way they were accepted, loved and cared for, my husband had demonstrated his understanding and empathy. Whereas I had become structured, disciplined and orderly in order to draw boundaries and ensure a reasonably smooth functioning of the family. This process of taking back our projections, was not acknowledged particularly by me, as the beneficiary. It seemed like we were working and facing our frustration, hurt, and disappointments by projecting these challenges on issues where we had much less control, and hence any possibility of resolution. Acknowledging this shift and how much it meant to me led to resolving something deeper.

We still argue and can't see eye to eye on political issues, and there are big frustrations, but for the most part it pertains to the political subject and doesn't endlessly feed on our relationship. I think it has also helped me to come to terms with the intense sadness that I feel about not sharing some values that I consider very precious and had earlier assumed as shared.

Caste and Class Identity

As I was becoming aware of the privileges that I and my family had had in terms of class, caste, religious structures, there was a sense of shame and guilt and a pressing need to discuss this with my family of birth, as we had experienced and sometimes been perpetrators of this discrimination as part of our extended family. Every time the discussion moved towards this topic,

there was resistance from my parents. While I reflected on my compelling need to resolve with them, I realised that I had begun to see my parents as the embodiment of the very systems that I was learning to reject/fight against and converted it into a fight against them – an infantile regression. The nature of behaviour was also possibly an assertion of my power and authority over them, now that this was my family and they were dependent - perhaps a manifestation of the hierarchies within me.

Primary Task of Self and Attendant Dilemmas

Apart from the existential primary task of survival, I saw my primary task for self as learning to develop the capacity to love and lead as part of groups and systems.

In the work context, it would also translate to studying the unconscious processes and hypothesizing about them, offering it for systems to learn. In the context of family, one does bring up unconscious processes, but with much more tentativeness, because of the inevitable complex web of conscious and unconscious mutual needs.

How much of social reality orientation does one bring at home has remained a question: for instance, if there is discrimination at home with house-helps, or between the daughter and son etc., it can be challenged. Views can be dialogued, and sometimes argued, but can there be prolonged anger/resentment due to that? How is it even relevant to the primary task? How does one accept that there is only so much one can do around matters of working with social identity in a family? To what point is it courage to fight, and at what point does it become acceptance of how different people are, and think?

Few Insights

Self in the context of family systems

◆ Most systems and groups often engage in basic assumption behaviour and sometimes engage in work group behaviour. I seem to expect family systems to always engage in work group behaviour – to provide love and support, to constantly create an environment for development, to be meticulous in care -giving, etc. This harshness is itself an indication of setting up family systems to fail and in-turn create a challenging and anxiety provoking relationship between individual and systems of all kinds

◆ Family is called the 'primary system' with which we interact, learn and grow. The word primary can be interpreted as the 'first' as well as the 'chief'. My unconscious preference seemed to be to see it as the 'chief' system, thereby creating hierarchies in how systems are perceived for the task of learning.

Containment and holding in family systems

◆ Family systems through their primary task, have the possibility to provide an emotional environment conducive to growth. The capacity to contain, and a holding environment, both contribute to this growth. Containment is an internal function that demands tolerance of anxiety and a capacity to postpone immediate gratification towards the possibility of emotional growth.

In a moment of anger, I reprimanded and shouted at my son without adequate inquiry into a specific incident. He did not refute but listened to me with tears of anger. Later when I realised my folly and asked him why he had not clarified immediately, he said: "I didn't think it was the best time to argue when you were angry." He had the capacity to contain his anxiety at being misunderstood, and created a holding environment for me, and enabled my learning in that instance.

What is the place of containment in a family? Shapiro says "the control and suppression of other activities that are within the total resources of the individual but that are irrelevant to the particular task, is containment." This to me seems relevant in drawing boundaries and not making the primary task of self as the primary task of the family.

Post Koodam Developments – Some Resolutions

Through the process of writing this paper and the way I was taking on roles in other systems, I was able to realise and accept that there were better ways to structure the family that served the primary task of the family, and of self and others, with more ease/freedom/mutual respect. I had for very long managed to preserve the status quo without challenging the idea of an 'ideal family' or role of a 'good daughter' and having the power of the 'glue in the family system' through sustaining the existing structures. Resolving these aspects internally led to willingness and clarity in the members of the family system to see other alternatives that support everyone's well-being better. We now live in 2 separate houses, where tasks of both families are much clearer. My parents are learning to live by themselves and finding their dignity and freedom in that process; whereas my family is learning to take more risks and take charge of their choices. We live close enough to be there for each other, but boundaries of functional tasks/space/role are much less complex and hopefully more fulfilling for all.

In the process, beginning to see 'love and nurturance' not just as an active 'doing/providing/giving' thing, but also seeing it as 'containing/holding/being' seems to have dawned on me, also enriching the way I look at my primary task.

Conclusion

The reflections and processes above may be very different for different people/kinds of families and family choices/personal needs/priorities, etc. Despite these differences, what I found helpful was to think about the following: family as a system, the primary task of the family, primary task for self and others, functional tasks that change over time, conscious and unconscious dynamics that come in the way of living the primary task, etc. Similar to a process of review and application, GR provides possibilities to work with these aspects in family institutions also.

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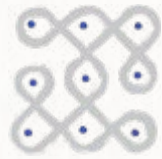
Appreciating Risks and Conflicts in Groups using a GR Lens
Sakshi Vaishampayan

The white paper here is a study of **Risks and Conflicts** as seen in a residential housing complex, studied through the group relations lens. It is based on the observation that perhaps it is good to have risks and conflicts in systems, so as to channelize group energy and attention on a larger outcome. However, the white-paper also talks about the unconscious processes that go on behind group formation, identifying tasks (covert and overt), defining or picking up roles, authority and its relevance, as well as holding onto the thread of keeping the group intact. It draws attention towards unconscious gender bias, tentativeness despite perceived authority, affiliation to authority figures, reaction formation process, need for inclusion, role of citizenship, motives and conflicts, etc. It also touches upon the feelings at self-level and that of the group, in the process. Hypotheses have been built around observations and contexts, as found relevant. Citations/references have been shared wherever they seem to elucidate more clearly.

Framework of the topic under study using the GR lens

1. Understanding the System, i.e. Residential Complex
2. Group Formation
3. Purpose, Task and Roles
4. Primary Task and Risks
5. Group and Self

Understanding the System: Residential Complex

There are 160 flats in the 2 towers of the residential complex. 80% is occupied with either the flat owners or the tenants, while in some cases the flat owners have retained their flats as investment property only. A small inventory is yet unsold. The possession process (for Tower B) started in October 2018. By October 2019, the residential complex was largely occupied. By and large, it is a cosmopolitan, upper middle-class social set-up, with residents from different cultural backgrounds. The spacious complex has been designed and developed with most of the modern-day amenities generally available in gated community living. Just to give a brief case background, the builder (a reputed name in the real estate industry) had promised several features/ amenities while engaging in the flats sale-off process. Quite a few of these promises were not met with as outlined, including clarity on parking spaces, non-encroachment of children's play area, etc. To add to it, there was a whopping water bill (more than Rs. 30 lacs) slapped on the residents, to which the builder was not ready for engaging in any conversation with the residents. The residents kept on meeting and dialoguing individually with the representatives of the builder, but all in vain. To add to it, since there was no formal 'Society' yet formed, the representation of the member residents was perhaps not being taken very seriously by the builder. In March 2020, the builder sent out the water bill, for which there were no details, nor any break-up mentioned, despite being asked by the residents time and again!

The system – residential complex – is fairly new. Resident members have moved in with memories of their previous residential set-up and environment as well as their aspirations and dreams of a modern, stylish, lavish residential project where the infrastructure would support quality lifestyle and work-life balance. People were getting to know each other. Working relationships were getting forged in this system.

As a member resident, I was initially taken aback when the builder started going back on the promises made. More so, because of the financial impact it was to have on us. It was unreasonable and I felt cheated as a flat buyer. The only fact providing some solace was that I (and my spouse) was not alone in this situation. That we could together probably face this situation better and find a way out. While we are the joint owners of the flat, I had somehow taken up the role of a helper while my husband was deeply into coordination and communication with the builder. As I introspect, it feels I was inadvertently trying to take an easier role of 'support staff', while the seemingly complex task of understanding the financial transactions, liaising with the builder, reading all the commercial documents, comprehending the pay-out slabs with calculations and documenting it with accurate details were all passed on to my partner. It was a mix of competency issue along with some level of inertia, where I kind of side-stepped!
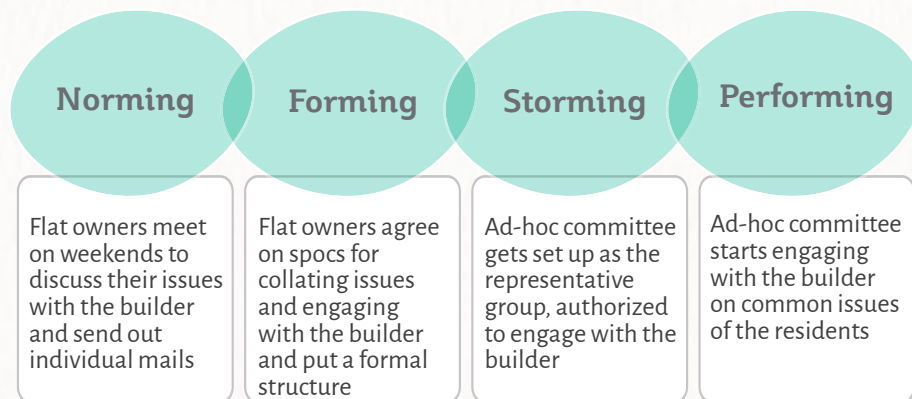
Hypothesis

- ◆ It is perceptibly easier to address system issues at a group level than at an individual level.
- ◆ People tend to act ignorant and incompetent/less competent when they would want inclusion but with seemingly lesser responsibilities.

Group Formation

From September 2019, the residents started receiving emails and common communication from the builder regarding increased charges for common services (including maintenance, water charges), changes in the agreed service levels (usage of parking space, gymnasium and club house, swimming pool, etc.), delay in utilities promised (pipeline gas connection). Initially, the residents continued to engage with the builder one-on-one. The builder used to write back on individual complaints mentioning that the issue was addressed and closed, earlier, when the facility service manager had handed over the keys to the residents as part of taking possession. This used to be an extremely formal process. The residents had just started getting to know each other as neighbours and co-residents. They also started organizing meetings amongst the residents themselves to exchange notes and understand reverts from the builder to each one individually. But it became very clear to them that it would be a better approach if they came together to engage with the builder jointly, rather than individually. On a one-on-one basis, it was perceptibly easier for the builder to deal with individual level issues more casually, and without any fear of consequences!

Some of the more proactive residents started meeting up regularly, documenting meeting minutes and exchanges with the builder (or the authorized representatives) on the open items. They took it upon themselves to compile and consolidate all the open items and start engaging with the other party. They divided various tasks pertaining to correspondence and communication with the builder. Gradually these meetings gave birth to the formation of an ad-hoc committee to take up all issues in a more structured manner. In the absence of a formal Society Managing Committee, the **ad-hoc committee** was formally set-up with majority consensus from the residents, authorizing them to engage with the builder on the issues of the residential complex.

Norming	Forming	Storming	Performing
Flat owners meet on weekends to discuss their issues with the builder and send out individual mails	Flat owners agree on spocs for collating issues and engaging with the builder and put a formal structure	Ad-hoc committee gets set up as the representative group, authorized to engage with the builder	Ad-hoc committee starts engaging with the builder on common issues of the residents

I did not participate actively in the group formation process and in the proceedings of the ad-hoc committee. The rigour of attending meetings continuously, communicating with the builder with documented records, and allied activities, meant extra effort at a personal level, which did not feature in my list of priorities. It was interesting to note that only one-woman member continued with the group processes and became a part of the ad-hoc committee. I felt both happy and a bit jealous, rationalizing her presence with the thought that she was retired and not with as many responsibilities and hence, could allocate time for these activities. Later, I realised that she was extremely resourceful and effective in liaising with govt. bodies and getting work expedited at govt offices. My spouse became one of the ad-hoc committee members. That he became a part of the group made me happy, and gave me an additional sense of being important.

Hypothesis

◆ Groups that are formed because of an inherent risk of loss of any kind, may come together to stand up for a common cause more strongly than those which do not have such risks.

◆ Groups formed with a formal authority structure may be better equipped to resolve group / system-related issues than loosely formed groups without any formal authority.

◆ People may want to take up certain tasks as their responsibility, but not necessarily be made accountable for the same.

Purpose, Task, Roles, and Group Dynamics

The ad-hoc committee got formed with the purpose of having a structured body to engage with the builder, where the collective power of the residents could be channelized for conflict resolution with the builder.

The primary task was to ensure that the flat residents are able to enjoy the amenities as had been promised by the builder. After the ad-hoc committee took the joint call on *not paying any of the charges that were unreasonable, not accounted for with details, and for which the builder was not ready to engage* with on a deep detailed manner, the builder stopped supporting the facility management beyond the agreed tenure. This was an **inflexion point** when the ad-hoc committee stepped in to take up the task of ensuring that the facility services continue even post the expiry of the tenure mentioned by the builder.

In the direction of achieving this task in the given system (residential complex), the group members came together. The group dynamics were clearly evinced while the ad-hoc committee was getting formed and got structured with distinct roles for facility, housekeeping, security, maintenance, utilities, parking allotment, etc., The engagement of the ad-hoc committee members with each other hinged on the two-fold task at hand: (i). not to agree with the unreasonable demands of the builder, and (ii). ensure that the facility services are still on with no hassle to the flat residents. Some people volunteered; some were persuaded to join the ad-hoc committee

by other group members more familiar with each other. *Roles were allocated depending on who was good at what (competency parameter) and who had the required time to devote (availability parameter)* in this regard. Members who were either retired, or who were engaged with online work rather than being physically available at their office, or who were self-employed and had seemingly more flexibility with time, picked up roles which were responsible for ensuring regular daily services for the facility.

There is no single leader for the ad-hoc committee. There are role holders responsible for managing housekeeping services, garden maintenance, maintenance of sewage treatment and water treatment plants, solar panel upkeep, engaging with the builder on the core dispute of amenities and expenses, ensuring property tax payments are collected from each flat owner and shopkeepers operating from the premise externally, liaising with government agencies for ensuring regulatory compliances are adhered to, and requisite permissions are in place, identification and allotment of parking space, etc. Perhaps unconsciously, people who are engaging with the builder and liaising with the government office functionaries get perceived as ad-hoc committee members more in action and, therefore, discharging more complex responsibilities. While they may not be the designated leaders, they are generally more in conversation with the residents at large with respect to progress updates on issues being dealt with by them. But obviously, they also get pulled up by the residents for delays and not-so-satisfactory responses received in their area of accountabilities. Their names keep coming up in most of the conversations/open items with respect to the group discussions. The ad-hoc committee perceives them as extremely reliable members and the residents look up to them for resolution of their issues/updates on open items/sounding board. They may be looked upon as 'leaders' within the ad-hoc committee, despite the fact that there is no formal Society yet in place. Other members operate as "support groups" focused on other critical activities which, although important, may not be as crucial for

the residential complex as are these, in terms of being addressed on priority. For e.g. if the consolidated issues of both the Tower residents are not taken up with the builder regularly, there won't be adequate pressure built up on the builder to agree for collective discussion with the representative body of the residents on open unaddressed issues. If the society registration process is not expedited with the Municipal Corporation, pursuing legal action against the builder will not be possible and individuals will then have to get into litigation individually which might become a lengthy and draining process. For us as residents too, some of the work appears more crucial and urgent from an impact perspective and hence people engaged with these roles are often followed closely for their messages on the WhatsApp group created for the Tower residents.

Roles were picked up according to competencies/skills. However, depending on the impact of the role, gradually the role holders started getting noticed and perceived as leaders and supporters. I share this perception with few other resident members who I have interacted with and are not part of the ad-hoc committee. At the same time, there is a section of residents who display a sense of entitlement in being updated by the ad-hoc committee on the open issues. While they interact with the ad-hoc team on the common Whatsapp group, at times they question them in an authoritative manner and even lambast them on any issue. They immediately start drawing parallels with their earlier housing society and inadvertently show that the current team here is not as professional or experienced or aware of working things out. The tone is condescending, admonishing and harsh, even oblivious of the fact that the people they are talking to are their fellow resident members only.

At times, I chipped in on the discussions, trying to draw attention of the larger group on the tone and with a request to understand the complete picture of why things might be happening the way they are and the fact that

the ad-hoc committee is only helping by representing and resolving issues of the larger group where everyone might not have the bandwidth to spare time, attention and energy. These were the same set of voices that highlight issues, point fingers at what is being done, give uncalled for advice, but do not come forward to engage with the ad-hoc team by picking up responsibilities as well! These people, perhaps, feel that the ad-hoc is at their service 24/7 and the distinction between the ad-hoc team and the facility management team sometimes gets blurred for them. However, on the other hand, it is also due to the existence of such voices perhaps, that the "ad-hoc" members feel responsible for their actions and the need to act as "caretakers" and "trustees" so to say.

The need for inclusion in group while also wanting to maintain distance has been elucidated in Wilfred Bion's work on unconscious processes where he says, *"The tension between wanting to join the group and be independent from it often generates anxiety in its members and can lead them to defend against this anxiety through the mechanisms of splitting, projection, and projective identification. These defenses are unconscious processes. It is important to note that these unconscious processes distort reality, impede optimal functioning, and promote behaviors that can create a variety of both negative and positive feelings among group members."*

Hypothesis

◆ Groups must have a compelling primary task to sustain and bring in the required energy to propel the desired outcomes.

◆ Groups with clarity of purpose and primary task, may be better able to define and allocate roles to group members, based on their individual competencies and availability to task.

Primary Task & Risks

It's important to note that the people front-ending the issues with the builder are largely working professionals with their own livelihoods and engagements as well. Since there is a common task, they have come together to participate, stand up for themselves and fight out issues, *allowing their personal time also to be utilized for the roles they have taken up. There is consensus building, conflicts and resolutions, personal fears of additional responsibilities, issues emerging from the human need for inclusion, control and affection, personality issues* and differences emanating thereon which further impacted the group process here.

In one of the instances, there were delays in payment of property tax. Maintenance charges also were not paid by several members. Not all flat owners had paid till the given time period. The ad-hoc team had sent several reminders to the individuals, called them up personally and shared the urgency to pay. More so for the property tax, because the delay would have entailed penalty on the Towers. For the delay caused by a few people, others would have had to suffer. There was a group of defaulters who quoted the pandemic situation and their difficulty in paying. The ad-hoc team heard them well, but they had no alternative to payment because the government. had not issued any tax relief guidelines in favour of the larger section. There were cases of flat members not being in jobs / on notice period and yet, they did pool from their savings/other resources for ensuring that the statutory payments were made. Default from any single member would have meant penalty to the Residential Complex as a whole. Therefore, the builder had entrusted the ad-hoc committee for ensuring the collection of PT payment. Some of the "ad-hoc" team members were of the view that names should be publicly displayed of the defaulters, while other group members opined that posting names on the Whatsapp group for defaulters, may not be a decent proposition, as all were resident members and hence equal members of the

group. They debated with heated arguments w.r.t the amount of time and energy getting spent on the property tax collection issue, then the collection of maintenance charges as well. The group felt that a certain section of the flat owners/residents was not feeling the pain of the larger group and hence acting unconcerned. This coldness was not appreciated. The group finally came to a consensus that there would be 3 attempts sending individual reminders and follow-up for collecting the payments, with a public "Thank You" to the people who paid after the follow-ups. However, even after the 3rd reminder, if there were delays, the defaulters' list would get displayed in the building lifts and Whatsapp group. The ad-hoc team started with making their payment first before initiating any further process. While this was a tough decision for the ad-hoc committee, it had the positive impact of the property tax payment being made by 169 flat owners out of the 180 flats in the twin towers, before the 3rd reminder. *Risk of reputation made it work for the group!* While some members outside of the ad-hoc committee did not appreciate the display of names by the lifts and staircases, and condemned it, the members explained the cumulative efforts made earlier to ensure this situation did not emerge. Parallelly, there were resident members who supported the efforts of the ad-hoc team members.

In another instance, the first time a COVID positive patient was diagnosed in the Complex in June, he was immediately rushed to a hospital in Mumbai. His family (wife and daughter) had quarantined themselves immediately. The case was reported to the ad-hoc committee. The committee immediately informed the residents that there was a CVOID case reported in the complex. They urged the residents to exercise caution, take care and continue to practice social distancing. Some of the resident members wanted to know which family was impacted. The ad-hoc team replied by mentioning the floor concerned, but not the flat number. It was that point in time when people were so scared of the whole pandemic that they could even go to the length of ostracizing the family, causing psycholo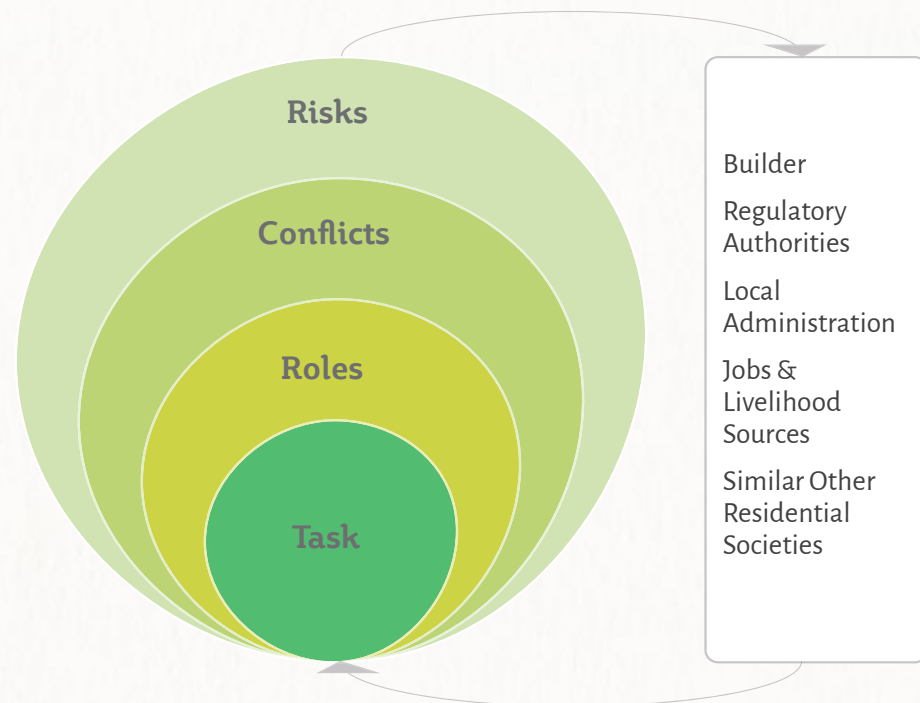gical and emotional disturbance to the impacted people. The ad-hoc team was sensitive to the repercussions it could entail. At one level, they continued to urge residents to show support to the impacted family, while at the other level, they continued to refrain from the flat identification process. The residents in the Complex started getting to know informally through the grapevine. The impacted family felt tormented by the tonality of some of the resident members who were so full of rage at the identity of the family not being disclosed.

The ad-hoc team pulled through the situation with interim updates of improvement being made by the impacted resident member, support getting extended to his family, till the time he returned fully recovered. Later, during the virtual weekly meeting of the group, the issue came up for discussion. Some of the non ad-hoc committee members also joined the meeting. Finally, the group decided on the commonly agreed protocol for intimation to the residents if such cases were reported further, along with the DOs and DON'Ts to be followed during such situations to avoid the spread of infection. The important learning here was that while the intent may be noble of the ad-hoc team, it may still be imperative to be inclusive of the views of the other group members in situations which are exceptional and one of its kind when group dynamics is concerned.

Since this is a dynamic event and is still undergoing resolution, including taking recourse to the legal route, there are many aspects of this whole scenario which make it an interesting group relations study, where a certain group or people coming together in a given system and stand up for a common cause (primary task) and in the event, set up goals, pick up roles while different shades of perceptions, biases, fears, collaboration, trust, situational leadership keep coming up as part of the group dynamics.

System – Residential Complex

Risks

Conflicts

Roles

Task

Builder

Regulatory Authorities

Local Administration

Jobs & Livelihood Sources

Similar Other Residential Societies

The given system has the *risk of losing out on common interests with the builder*. If they try dealing with their issues individually and not as a group. That translates into *possible financial losses, higher expenses, emotional setback, feeling of being cheated and not getting what is rightfully due*. In the process of being on the Task, the group has to explore areas they haven't worked on before, like managing the facility, fixing maintenance expenses, ensuring facility supervisor is held accountable as well as supported to be able to discharge his duties.

There are disagreements with fellow residents on expenses, services, service levels, turnaround time for resolution of issues, dealing with COVID contingency and ensuring regular services to the facility, etc.

"Wilfred Bion (1961) hypothesized that groups had two modes of functioning: work group and basic assumption. The work group attends to its primary task of group survival. Basic assumption group functioning represents an unconscious mode of group behavior that is focused on management of anxiety that surfaces related to the group's work. Thus, when the group members are engaging in basic assumption behavior, they are no longer attending to the primary focus of their task at hand."

The group members are new to the task, but they have commitment to learn from the other similar apartment complexes, engage with the local authorities as and when required, and ensure smooth continuity of services, without hassle. What keeps the group moving is both hope for a better tomorrow while not bowing down under the pressure of the builder, as well as risk and fear of what could be the possible outcomes, if the group did not come together and work. The understanding that the builder is a heavy-weight with resources and connections to defend his interests makes the group more prepared to deal with the issue, while understanding the legal framework and implications. To add to it, there is this sense of tentativeness, since it is still an ad-hoc committee and does not yet have legal authority in its fold to enforce outcomes in the interest of the group. Hence, it adds to the risk of possible loss on financial and legal angle, if the group were to even remotely alienate any of its group members in the process. There is an inherent fear about the ganging up of some of the voices which keep emerging in the group. Once the Provisional Management Committee (PMC) is in place, there is a high possibility of the Committee Members to take decisions and calls more sternly, while being inclusive. The tonality of unending requests from the ad-hoc team might gradually morph into assertive decisioning once the PMC is in place post elections. *"Risks"*

experienced at Group level can be summarized as either of these:

1. Losing out on common interests with the builder, meaning possible financial loss, emotional setback, not getting one's due.

2. Losing out on litigation, entailing that the group be better prepared on the legal aspects.

3. Reputation of the ad-hoc committee, if the common interests are not addressed as expected.

4. Disturbing the interpersonal relationships amongst ad-hoc group members, if issues are called out openly.

The behaviour (of being in request mode continuously) from one of the ad-hoc committee members responsible for managing 'communication', could also be a 'reaction' to the patronizing behaviour of the other fellow residents who displayed their sense of entitlement and constant cribbing, the set of people who generally raked up issues, advised the ad-hoc group, but did not come forward to participate to resolve.

Quoting from www.britannica.com/science/reaction-formation, "reaction formation" is a psychological defense mechanism in which a person goes beyond denial and behaves in the opposite way to which he or she thinks or feels. Conscious behaviors are adopted to overcompensate for the anxiety a person feels regarding their socially unacceptable unconscious thoughts or emotions. Usually, a reaction formation is marked by exaggerated behavior, such as showiness and compulsiveness.

Hypothesis

◆ The psychological needs, anxieties, and motivations of individuals are more similar than different, in a group scenario.

◆ The psychodynamics above operate in and around the primary task, which in turn gives purpose and direction to the Group.

◆ Groups operate with the risk of disturbing the inter-relationships amongst group members if issues are called out openly, as long as trust is peripheral.

◆ Conflicts and dilemmas get addressed in the group only when the issues are brought out in the open and discussed amongst group members with mutual trust and respect.

Personal Insights about 'Me in the Group'

As a fellow-resident, the emotion that ran common to me and the larger group were:

1. Feeling cheated and tricked as buyers.

2. Experiencing anxiety at the thought of the financial impact it could have on us.

3. The thought that we were not alone in this situation gave some sense of solace that we could probably face this situation together and find a way out.

However, while observing the group process, I also experienced certain *"risks and conflicts"* within me at a personal level. I sensed the risk of having to make the choice of missing out on some other priorities, if I were to take up a more active role in the group; risk of committing and being held accountable; conflict of holding onto the dichotomy of inertia and not wanting to be set up; difficulty in acknowledging that my spouse was able to balance out his professional space with the group work as well as trying to partner with me effectively in the domestic space during the lockdown period. At times, I displayed micro-aggression towards my spouse by making him feel 'guilty'
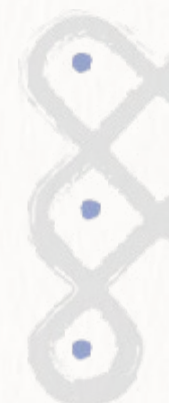
that he was so caught up with his other 'tasks' that he did not have time for the 'family'. When I noticed a single woman participating actively in the group process, I rationalized it with the thought that she has retired from active service and has enough time at hand to focus on such activities. In the process, I realized that I tended to withhold my compassion while rationalizing, till the time the feeling hurts me to an extent that I have to allow it to prevail and set me free.

As a fellow resident in this system, I am more of an observer without taking any active role in the ad-hoc committee structure. I understand groups as psychodynamic systems, in any context they may operate. I am also an active supporter of the ad-hoc committee and their genuine efforts, and keep voicing my opinion amongst fellow residents during open discussions around expenses, and the methods adopted by other apartment complexes to have their facilities managed. I am immensely vocal when the viewpoints from others are prescriptive, reprimanding, or with a sense of entitlement to the privileges for residents. The ad-hoc committee has kept the meetings open for attendance by any and every resident. That the people do not participate in the meetings, but later seem to get into an advisory mode, baffles me and I find it a derailing process from the primary task. That is when I voice my opinion more to ensure that the efforts get sustained and appreciated. I have received mixed feedback and revert on my views. I have felt that compassion has been missing on our side as fellow residents and I have not been able to resist from voicing my acknowledgement and appreciation for the ad-hoc group members, especially the one managing communication and sharing updates w.r.t progress happening on the open items.

I engage with the ad-hoc committee members more on a one-to-one basis. It is my personal interest to talk to them and understand from them how they reflect back on their journey so far; what do feel are their accomplishments, some of their dilemmas, their ongoing challenges and mutual conflicts;

how have they come closer as group members who do not just work on the task, but also take out time to connect with each other at individual and family level, explore their inter-relationships, ways of working on their disagreements etc. and come to a consensus in the larger interest. The ad-hoc committee members are thrilled to know that I am penning down my experiences and observations of the story of our residential complex thus far, for a GR study. They said they had never looked at it this way. I experience their excitement when they talk about how they came together, their fears around having to pay unreasonably more and without any proper justification from the builder, their spirit to fight it out with the builder rather than to agree to his demands. They also talk about how they work through and with their mutual disagreements on certain issues and find a solution in the larger interest. *Initially, what seemed like a drag on their personal time, now they find it very compelling because people look up to them for addressing their issues; they are known as 'ad-hoc committee' members which is an extension to their existing identities as flat owners.*

By picking up this project for study and presentation, I am also trying to communicate to the ad-hoc team that their efforts are well appreciated by the other resident members and they see value in their hard work. This thought has been well received with surprise from the group. They never thought their work could also be perceived as being sustainable, self-sustaining, and setting an example for others! Few of the group members really felt so full of pride when we had our one-on-one interaction, that their efforts got so acknowledged. It is still a long way to go in terms of picking up a few responsibilities for the group. However, my lending my voice and support to the group on a couple of occasions did get registered with the ad-hoc team. They said they would like to propose my name as a woman member when the election for the Society begins. I felt thrilled as well as nervous at the mention of the same, as it would also mean accountabilities and performance pressure!

Conclusion

By deploying a GR lens to this whole system study, first and foremost, I am more aware of what it entails to ensure that group processes work in systems. In my understanding, *it's the identification of the 'primary task', accompanied with the understanding of the associated 'risks' if the task were not addressed in the given system. These risks and underlying fears push the group to pursue positive outcomes collectively*, thereby bringing in the desired energy to deal with the psychodynamics of the groups and their inter-relatedness with the ecosystems they are operating in. Many a time, fear propels actions more than the hope of things turning out right. While at an individual level, 'hope' may more often initiate desired actions, in group work, it is perhaps the risk of loss and fear of the perceived negative outcomes, which pushes the group members to come together and act.

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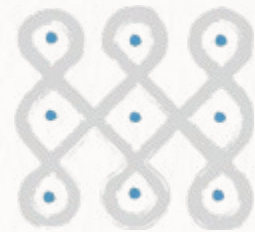
Workplace Settings

Dynamics of Managing Self in Role for a Development Practitioner

Vartika Jaini

This paper embarks on this exploration of the following questions:

1. What are the systemic unconscious dynamics and their effect on task in the nonprofit sector?

2. What does this mean for individuals working to task in nonprofit systems, in terms of taking up their role?

3. What are enablers that seem to support management of self in role?

The kaleidoscopic journey of this paper started with developing a preliminary hypothesis based on my own reflections and readings. This process needed me to be rooted in my experience as a development sector professional and a group relations practitioner. Three development sector colleagues who also had an exposure to group relations engaged on these hypotheses, enriching the mind map and evolving the hypothesis. These conversations also guided further enquiry into my own experience.

Some Unconscious Dynamics in the Nonprofit Sector

Most development professionals believe they are catalysts for bringing change. It takes some amount of dogged optimism to envision and hold in mind an alternative, inclusive idea of society. The gumption needed for imagining this different force field, could pull them and the systems they are part of to another extreme – of **omnipotence**. They may believe they can

get things done, even if these appear almost impossible. This could result in reducing the task and shrinking the context, to what can be handled by the system.

Kurt Lewin talks of different forces which determine inclusion or exclusion into an existing social channel. Once included in this channel, forces which were earlier pushing for exclusion will themselves start working towards favouring those that have been included. For instance, a university exercises discretion at admission, excluding many. Once admitted, its efforts are directed to favorably move the student along, as output.

In the case of the nonprofit system, agency of the community is undermined at first, only for the system to later put all its energy into increasing said agency. It's almost like Alice in wonderland: you have to become small to pass through the door into this world of wonder! **It is as if agency of the other has to be reduced to be able to find one's role.**

A related dynamic is spotlighting **that identity of the community which meets the needs of the system.** For instance, youth may have many aspirations and identities, but the nonprofit system working on "improvement" tends to see them as unemployed, or yet to be gainfully employed. We see others from our lens. Their stories fit our narratives.

For change to be sustained, relationships within the system need to be altered – sometimes across conflicting interests. The nonprofit system, however, tends to attribute a certain predictability to human action as a response to
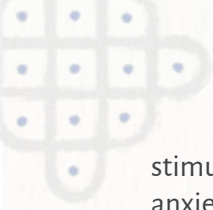
stimuli. This is needed to plan and work, but can also be a defense against anxiety, arising from not knowing. It could result in oversimplification. This **oversimplification together with omnipotence could create and reinforce a narrative that development can be, indeed is, delivered from the outside.**

What is Role, and Management of Self in Role?

Role can be understood as a dynamic concept. Like a sailor who uses the understanding of the winds and the sea, to navigate, keeping the destination in mind. Actions, including the state of one's own emotions, give further evidence, which the sailor deploys in navigation. As the 'picture in the mind' of the system and the context changes, with new information that is available, the 'person in the role' has the opportunity to exercise their own personal authority in service of the task of the system.

Role connects a person to the primary task of the system. It implies that to work for the benefit of the system, the person has to function in role.

Managing self in role thus means understanding system wide defenses that one may be unknowingly part of, because it meets one's own needs, some of which one may not be conscious of. Its aspects include managing one's own desires and relationships in pursuit of role. It invites accessing one's own subjective experience in a system, using this to puzzle about unconscious phenomena, and how these could influence taking of one's role.

What are Organizational Defenses in the Nonprofit Sector?

Social defenses link the individual to the collective level of activity. They could at times be of support in working to task. A sense of stubborn optimism and solidarity, for instance, aids those working for social change. However, these defenses also enable members to turn away from their realities, and thus may potentially impair functioning.

System wide defenses also serve a purpose of avoiding embarrassment or threat, feeling vulnerable or incompetent. In the nonprofit system this embarrassment could be on account of, among others, financial mismanagement of public money, irrelevance in the community, and not knowing negative results of the actions undertaken by systems. Fear of loss of reputation is one of the biggest fears. This is avoided through a system wide defense of **good intentions.**

Illustration 1

I worked in a grant making Foundation A in the role of Executive Director of one of the Foundation's affiliates. The Foundation thought itself to be rooted to the ground and somewhat conservative, prioritizing "real results" over being in the public eye. The Board wanted a shift to narratives that captured the imagination and also made a difference. Everything was on the drawing board, including the structure. A merged operational structure across other Foundations in the same group was being put in place.

Everyone was talking about collaboration, but underlying defenses put a bug in the intentions. They seemed to be actually seeking control, maximizing wins in an environment of uncertainty. Unaware of my own contribution to this, I felt the victim of this logjam. I saw survival anxiety as something for others in the system.

What helped me to place myself outside this logjam?

I saw myself as an internal champion of the change, and was eager to demonstrate one coherent program. These good intentions preempted the question: how are these system wide phenomena mirrored in me? Placing myself outside the system I was experiencing, in the process.
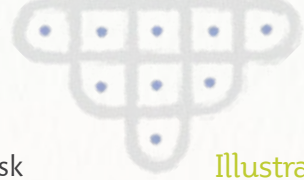
The program I led had a very wide primary task. The breadth of the task and the geography meant there was considerable overlap in the emerging organizational structure. My good intentions made it easier for me to overlook the possibility of my own ambition or survival anxieties. Underlying assumptions of good and bad made negotiation seem like compromise. Powered by good intentions, I could unquestioningly take on representation on behalf of the larger good.

It narrowed the idea of the system in the mind to the immediate organizational reality, keeping out of focus the place of these foundations in the institutional landscape working for advancement of rural communities.

Illustration 2

A medium sized, well recognized organization working in mental health was under programme and financial review. There were serious gaps in the financial systems, including those of conflict of interest. The founders of the organization were unable to see themselves as part of this problem. They felt let down by their accountants and auditors. Their intention was to focus on the programme. These good intentions came as defense to examining the gaps in management and organizational processes and their own role in it.

In effect, the assumed good intentions seemed to blur access to one's own experience in the system and of its context. This blurred view helps one to hold on to cherished assumptions, conscious as well as unconscious, as facts – including those about the context and system. Assuming representation on behalf of the other becomes easier, riding on the idea of one's good intentions. With this representation, one's own desires could almost become the primary task.

Illustration 1 continued

Organization N is a leading organisation in the field. It spun off an entity quite similar in agenda to the affiliate I was heading. Many of my team had worked earlier in Organisation N. I became increasingly anxious about the uncertainty regarding the future. It was clear that the space for the respective entities would need to be negotiated. There was perhaps anxiety in the team, including in me, in holding our own in such a collaboration. In my unconscious need to overcome this anxiety, my focus became maintaining harmony and avoiding conflict within my team. My focus on the task of the system was lost. I also seemed to lose my ability to exercise leadership. **Maintaining harmony became a defense against task.**

Illustration 3

Here was a women's organization set up by a journalist who was drawn to work on women's rights. Their donor's strategy was beginning to focus on working with women's self-help groups in the state. The women's group agreed to explore the role of their organization in this emerging initiative. A national women's resource group was brought on board to help make this bridge. I was in the role of programme officer of this project at the donor. In meetings, both the organization and the resource person rarely differed. It left me feeling unheard and almost intimidated. Collaboration broke down and the project was eventually closed.

Perhaps, exploring dynamics of relating for the task creates uncertainty and anxiety as it may challenge some of the 'cherished' assumptions about self and others. An internally non-confrontationist, pleasing culture of the nonprofit system serves the function of containing uncertainty and possible conflict.
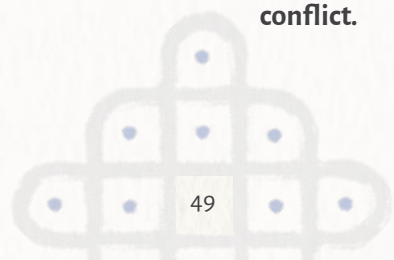
Dynamic of these Defenses Interfering with Task

Feedback loop from context is not always available in a nonprofit system, often making the task itself static, inaccessible, and ambiguous. When assumptions are not tested, they form part of myths. They are undiscussable and anyone not subscribing to them is seen as an outsider.

One such myth is a detailed diagnostic exercise before any organizational change initiative – particularly for strengthening community organisations. A detailed roadmap is made by external experts, making assumptions about how the system will perform with changes. While collective reflection and planning is essential, we know that any change process is inherently ambiguous. Also, you really understand a system only when you try to change it. Over investing in such a diagnostic expectation then shifts accountability to the diagnosis itself, away from unfolding of the change process, as the organisation begins to work to its primary task.

To avoid accepting ignorance and the complexity, the development professional could collude with an oversimplified view of delivering development. When task accountability is difficult to access, there is a chance of one becoming more driven by one's own personal yearnings.

One's own desires/ambitions and need for preserving past and future relationships become an important stimulus in the taking of role. The inner world and context of relationships becomes primary. The organization system runs the risk of becoming a club, a closed system – energized and preoccupied by itself rather than its task. The primary task which should be passing the mic (i.e., helping the community to change the force field so that they can get control on their environment) shifts. The development professional and system may unconsciously start to shift focus to becoming the mic (i.e., amplifying itself/themselves).

Enablers for Managing Self in Role

Development sector professionals often speak about their belief in agency of people and their taking charge, the catalytic role of our institutions, need for multi stakeholder partnerships, exit, sustainability, rationality, inclusion, and openness to failure. This is the theory of action – the master program almost - that one thinks one uses. What they end up using - the theory in use - however is about needing to do something for another, promoting dependence, difficulty in letting go, inward looking, echo chambers. The unconscious phenomena mentioned earlier in the paper may help understand the reasons.

The development sector, and perhaps all public service institutions particularly, are prone to the risk of becoming closed systems: charged with all-encompassing primary tasks and difficulty in discerning results of one's actions.

In this context, management of self in role offers a way to connect with the task of the system and through that to purpose in the context. This requires learning to work in a manner that allows for re-examining one's own experience – through exploring one's cherished assumptions – conscious or unconscious - with eagerness, rather than seeking to reinforce them through one's unexamined experiences. Awareness of one's own valences and desires allows one to also see what else may be happening in the system, allowing for new possibilities for the taking up and making of role.

Keeping sight of the system through pictures that are evoked in the mind may offer a tool for accessing one's own experience in that system – to be able to see beyond one's own desires and web of relatedness, towards connecting to the task of the system.

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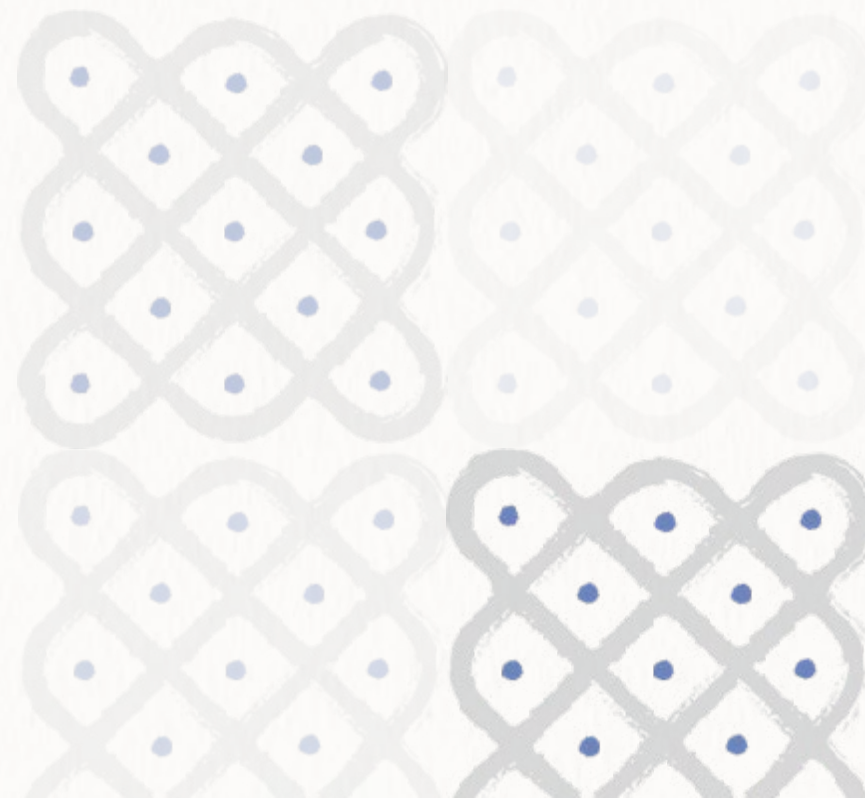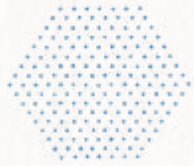
Bringing Group Relations to Life in Consulting to Organisations

Brigid Nossal

My thanks to Group Relations India for the invitation and opportunity to share something of my experience of the application of what we know and learn from group relations conferences (GRCs) to organisational consulting. First, I'd like to give you a very brief background to my journey into this work. Then I will introduce three ways of working with individuals and groups that I use all the time. I am going to present this by telling the story of some work that we did with a forensic services organisation.

Although I didn't know it at the time, I began working with some of the key features of group relations conferences in my first job as a teacher at an alternative secondary school catering for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who had been rejected from up to 10 other schools. It was a small community school whose pedagogy was founded upon experiential learning, reflective practice and what in group relations we often refer to as BART – boundaries, authority, role and task. However, it was another twenty years before I discovered the Tavistock method of group relations conferences. At the time, I was working as a consultant and had become frustrated by our failure to impact the organisations that we were working with in any lasting way. We seemed always to be just skimming the surface of issues and not getting to what was really going on.

As it happens, my first teacher was Gouranga Chattopadhay, who was living in Australia at the time. It was in a group relations style workshop with Gouranga that I first learned from experience about unconscious parallel processes and the way that, if they are not attended to, consultants can unwittingly reproduce

and reinforce the very problems and dynamics that they have been engaged to address (Alderfer 1987; Sullivan 2002). From this first introduction to group relations conferences in 1997 I was 'hooked' and have devoted the past 20 years to learning more about unconscious processes in groups and systems and, where possible, to make this learning accessible and available to people in organisations.

People often describe their learning from GRCs using expressions such as: 'it was the most powerful learning I have ever had'; 'it completely blew my mind'; 'it was life-changing'. While this makes them a precious resource as a vehicle for learning from experience, I think there is a risk of GRC learning becoming reified and idealised, or subsequently fled from by people in organisations as 'too risky' and 'too disruptive'. In either case, the very practical aspects of the learning that GRCs can make available to organisational consultants, managers and workers can get lost.

At both the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations (ISPSO) and amongst students of National Institute of Organisation Dynamics Australia (NIODA), there has been the perennial question, how is this powerful learning from the GRC experience to be communicated and shared in the 'back-home' organisational setting without alienating people? In this presentation, I would like to share with you my answers to this question. I acknowledge that in what I want to say, there are some inherent contradictions, but I have come to accept the inevitable variability in the degrees of appetite for working in this way and the fact that it is not everybody's 'cup of tea'.

I have noticed that for some people the GRC is treated like a kind of 'out-of-life' experience. It is as if what happens at a conference is a fascinating, but encapsulated bubble of learning, rather than a slice of everyday life in organisations that in the GRC we pause to explore together and examine closely. What I mean here, is that every day, whether I am working in my own organisation or consulting to organisations (or indeed, sometimes even in my family system), a part of me tries to stay aware that I am also in a group relations conference experience and it is possible to stop and turn one's mind to thinking about what is going on in exactly the same way as you might in an intergroup event or an institutional event or a Small Study Group (SSG). As Rosemary Viswanath (2020) reminded me, our task as consultants to GRCs is to be present to and consult to what is – to the best of our ability. It is nothing more nor less than this. When consulting to organisations, this is just as true, but we often have a heavier burden of expectation from the client that we have to manage and not be seduced by.

Returning to the contradictory answers to the question of application of GRC learning. On the one hand, my response is that GRC work, that is, the study of unconscious processes in groups and organisations, needs to be taken seriously. The study of the unconscious is not child's play, (although it can be very helpful to be playful, like a child). We know that in the SSG, for example, people can regress and even lose their minds – the consultant can lose their mind and the consultant also needs to be able to find their mind again in order to be able to provide appropriate or good-enough containment for the work. To do this, we need to be appropriately trained and experienced and, while this is not true for everyone, most of us would benefit from the experience of having an analysis. This, in itself, is a serious commitment.

I am reminded of an often quoted saying of the psychoanalyst Bion (e.g. Bion 1970) upon whose thinking the GRC largely sits, that the work demands of us to eschew memory, desire, and understanding. What is less often quoted is

that he also said that we need all the theory that we can get. This was one of the ways in which he referred to binocular vision: as if looking through one side of the binoculars without memory, desire, and understanding, with free-floating attention and being in a state of reverie and through the other side being able to consider, for example, Basic Assumption Group theory, object relations, projective identification, and possibly, experiences of other groups. While some people seem to come to this work intuitively, I am not one of them, and learning in depth about psychoanalytic theory has been very important to my practice, both as a consultant and as a staff member of GRCs.

However, I also believe that if we make group relations into something so difficult and inaccessible that one would have to study for years and undergo an analysis in order to do any application work in organisations, this would be neither useful nor realistic. My experience is that it is possible to do very meaningful and deep learning work with very little training by using some frameworks and tools developed for this purpose. The three that I use that I'd like to share with you (and many of you will be familiar with them), are drawing as a tool for exploration (so often used to great effect during the review and application sessions in GRCs) (Nossal 2013), the Transforming Experience Framework (TEF) developed by the Grubb Institute (Long 2016) and one that you are less likely to know, Relational Coordination (Hoffer Gittell 2016). What follows is a very brief introduction to the second two and then a description of how these were applied in an organisational consultancy.

I feel lucky to have been working with Bruce Irvine (sadly, now deceased) when the TEF was first developed. It is a framework that builds upon the earlier work of Organisational Role Analysis (ORA) and combines it with the Tavistock Institute's Input Transformation Output model (Miller and Rice 1967). I will just take you through it briefly and if you would like to learn more about it, I can send you a slide show with notes that allow you to walk through

the model in a bit more detail. Essentially, the model is a tool for exploration and organisational analysis that focuses on four dimensions of experience (see figure 1 below). In relation to each, the question is posed, what is the experience of being? In introducing the framework, it is important to begin with context, thus, what is the experience of being in context? What is the context? It is the place from which all input comes and to which all output relates. It includes, for example, national and global politics, the environment and climate, the economy, right now, the COVID-19 pandemic, the market etc. In thinking about the question, what is the experience of being in context, in context we are all citizens and in context we are all connected. To begin with context is to immediately situate oneself and, for example, an organisational problematic within a broader framework of thinking. It takes us out of the individual and interpersonal realm to think about what else is going on that may be impacting our experience.

Role – Taking Action to Achieve Purpose

Experience of Connectedness with Source

Family History
Work Experience
Valency
Professional Interests
Ambition
Passion

yearning
the experience of being a PERSON
desire

connectedness
the experience of being in CONTEXT
resources

vocation
Role

o-i-t-m

Social Climate
Government
Politics
Regulation
Health Sector
Employment
Justice System

Primary Task
Leadership Style
Work Culture
Values
Systems & Processes
Technology

accountability
SYSTEM
purpose

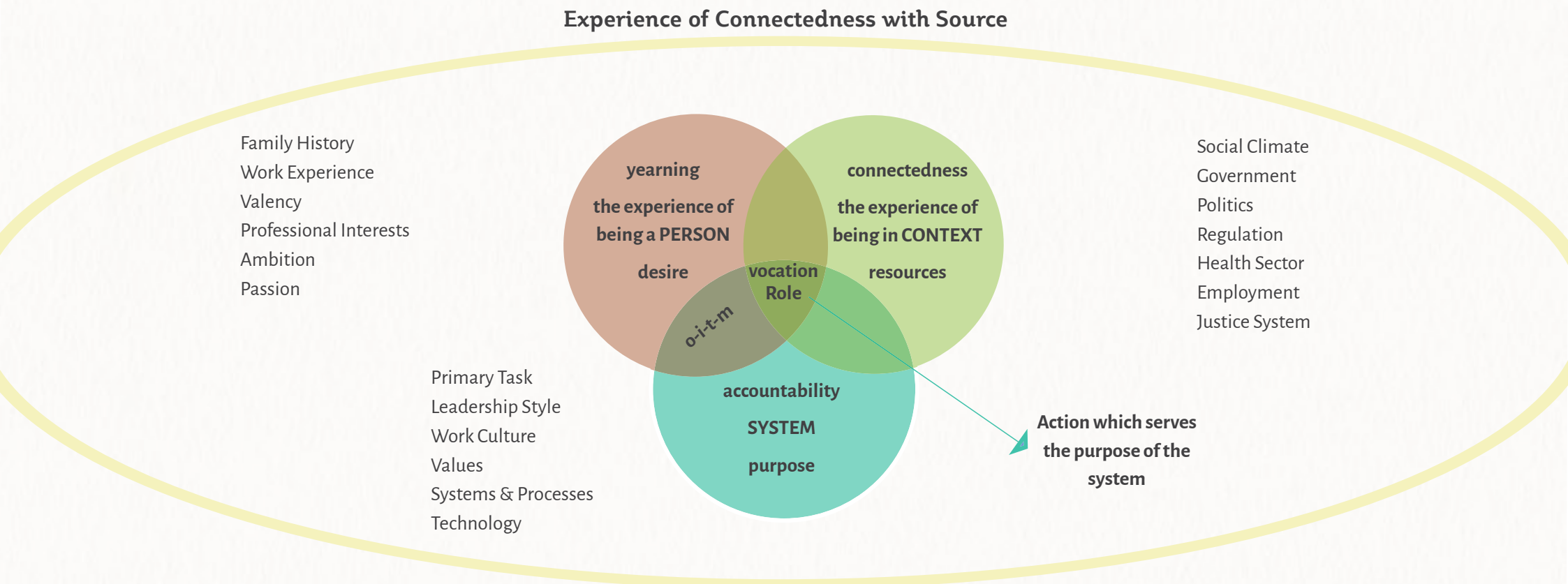Action which serves the purpose of the system

Figure 1: The Grubb Institute Transforming Experience Framework

Next, is the System or the organisation. An organisation is created to meet a need in the context. It derives its employees and resources from the context and it returns its products and/or services to the context. We ask the question, what is the experience of being in this organisation? In organisations and systems, we generally occupy the role of employee, or, for example, in a sporting club or professional association, the role of member. When looking at the system, we consider, for example, things like the leadership style, work culture, systems and processes, primary task, policies and decision-making and what changes or restructures may be in progress. In this part of the exploration we can think about these things and the impact that they may be having on the individual and collective experience of being in the system. As an example, if the organisation has just had a budget cut, a number of people have lost their jobs and/or a new CEO has been appointed to get the organisation back into the black, this is likely to impact the individual experience of being in the organisation as well as the group dynamics. Again, the focus tends to be less on the individual and the intra or interpersonal, and more on the organisation as a whole system of things going on. Then we come to person – what is the experience of being a person? Here we can consider questions of personal aspirations, feelings, family and work history, valency etc.

Beyond this, there is the dimension of experience of being connected to source. Source is defined as, all faiths and none, the spiritual dimension, quantum mechanics, or the dimension that is, perhaps, beyond context. When working with organistions, I make a call as to whether to include the dimension of source, but if there is an openness to think about it, it can provide an avenue to thinking deeply about purpose, passion and vocation. What the diagram of the TEF shows, is the hypothesis that the experience of being connected to source in context is one of connectedness, in organisation/ system it is one of having a sense of purpose, at the individual level, it might be felt as yearning.

At the intersection of these three circles is role. Role is impacted by all of the forces coming from context, system, source and internally from the person. In terms of connection to source, it might be a sense of vocation or being called to the work you do. The critical thing about role is that it is only from role that we are authorised to take action.

I have found that the TEF is a very accessible and versatile model that opens up a lot of important threads of enquiry. So often clients come to us with what they think is a personal or interpersonal issue, but once considered using the TEF, discover that it is often a system or context issue, or some mix of things from the four dimensions. Using the TEF as a tool for enquiry and exploration immediately deepens and broadens the things that are available for thinking about and sense making.

Relationships

Shared Goals
Shared Knowledge
Mitual Respect

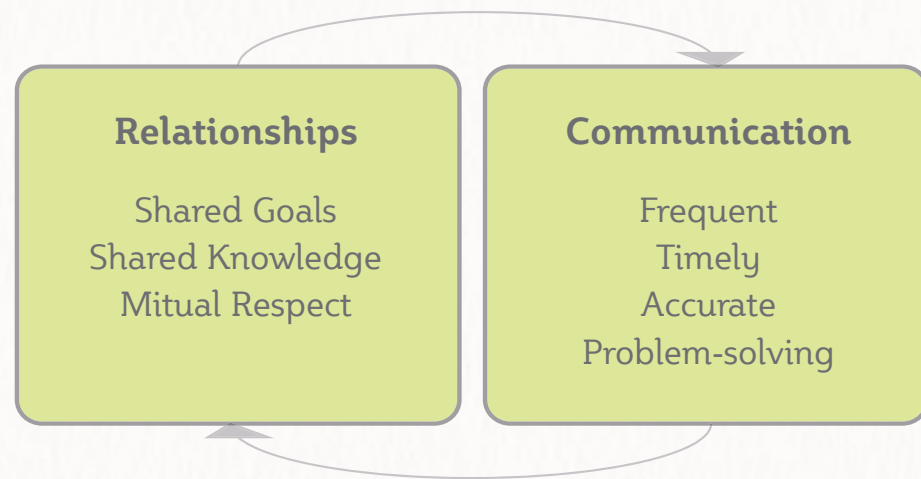**Communication**

Frequent
Timely
Accurate
Problem-solving

Figure 2: Relationship Coordination

The other framework I want to present in brief is Relational Coordination (RC). The bold claim of this model is that if the seven dimensions of relating depicted in Figure 1 are strong across the organisation, this will positively impact work culture, individual well-being, productivity, and financial performance. I think as practitioners we already know this, but the unique offering here is the ability to apply a survey tool to get quantitative data about the quality of the relationships that drive performance and decision making. I find this is often what clients want. What is different about this survey, however, is that it focuses its questions not on the individual, but on task and role. It asks the question of interdependent work groups, 'when you are working on this task, to what extent are there shared goals, shared knowledge and mutual respect?' Like the TEF, it immediately shifts the focus from the individual to the role and task. NIODA thought it was a good fit for our action learning approach and this is how we came to work with the forensic services organisation that is the subject of the case presentation. We wanted to test the survey and they agreed to take part in a trial. Interestingly, before we even began, they contacted us with an urgent request to also help them with an interpersonal conflict that had escalated and they extended the contract. We convinced them that we believed the process we had designed would also create an opportunity for the so-called interpersonal conflict to be addressed. They wanted conflict resolution and we gave them a system intervention that proved a bit like an intergroup event.

In brief, the forensic service organisation is responsible for a wide range of forensic and science services. It provides the criminal justice system with clinical medical services including the examination and testing of both victims of crime and alleged perpetrators. It also investigates deaths reported to the Coroner and has state-wide responsibility to support and coordinate the management and storage of deceased persons who have died as a result of non-Coroner's deaths, including those associated with epidemics and pandemics. The part of the work that we were involved with was to do with the Donor Tissue Bank. At the time, this was an integral part of the service, but was quite split off. The work of the donor tissue bank is to seek consent from families to retrieve and store tissues, usually skin and bone. To be viable, tissue must be retrieved within 24 hours of death, but the body may only arrive at the service several hours after death, sometimes leaving only eight to twelve hours. Usually, the police have to arrive and do their own forensic investigation before the body can be moved, so it can take a number of hours for bodies to reach the organisation. At this point, the bodies of the deceased have to go through an admissions process and families need to be contacted to seek consent to retrieve tissue. Mortuary staff then handle the body, photos and x-rays are taken, and an initial pathology assessment is made to determine suitability for retrieval of tissue. All the while the clock is ticking and people are working under extreme pressure and with emotionally very confronting tasks – whether it is speaking with families of the deceased in the immediate aftermath of a sudden death; cleaning and cutting open the bodies for forensic investigation; or examining what may be a victim of a violent crime or road accident to determine cause of death and suitability for tissue retrieval.

The RC is a diagnostic tool, but it perfectly lays the groundwork to focus clients on BART and action learning. In this organisation, there were four highly interdependent functional groups who were having trouble working together:

- ◆ Coronial Admissions and Enquiries
- ◆ Mortuary
- ◆ Pathology
- ◆ Donor Tissue Bank

Curiously, initially, we forgot to include the Executive Group. The first part of the process was to carry out a series of diagnostic interviews and focus groups.

In the RC model the purpose of this initial step is to come to an agreement about what task the survey would be best focused upon. We blended this with our systems-psychodynamically informed approach to organisational diagnosis and included workplace observations and drawing as a part of the data creation process.
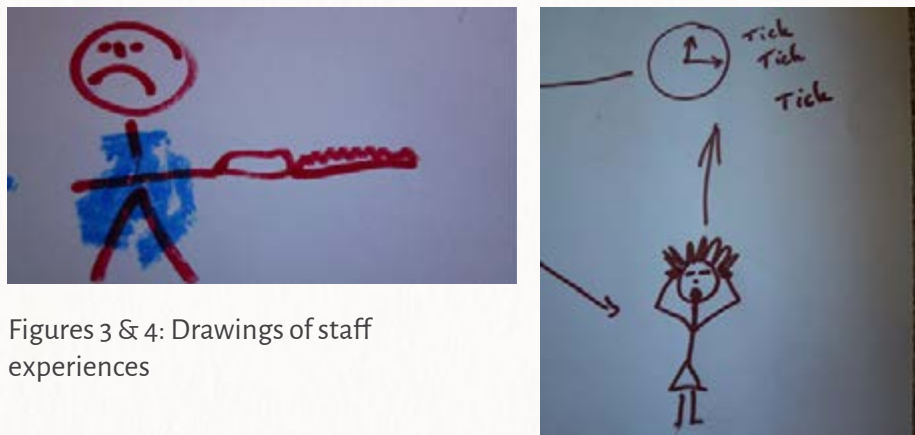
Figures 3 & 4: Drawings of staff experiences

As we began the interviews, we realised our error in not including the Executive Group, and were able to bring them in. The task that was then chosen and agreed for the purposes of the RC survey was, 'the first 24 hours of body management'. As there are only 24 hours (and in reality often only eight hours) each of these four functional groups are highly interdependent and need to work seamlessly together, and with the support of the Executive Group. When we began this work, the groups were instead blocking each other, and relations were breaking down. Tensions ran high and this created delays that sometimes meant that it was too late to carry out tissue retrieval.

As you can imagine, this is an organisation in which the proposition that there is an emotional dimension to the task was not difficult for staff to accept. The

Coronial Admissions and Enquiries staff are the first to speak to the families of the deceased who are usually in shock and distress, the Donor Tissue staff have to seek permission for tissue donation from them, the mortuary staff handle and cut open the bodies and the pathologists investigate the bodies and the tissues under a microscope and make the decision about tissue retrieval. Each of the tasks is extremely time sensitive and the opportunities for delay are plentiful. Each of the tasks is likely to evoke strong emotional responses, both conscious and unconscious. At this point it seemed reasonable to assume that the anxiety and stress associated with the work was having a deleterious impact on working relationships. In the absence of any space for processing the difficult emotional experience of doing the work, anxiety seemed to be finding an outlet in interpersonal conflict.

In the survey, individuals respond to seven questions about each of the five groups, giving a score on a scale of one to five. For example, 'when working on the task of body management in the first 24 hours, to what extent are there shared goals between the Executive and mortuary staff?'
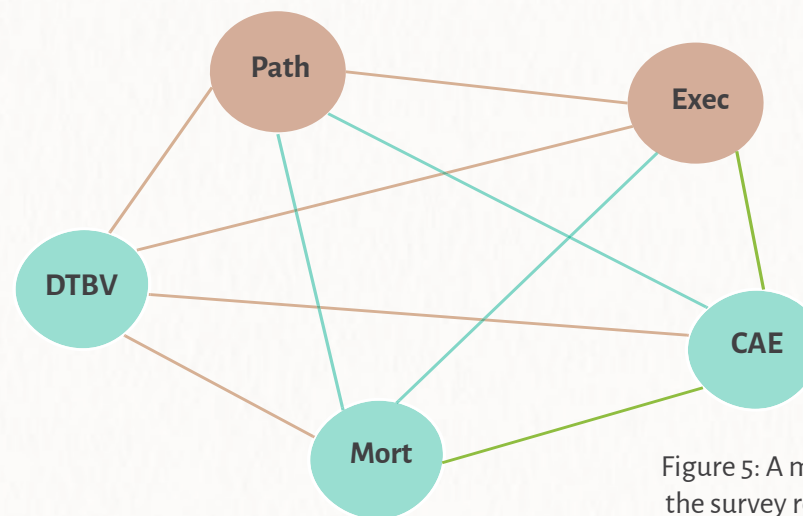

Figure 5: A map of the survey results

In the map of the survey results, green meant that the relational ties were strong, blue was medium, and orange was weak. In the aggregated results for the five groups, it proved helpful that knowledge sharing was the thing that scored lowest, because in a way it was less confronting for staff to speak about the challenges of knowledge sharing in the first instance, rather than, for example, the lack of mutual respect.

When combined with the interview and observation data, we learned that there were many process and structural things getting in the way of knowledge sharing. For example, they had chosen to read the confidentiality and privacy policy as if this meant that one functional group was prohibited from sharing electronic data with the other three groups. In fact, the organisational policy around privacy and confidentiality meant that all staff were signed up to the same compliance requirements and there was no legal or policy reason that data could not be shared between them. Making information accessible electronically as it became available promised to create some immediate relief and time-saving as trying to get information in a timely way was one of the sources of tension and conflict between the groups.

Another curious phenomenon was that they had recently moved to a new purpose-designed building, however, walls and electronic card pass doors had been placed between these departments and each carried different security key passes. This meant that if they couldn't reach the person they needed to speak to on the phone for an urgent question or decision, they couldn't just walk up the corridor to find them. It was difficult to discern the logic behind these design decisions. It was almost as if the architect had been caught in a parallel process designed to reinforce the barriers between these highly interdependent work groups, rather than facilitate their collaboration. We wondered what unconscious function keeping these groups apart might serve.

With the results of the survey and the data from the interviews and focus groups we created a Working Note and brought the five groups together for a one-day workshop. This is when we introduced the TEF, presented the results of the survey and created a gallery of the drawings. The intention was to come to a shared understanding of the issues, develop some shared hypotheses about the current state, and to design an action learning project to respond to them.

When I was first trained as a socio-analyst, survey tools and frameworks were seen as potentially defensive and obstructive 'screens' that could get in the way of consultants and clients discerning what is really going on. However, what we learned in this consultancy is that, while defensive, presenting the data in this way also provided containment, and paved a way for staff to be able to engage with our hypotheses about possible unconscious dynamics. While the issues were largely to do with inefficient processes and structures, we hypothesised that unconsciously, they served an important defensive purpose and we presented the following hypothesis. How we did this was to create a fishbowl with the four consultants in the middle and the staff sitting around the outside. This seemed to work so as to create a non-confrontational 'take it or leave it' space. The staff could listen to us without anything more being asked of them. The consultants then spoke with each other about our experience and thinking and the hypothesis about what might be going on. It was written into the working note in this way:

While staff are well-trained to manage their emotions in the face of what is arguably confronting work, the organisation provides little in the way of overt and institutionalised debriefing for the feelings that may arise when people are faced with grieving families, mortality, and the intimate work of handling bodies and body parts. People need ways to deal with these feelings. In the absence of good-enough support, staff may create boundaries that serve an emotional agenda, but which may not serve the task at hand. We wonder if the groups participating in this project are so tightly encapsulated/bounded as a way of insulating them from unconscious and unaddressed feelings aroused by the nature of the work itself.

It seemed plausible to consider that while internal to the functional groups they had developed healthy defences and positive relations, it was as if in an unconscious way, this was only possible, so long as they didn't have to

collaborate or be in touch with the nature (and the emotional labour) of the work of the other groups. In the service of these social defences, built and structural barriers had been created, only adding to the stress and slowing down work processes.

The presentation of this hypothesis in the fishbowl seemed to really unlock something in the staff. It felt like a collective sigh of relief. In the second part of the workshop, mixed groups were then invited to work together to problem-solve around the practical issues and some action learning projects were agreed to. People seemed relieved to be able to work with each other across the functional boundaries, and the interpersonal tensions dissolved. The structural and process problems that had seemed so intractable could be seen to be fairly readily solvable. It may have been one rare occasion in organisational consulting where a hypothesis about unconscious defences in the system was able to be heard and to seemingly 'meet' the group where it was. Bion (Bion 1970) writes about the selected fact and its capacity to make thoughts available for thinking and sense making, and to enable a shift from paranoid-schizoid thinking to a depressive position. It seemed possible that the working hypothesis served something like this purpose.

The Action Learning phase of the work included small, interdepartmental groups that met monthly to plan and reflect upon their interventions. This work was framed by the TEF, the RC and this quote by Paolo Friere,

'Dialogue involves working with others collaboratively on problems for which the best answers are not yet known.'

The result was that people involved in the project developed a common language and the ability to think about context and system issues, and talk about task, role, boundaries and authority. Some things began to change.

There is much more that could be written about this project, but I hope that I have at least given you a taste of how using some quite structured frameworks can support people in organisations to make the same sorts of enquiries and to begin a process of reflecting that is akin to what we seek to achieve in group relations conferences. It was my fondest wish that members of the Executive Group of the forensic services organisation would attend one of our GRCs together, but they have not yet been ready for this. Unfortunately, the case study does not have a fairy tale ending. There were many other parts of the organisation where staff were not involved in the consultancy. Then sadly, just as the work began to gain momentum, it was cut short. We can only hope that a seed was planted and that sufficient learning and skills were gained so that the work may continue in this organisation in some form.

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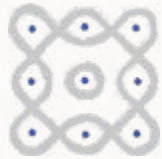
Recognizing the Power of Unconscious Beyond Individuals
Pradeep Singh

Getting Introduced

In Sep 2017, I attended a leadership workshop wherein I could be an observer for half day in a 3-day leadership development workshop. With no prior background in GR and clueless about what was in store, I was immediately struck by the set-up – the facilitator sitting, as an equal, in a circle with a group of 10-12 participants and the group having a discussion without any announced agenda, topic or set objectives. Instinctively, I observed the 'group' behaving and evolving in ways that were distinct and, in many ways, different from what the individuals were articulating as their thoughts and desires. During these few hours, my feeling was that of exhilaration and having discovered something powerful. However, after the day got over, I felt mentally exhausted and emotionally drained out, even though I had no active role in the workshop.

Learning to see Unconscious Dynamics

It was only later that my mentor told me about the GR methodology and encouraged me to explore it further. I partnered with my mentor in many such workshops, gradually taking up the role of a co-facilitator. Soon I realized that what I had experienced in the first workshop was only the tip of the iceberg and I had not even got in touch with the most basic concepts and rules of how group unconscious works.

As a newcomer to this field, it took some unlearning to move away from the conditioned learning method of conceptual understanding followed by experiencing and applying. I understood that the unconscious must be experienced by putting oneself through the process before one goes to the concepts that essentially attempt to somewhat put the experiences into perspective.

My Experiences as a Participant

I participated in the LTTUC workshop in Jan 2019 and attended other workshops in my organizational role with my mentor. These experiences gave me the opportunity to learn and work with my own unconscious. However, while I can distinctly observe the group unconscious processes at play and analyze them to some extent, the picture has been far less coherent when it comes to understanding my own unconscious.... I could experience it at a feeling level but could not create any meaningful picture of my unconscious self at the thinking level. Some of the aspects I felt strongly were:

1. In the LTTUC, I could see myself and other participants regressing to a child state, and the behaviours played out through the 4 days even outside the workshop. I found myself (and others) more ready to strike up conversations, build bonding, feel and express emotions with far more ease. I distinctly remember how the workshop enabled me and others to have their usual masks come off, and behave in more natural ways.

2. One thing that struck me hard, personally, was the strict boundaries of space and time followed by the LTTUC consultants. I felt betrayed for not being given the opportunity to interact freely and learn from them outside the workshop design. It was evident to me that this was by design, but it still was hard on me emotionally.

3. In almost all the workshops I attended as a participant, or even as a facilitator, I experienced strongly vivid dreams during or around the days of the workshop. This started happening even before I was introduced to the social dreaming matrix in LTTUC. I have learnt most about my unconscious including about my relationship with my parents, my suppressed desires and aspirations from these dreams, than from the workshops themselves. Such vivid dreams tend to happen in bunches during the workshops but very rarely (once or twice a year) otherwise.

4. Most of the above experiences do not make any cognitive sense to me. They just tell me about the presence of my unconscious and have given me some deeply personal indicators about myself. But I have no coherent view of how my unconscious works.

5. One thing I did learn through analyzing this and working with my mentor is about my unconscious script. This is the only learning that I can single out distinctly as a conclusion that I have been able to arrive at about myself, through these experiences.

My Experiences as a Facilitator

I have had the most meaningful experiences with GR in my role of being a joint facilitator in several leadership development workshops in my organizational role, that had some elements of GR in their design.

1. The group is the *gopuram* – it's sacrosanct. It's more important than any individual and its bigger than the summation of individuals. It takes a life, identity of its own. It generously provides a space for learning and experimentation. The facilitator role is to open and hold this space, and maintain the group's sanctity.

2. The group unconscious seems to gain power from the closed space in a workshop and gains intensity as time progresses in the life of the group. As this intensity increases, it creates a stage, almost a cover or a safety cushion, for individuals to act out their own unconscious processes. I feel my mental exhaustion in these workshops, even as an observer, comes from contributing to the price a group pays for providing this stage to the individuals in the group. The ones who take bigger personal risks tend to reap most benefits out of this stage.

3. My personal style as a coach is to treat the individual as the unit of analysis. This required unlearning so that I could try and move away from encouraging individuals to learn by 'sharing' to learn by 'inviting' feedback in the here and now. This was immensely liberating.

4. While working with participants in the workshop, something magical happened quite a few times. I ended up giving feedback and insights to participants that seem to 'come to me' instead of a conscious analysis. Quite often, I found myself making a point which I later wondered to myself as to how did I deduce or discover it...and lesser the degree of conscious thought that went into these observations...more insightful the group or the participant seem to find the point I was making. My mentor explained this to me by saying something to the effect that...the group unconscious is speaking through me...as if I could hear what it was saying just a little bit better than the participants.

5. Most participants seemed to get genuine insights about themselves during the workshop. Many of them tend to remain in a spell for a few weeks after the workshop...as if having read a life changing book. But very few of them seem to choose to stay with the insights they get about themselves

over the long term and work through the consequences of it or attempt to bring a meaningful and positive change in their behaviour or outlook. I am not sure...if as a GR practitioner, lasting behaviour change is, or should be, a desired objective. However, as a L&D professional, I lament the fact that for most participants in my workshops, the 'strong' experience they have during the workshop does not translate into a lasting desire to work on themselves or precipitate positive (as per their definition or desire) behaviour change.

Applying the GR Methodology at Scale

Probably it happens often when one learns something new, exciting and powerful.... after gaining these early experiences and understanding of the GR methodology...everywhere I looked I could see group processes at work. It seemed like people struggle with most systemic problems because of a lack of awareness of how group processes work and failing to take the group unconscious into account in designing systems, removing bottlenecks and solving problems. It was like this was the missing piece that goes beyond systems thinking.... not just looking at non-linear cause-effect relationships but also looking at unexpressed fears, causes and the unconscious ways in which groups move away from, or never arrive at, what seems to be their most optimal operative state.

I always felt that groups, systems, organizations, nations operate sub-optimally...the collective obtains outcomes far below the individual capabilities of its constituents seem to suggest. The GR methodology helped me make sense of why this happens – because it's inherent in the nature of a group. Groups are bound to behave sub-optimally...because they operate with basic assumptions that steer them away from their optimal course... because the group unconscious is powerful and often misunderstood due to ignorance.

Over the course of time, I had another realization while trying to apply the GR lens to groups separated in time and space. Examples of such groups are organizations or nations. Unlike a workshop where the space and time boundaries are established...in context of these multifaceted situations the group loses a lot of its power and sanctity.

The rise of social media has complicated this landscape by creating strong identity bubbles serving as groups with uncompromising boundaries. These groups have no space for experimentation with their boundaries and often clash with each other. It seems like these groups have been manipulated by their fear of survival to serve only one purpose – exclusion of others. A lot has been said and written about the rise of the political right across countries in recent years giving rise to populist, unconventional leaders who take pride in being anti-establishment and depart from being diplomatic, subtle, statesman-like and following protocol. The GR methodology has taught me not to focus too much on the individual leader or analyze this purely as political phenomenon.

Instead, I interpret this as Basic Assumption Dependency at play where the social media has become a means for otherwise dispersed groups to transcend the space and time constraints and the group unconscious exercising its power. The rise of such a leader is a manifestation of the group expressing its fears of survival, mistrust of the 'establishment', dislike for identities other than their own, righting historical wrongs and other repressed emotions and desires. What this tells me is that this 'world' phenomenon is not part of a grand political design or an international right-wing movement and hence the group could revert to a lower energy state as it approaches the limits of the price it is willing to pay for moving away from its primary task (in the case of nations, the primary task could be ensuring safety and improving the quality of life for all).

Conclusion – What GR has Given Me

The most satisfying part for me from this early journey into GR has been the immense opportunity for personal growth it has given me especially in the process of becoming a facilitator. It has taught me to unlearn through experiences and move away from over intellectualizing, it has helped me practice authenticity and vulnerability and discover unconscious parts of myself bit by bit.

Being able to perceive group processes more closely than the participants, gives me an immense sense of power...something I do not seek but I will be untruthful if I say that I have not enjoyed having it. However, it has also made me value my role as a facilitator more and has certainly made me a more caring person.

Last but not the least, GR has helped me understand that the external reality is not just what I am subjected to but something I participate in creating in more ways than I realize. Hence, as a person one should take responsibility for the role one plays in creating their own reality even if it's outside their conscious awareness.

Becoming aware of this fact and practicing it is a lifelong journey.

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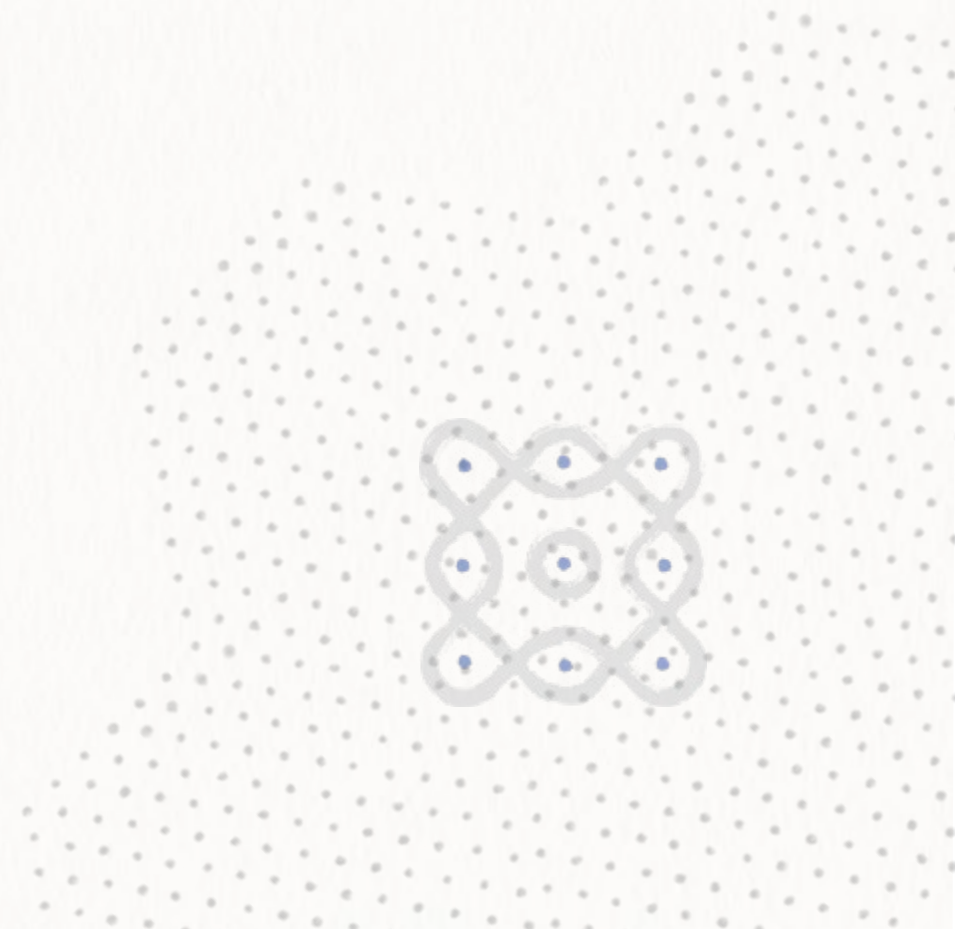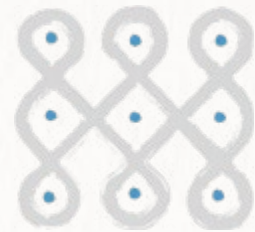
Post Koodam Reflections

Koodam 2020 Reflections

Anuradha Prasad

The Primary Task of Koodam 2020 was "to broaden and deepen one's thinking about the application of group relations frameworks in family, organizational, and social contexts, by offering one's thoughts and experiences towards generating insights through collective reflection".

The sessions on offer in this Koodam was a rich tapestry of discussions which covered applications from different angles. The design was so creative that each session offered a different application experience and clarification of concepts on GR. The only difficulty I had was the choice of which parallel session to attend!

While all the presentations were on application experiences of GR frameworks, the sessions I attended covered four focus areas of application: I). GR and the individual II). GR and Psychotherapy – from binary to integration, III) GR and Organizations iv) Novel application of GR.

I. GR and the individual

There were four powerful and sensitive presentations from the presenter's own life exploration. Something about putting oneself and one's experience in the centre of a presentation makes it very powerful and offers areas of examination to the listeners too.

1. Chandan Shamnani's presentation on the **Dynamics of colonialism at work** opened one to the examination of many questions. How is one internalising the colonised mind without being aware of it, how the process of appropriation by the privileged leads to the setting of standards by them; how is that as the privileged one doesn't even open up to the fact that as the colonised (and what is colonised is every part - thoughts, attitudes, relationships, bodies) one in turn performs acts of colonisation

(appropriation) as a privilege. It's easier to, perhaps, identify and blame the 'other' for their colonised mind but accepting the colonised within is a different matter. I so appreciated the personal exploration of Chandan in examining the colonised mind with examples from his experiences.

2.Mosaic of early experiences: I appreciated the sharing of the three 'first timers' from a personal reflections angle. And to be sharing so deeply from just one or a couple of experiences requires quite some deep exploration.

Kavi Arasu: A realisation of what privilege means that helped him to hold his success or failure lighter. What a relief that must be to not take oneself too seriously and to accept what comes. He realized that he was choosing options based on what is familiar and therefore not opening himself up to new ideas and experiences. Playing safe perhaps. Don't we all do it?

Kiran Lalsangi: Kiran's presentation was a deep personal sharing of how his eyes opened up to many aspects of diversity and how he applied them in the place which is most difficult, the family. It was also patriarchy at play. Being a man and a son-in-law, he challenged patriarchal notions and practices, albeit gently. However, I wondered whether it is perhaps a tad easier to challenge patriarchy being a man and that too a son-in-law.

Pradeep Singh: Pradeep's presentation was on recognising the power of the unconscious beyond that of an individual. Opening up to the role of one's own unconscious in creating the reality of the groups that one is a part of.

II. GR and psychotherapy – from binary to integration

Gunjan Zutshi's - individual and group learnings from practice of GR and Psychotherapy was of particular interest to me. Some of my insights from her sharing are:

- ◆ The trap that one falls into by comparing one perspective with the other and so tie oneself up in knots, rather than understanding that

each perspective has its own importance. If one can only look at the inter-relationship; of how one can add to the other. Group Relations understanding can bring much richness to the therapist-client relationship.

◆ Psychotherapy focuses on the individual, whereas the GR lens helps us look at unconscious processes in the group and the systemic aspects. GR teaches us to pay attention to the context such as patriarchy etc. on the individual.

◆ I am the group and the group is a reflection of me. Further, it teaches us that we are not so separate. While we see everything around us as split, the GR lens shows us that it isn't so much a split but about binaries. It helps us to learn to look at the integration of the binaries within us. Therefore, psychotherapy and the GR lens is not a split framework but can be an integration process.

III. GR and organizations

David Sundardas and Nalesh Patankar, Dhairav Dalal and Yash Kaul from two different systems trace the impact of participating in GRCs and GR based workshops organised by GRI over many years. Obviously, the organizations have experienced the benefits because of which time and again staff have been nominated. Answering some direct questions put to them by the moderator, the panellists spoke of why they were attracted to GR. These were

◆ GR is the only method which leads one to examine systemic issues and reach the root cause of organizational processes.

◆ It is different from other perspectives as it takes the focus away from the 'what' to the 'why' of things, from the individual to institutional learning, from the leader to leadership.

◆ From teaching about leadership to providing an experiential space for practicing leadership and examining oneself in the here and now.

◆ How Task, Role, System, unconscious, and boundaries are applicable in organizations

◆ Most of all when so many people have experienced GR perspective it establishes a common language because of the shared understanding and helps in aligning the team.

◆ Finally, it was clear that a certain critical number from an organization needs to experience the GR perspective and methodology for it to bring any impact to the organizational field. But for that to happen, an act of leadership is most important in leading the way. That the four panellists have amply demonstrated.

IV. Novel application of GR

Sunitha Lal in her presentation on **Storyteller, Storytelling and GR** shared how her understanding of group relations frameworks have influenced her role as a writer. The ingenuity and creativity she used in her work was very powerful and gripping. My understanding from her sharing is how GR frameworks (especially boundaries and systems perspective) helped her in staying true to her role of telling the stories on the impact of patriarchy on women's lives and keeping her focused on what she wants to tell. Perhaps this is why the stories, actually short stories, have turned out to be so powerful and impactful.

I thoroughly enjoyed this edition of Koodam because each session was so different from the other in its application of GR, the context and setting it was used in, and the insights it gave me as a learner.

Koodam 2020 – Discrete Reflections

David Sundardas

How is GR best defined? A metaframe i.e. a framework of frameworks or a framework? What are the constituent elements and how do they fit together? I came away with this dilemma given the extensive references to 'GR framework' in Koodam. This is a dilemma that I have been exploring to figure out for myself and one of the things I did was to go on a review of GR glossary of terms. The glossary of GR terms sort of educated me about the constituent elements while the exploration continues on about how they fit together into a metaframe and/or a framework.

Leadership

Notes and quotes from Koodam...

- Transformation from leader to leadership
- Working on your unconscious in public
- Moving from victimhood to compassion
- Love and acceptance don't have to coexist

We have been on a quest for developing leadership for more than 16 years. In this ongoing journey, we have undertaken ten distinct programs which our leaders have attended while in the case of several programs there would be repeat attendances, as has been the practice for group relations conferences. Our empirical formula is that integration of experiential learnings on leadership from GR events in non-GR professionals is usually triggered after participating in three GR events. While one of the obvious variables is the individual, in the GR context leadership is also to do with group and system. Hence it has been one of the practices we adopted to undertake experiential learning through GRCs as a group within our system. When the question

came up about how many GR events are adequate, it caused quite a bit of rethink. Given the vast number of variables involved we don't really know the answer as to how much experiential learning amongst other measures is necessary and sufficient for a non-GR professional to transform. We have taken the approach of 'observe and adjust'; so perhaps this question is an area for further exploration, and even focused research.

Primary task

Notes and quotes from Koodam...

- Disruptions and corruption of primary task leading to abusive behavior
- Shifting of primary task from fighting the builder to managing the complex of apartments

Primary Task, Work Group and Basic Assumption Groups – it's incredible to reflect on the aftereffects of the interplay between these three elements of the GR Framework (or is it metaframe?). Corruption of the primary task in our system is all too common originating from a lack of appreciation of the role, misconceptions about the system, inability to engage with the primary task, etc., with devastating consequences such as loss of organizational reputation. Koodam provided several insights including shifting the primary task to help bring the Work Group back into play.

Defense mechanisms

Notes and quotes from Koodam

- Membership – baPu (basic assumption Purity Pollution) at play...
- Entitlement as a defense against giving up hierarchies

- Projection on an external issue as a defense mechanism

- Entitlement prevents compassion from occurring

- Courage swayed by privilege

- Intention is a way of denying the unconscious

- Distance that I create to safeguard myself

As a run up to Koodam one of the topics we explored was about defense mechanisms that we encounter in our system. Discourse and discussion on defense mechanisms was quite extensive as well as enriching all throughout Koodam. As a non-GR professional, it's quite challenging to make peace with the fact that there seems to be a defense mechanism lurking everywhere in the system and then go about figuring how best to respond.

Oftentimes in corporate systems we encounter the BICS (bull in a china shop) approach to perceived defenses. One of the going challenges we are dealing with is how we treat sub-contractors who work shoulder to shoulder alongside our employees in creating value for our customers. While in our system we have learned to engage with defense mechanisms whenever we have been able to successfully identify such situations, there continues to be a dire need to broaden and deepen the scope of learning.

System

Notes and quotes from Koodam...

- With the system and within the system

- Personal space of an individual vs. organizational space

- Need to get beyond personal to the interpersonal

- Being part of the system and yet be able to consult (to system and self)

- Scary to realize that we must be within the system

Koodam provoked quite some reflections on the system. Every system is part of another system resulting in the so-called system of systems and then there is this constant interaction between systems. Easy to say and difficult to engage without losing the system context. Drawing the system into context has been an area of work in our system, as also helping leadership actually operate at the boundary of the system.

Reflections on the panel discussion in Koodam 2020
Ganesh Anantharaman

The panel discussion GR Application in Organizations: a view from two systems brought to light application experiences as represented by the leaders of the two systems - Smiths Medical and Siemens Global Delivery Network - who were invited to be on the panel simply by virtue of the fact that they were two organizations that had invested heavily in building GR capability in their leadership. The discussion, marked by a degree of reflective candour, made it clear to the members present that applying GR is not without its dilemmas, and yet with its attendant rewards. This had the consequence of making the GR methodology appear less daunting and more accessible for use in everyday organizational decisions. What is the primary task of this meeting? What is the picture-in-the-mind we have about our own customers? Why did we forget to place the suggestion box for feedback in our all-hands meeting? Are we converting the person who is raising a

difficult issue into a difficult person, instead of seeing what the person may be representing on behalf of the system? These are a representative sample of ways in which leaders from both systems had put to use the GR framework to make sense of what they did or did not do.

The dilemmas were present no doubt: how much do we attend to unconscious processes when we are faced with tight deadlines? Some of us take more readily to GR methodology than some others; how then do we proceed? How do we reconcile with the fact that our reward and recognition mechanisms emphasize individual achievement when we know that the health of the system may require a different measure of performance than competition?

It was a sobering, and yet joyful moment, when one of the leaders in the panel said that wrestling with the above dilemmas is the very task of leadership, and that there is no simple formula out of these. Perhaps what was being alluded to is yet another aspect of the GR framework: an enhanced capacity to squarely face the complexity of dynamics in the system as a whole, without recourse to oversimplification, which is but another form of denial.

Post Koodam Musings
Rosemary Viswanath

The idea of being a group relations practitioner carries the image of a sober almost weighty role! Koodam 2020 helped dispel this image, well, perhaps at least challenge it – by offering a range of dimensions, experiences and emotions of what it means to live GR! This came home to me with a comment of one of the participants Jacob John when he spoke about how attending a GRC helped him to feel lighter – and how he was able to access more empathy for those in leadership. This aspect of lightness was also reflected in the topics

the presenters chose straddling a range of contexts. What was impressive was the fact that the 'newer' Koodam members some of who had participated in only one LTTUC/GRC or were participants in leadership programme for the not for profit sector (which leaned heavily on GR frameworks in its design), were active and engaged participants at Koodam, finding resonances of their experiences and contributing significantly to the process of collective insight making.

Koodam 2020 presentations and conversations very vibrantly demonstrated the value of puzzling about unconscious processes in self and in systems. This is uniquely GR – particularly the realisation that there is a mutual relationship between self and system! It struck me once again, that even the use of phrases like '**the** unconscious' may quite unconsciously serve to distance oneself from unconscious processes which is part of oneself, and one is part of! Similarly, when we say '**the** system' we subtly distance ourselves from our part and role in it – almost as if that slight distance or separation makes it all the more manageable, or bearable or allows one to be more in control.

The impact and implications this has on how one takes up one's role were discussed in so many ways – whether given roles such as in family, or as a consultant, or in the organisation. or roles one takes up and makes, such as in one's apartment association or as a writer. It struck me that what one does in those roles was easier to see than what one avoids, or even the roles one avoids. Perhaps what one resists or avoids is even closer to unconscious material than what roles one allows oneself to inhabit. Even my identity, 'who am 'I, is described more in terms of what I present/represent, and less in terms of what I resist.

A related idea articulated in one of the conversations during a presentation (Sakshi Vaishamapayan's on her residential apartment association) was by Uma Ravikumar - what does it mean to take on the role of a citizen? We often think of the primary task of families as that of nurturance and support of its

members and indeed that is so... but we often don't see that the primary task of the family that connects it to its context – the society- is to develop mature members of society – mature citizens. It is interesting that the pandemic which sent us all back into our homes was also an opportunity for many to think about our role in society. And this may be because it impacted us collectively, urging us to think about roles we inhabit in the collective.

The pandemic also forced us to reimagine several things. And to me one of them is to recognise what was not working, and see if I could take some steps to recast my understanding of habitual relationships, habitual assumptions. And a magic word in that was to sometimes wait. Waiting allowed the first unconscious rush of assumptions to not overpower all action. Waiting allowed new things to emerge. Waiting often allowed new perspectives to be voiced. Waiting was invitational, and was qualitatively different from a passive aggressive or withholding silence, or a narcissistic rushing in.

Looking back at Koodam 2020, it seems to me that the idea of leadership was not as much discussed as was role and system. Perhaps in the current context of our country – this was a difficult topic to unpack – lest it lead to uncovering material one would rather not face. Perhaps we load too much on to the word leadership – a superwoman or superman image, and then get overwhelmed by this process. A central aspect of leadership is the ability to articulate the task, keep the main focus on it, and nurture the task. Nurturing tasks requires focus and clarity (so that one's nurturance does not get side-tracked into narcissistic or other unconscious motives). But nurturance of task also requires kindness, humour, warmth and spaciousness – any kind of nurturance requires these qualities. A GR framework helps one access these in the exercise of leadership – and allows us to see that 'task orientation' need not be a cold and heartless pursuit as is oft imagined! Being part of the Koodam Convening team was an opportunity to experience leadership in and for the collective, and in ways that were joyful.

Reflections from Koodam 2020
Sakshi Vaishampayan

It was an enriching experience to be a part of the Koodam Convention from 17th to 19th December 2020. The first reaction on receiving the invite was a joyful exclamation at seeing an alternative platform despite the lockdown and a 'No-No' on gatherings. Yes, it was a virtual platform and at the outset I was not too sure if it could be as engaging as an in-person conference experience. Happily, I noted that I was proven wrong. Rather, the three days program design was such that there were hardly any moments of non-engagement!

From a program construct perspective, it was crisp. Timings were comfortable even for the office goers to be able to connect, since it was only after office hours. It was encouraging to see a pool of 40+ eager participants gathering there to share and explore. It was also interesting to notice that people had volunteered to come up with presentations and participate in panel discussions. The homework made it smooth and time-bound.

There were reflections to be picked up post each session. We had an external speaker from Australia to talk about **Bringing Group Relations to Life in Consulting to Organizations**. While there was deep exploration during this plenary session, there were technical glitches too. As a group, we chose to wait and reinforce our attention to the topic. Not sure, if we might have held onto our restlessness had it been an Indian speaker or someone from the group itself! There were different topics being presented. There were sharp reflections made during the **Colonialism at Work** session. We could connect with some of the biases we hold against us,Indians, even in the professional space, compared to fair-skinned professionals, while many times considering the latter to be the implicit authority figures. This is an observation worth exploring in greater depth, and also how it has impacted our mindset in claiming our rightful space in different aspects of life, both personal and professional. Kiran Lalsangi, during his reflections on **Group**

Relations Role in Understanding and Exploring Diversity spoke seamlessly about the family system and unconscious gender bias that he experienced being a man, especially during the lockdown phase, and how he observed 'equal partnership' and 'patriarchy' being in conflict in his personal life. We really loved the various nuances brought about by Uma Ravikumar while presenting on **A Systems Approach to Making Sense of Family Dynamics**. It was relatable and could have been discussed in further detail but for the paucity of time. The moderators played a crucial role of nudging forward the discussion, at the pauses if they got stretched too much.

I had planned for the paper presentation but started getting nervous as I started writing it down. In the process, I realized my unconscious bias to being near perfect in outcomes, sometimes even at the cost of building pressure for self and elongating timelines for the system. As I write my reflections, I am mindful that there are some 'butterflies in my stomach' syndrome, which needs to be addressed. While the paper as well as the presentation were well appreciated, I felt the conversation flowed smoothly. I did have initial anxiety about how many would attend the topic I was presenting, because it was about a residential complex and its challenges in a group dynamics exploration of sorts. However, it was encouraging to see quite a good turnout for the presentation and discussions. Quoting from my own presentation topic: "There must be a compelling proposition for groups to come together"!

A happy three-day exploration which came as a welcome stimulating break during the lockdown. It reinforces the possibility of alternatives if the intent is there. One of the things that group relations study does, at least for me, is the fact that it gives that nudge and hence makes it difficult to avoid being in action. It makes one introspect and hence also springs one up in action. So, while there is 'group study' as a topic, it was also a forum to study the group present there through observations. Look forward to more of it. Heartfelt thanks to the Koodam Convening Team to have put it up for us.

Reflections
Sunitha Lal

From residential to online, will Koodam be the same? No, it was not, but at the same time it was familiar. Post Koodam, I have more questions to work on and deal with; some disappointments too - as you realize the shifts you thought happened did not happen within you. Work starts within, the hardest place to start from. But we are not in a race, are we? Added to being a member was also the anxiety of presenting a paper. Preparing and presenting a paper @ Koodam gave me insights into how I take up roles. My constant worry of not wanting to take up too much space; how to continue to aspire for those moonshots but not be blinded by ambition; is it mindfulness or some scripts buried deep; shadows of doubts? Is it being aware of not taking too much space or assuming that there are only so many resources available, then who do you privilege? Does looking at everything from a spectrum of resources then reduce it to taking and using. Can one be a giver and taker while being in service of the system? Koodam to me is a space where you find yourself in the courtyard — as you relate, reflect, and react with fellow practitioners; questions, doubts, pointers, answers, shadows, and the pauses.

Reflections
Vartika Jaini

Koodam 2020 was filled with a sense of joy mostly arising from demystification of the application of group relations - making it accessible in a range of systems. While Koodam demystified, it also humbled me to the work that needs to go into working with defenses and maintaining cherished assumptions!

The writing of a paper for Koodam and presenting it, started as a way of expression. It became instead a process of sense-making, with others. The germ of the idea of my paper was on system level psychodynamics that pulls the nonprofit system away from task. I started out with a bit of damning the sector! Writing the proposal needed me to own my identity as a development practitioner to be able to apply the GR lens. I thought I had wrestled out my varied experiences and put them in the paper. This was till I started work on system wide defenses and chose a particularly significant experience - still raw for me. With each refinement and reflection, I came closer to taking off one more peel in my resistance. Reading, reflection, dialogue and writing, and on the surface willingness, but the resistance to seeing my own place in a system was so high! Once I saw my own experiences in a different light, it released me from the stuckness I had felt earlier. Writing, I had initially thought, was an expression of one's thoughts. It was that, as I gradually left the quotations and found my own voice. But what the Koodam process showed was that this kind of writing is also a process of application.

The Beginning - Reflections on KOODAM 2020
Zahid Gangjee

When Koodam 2020 was over, I recalled that years ago my younger son used to shout "The Beginning!" when the words "The End" appeared at the completion of a video we had been watching. He, of course, wanted the film to never end! My feeling was that I was embarking on a new journey, a beginning.

Over the short but intense 3 evenings of Koodam 2020, I had learned new ways of looking at GRC work; re-learned what I thought I already knew; was challenged to look at my defenses; learned that it was **not** the "ethics of intention" but the "ethics of consequences" that mattered; and was reminded

that there was a spiritual reality that manifests itself more clearly in dream work.

During and after Koodam 2020, I seem to have given myself 'permission' to dream and vividly recall my dreams. I was having dreams at night, during my naps and experiencing 'reveries' in the breaks I took in between work. At one point I began wondering if I was "losing it"! But I was feeling happy and freer than before so didn't let it worry me too much!

Then I received a link from a client with whom I was doing self-growth work. It was an article on dream work! A quick read left me astounded. It was as if the client had unconsciously understood my condition and sent me a way of figuring things out for myself! I had been working with him through his dreams to move out of a pattern of behaviour that was blocking his growth. Now he was unconsciously returning the favour! I then "inadvertently" deleted the link. It's as if the article had become a dream and disappeared into the unconscious. Rather than quickly retrieve the article, I decided that my unconscious was signaling me to continue with my outburst of dreams rather than quickly trying to 'understand' them. But I also decided to follow the discipline that I'd asked my client to follow - record the dreams, free associate with them, try to figure out if themes were emerging, etc. I became the client **and** the dream consultant. It was very insight-provoking.

I then found and read the article titled "**In Exile from the Dreamscape**" by Rubin Naiman, a psychologist specialising in sleep and dream medicine, and a clinical assistant professor of medicine at the University of Arizona's Andrew Weil Center for Integrative Medicine. His latest book is *Hush: A Book of Bedtime Contemplations* (2014).

He uses the term '**dreamwork**' to "refer to the practice of habitually engaging with dreams – our own and those of others…. It's more about allowing the dream to work us. It involves practices that support recall, journaling, sharing and interpretation, as well as strategies for managing dark dreams. Dreamwork

calls upon us to practice novel ways of perceiving and relating to mystery."

Naiman began as a neuroscientist focusing on the **physiology** of REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep phase when we dream. As his understanding of the importance of dreams influencing mental & physical health grew, he qualified himself as a psychologist to do dreamwork. His article was a goldmine for me. It contained many new concepts, new ways of looking at dreams, and of relating to them for my own and my clients' growth. I am quoting a few nuggets below.

"Research about REM/dreaming began in the mid-1950s and accelerated sharply with advances in neuroimaging. We now know that, independently of sleep — that is, of non-REM sleep — REM/dreaming plays an essential role in learning and memory, mood and immunity, as well as in creativity and artistic expression. Just as important, REM/dreaming stretches, expands and reshapes our very consciousness. From Morpheus, the Greek god of dreams, REM/dreaming effectively morphs our fundamental sense of self."

"Dreaming can be personal or transpersonal, revealing the world behind my world, or the world behind the world."

"In his first book of alternative medicine, *The Natural Mind* (1972), Andrew Weil argued that humans have an innate need to expand consciousness, which if not met naturally will increase our chances of relying on substances and drugs to do so. Dreaming naturally expands consciousness."

"Today, there is indisputable scientific evidence, corroborated by anecdotal reports from clinicians, to indicate that we are in the midst of a silent epidemic of REM/dream loss that leaves us as least as dream-deprived as we are sleep-deprived, since so many lifestyle and medical factors suppress, damage, or otherwise interfere with REM/dreaming."

To me the message is quite clear. I have to incorporate dreamwork into the work I do with individuals, groups and organizations. I have started doing this

and, of course, it has posed challenges that have pushed me into attempting new ways of working.

Since today - 22nd Feb 2021 - is when I am sending my reflections to Koodam 2020, I wrote down the dreams I could "catch" this morning:

My wife and I are watching the funeral preparations for a young south Indian woman from the first floor verandah of an internal courtyard. We come down the steps, join the others and walk in the procession to the crematorium in a mood of deep sadness.

Both of us are heading to Bengaluru airport to catch a flight home to Kolkata. The roads are strangely empty in contrast to the crowds at the airport — people desperately trying to get out of this town and get to their homes. Even though we have confirmed tickets, there is no way we can catch our flight. A friendly Sikh taxi driver takes us to a 'safe' guest house through narrow back roads that look like old Goa. It feels a safe place. Both of us talk about missing our nephew who lives in the USA and has very recently been awarded a very prestigious prize in Neuroscience (neurobiology, physiology and behaviour). I am very worried that he might be very ill or dead.

The cocker spaniel of my childhood best friend strolls in looking very wise. He climbs into my lap, I hug him and he gives me what I experience as very wise advice. To reassure my wife that I've not gone mad (talking to a dog), I say, "He's very wise, comes often, gives sound advice and predicts correctly".

I wake up and am aware that I'm concerned that a long-time friend of mine has joined a political party whose values I strongly differ with.

I have included this dream as I end my reflections, as I'm aware that those who read it can make their own associations with it and perhaps gain some insights for themselves and about our larger context as I did. I wanted to give back something to the Koodam 2020 community that helped me on a new beginning.
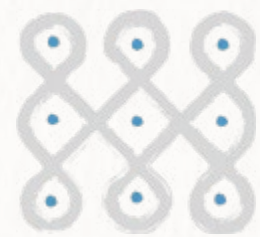
About the Authors

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About Koodam

The idea of Koodam, and the name itself were both proposed by Rosemary Viswanath with the purpose of creating a Learning Forum for GR practitioners in India. Koodam, a Tamil word meaning 'a space to gather', which has parallels in other Dravidian languages all signifying a space with some defined but not very rigid boundaries that allows for new possibilities to emerge, was in line with the thinking that all GR work is subversive and political, and challenges the dominant discourse in every culture. Koodam, with its Dravidian origins was deliberately chosen also to move away from the predominant narrative in India that all 'thinking work' is the preserve of Brahmins, and to also challenge the hegemony of Hindi and Sanskrit as default alternatives to English when it came to choosing names.

Koodam is envisaged as a gathering of practitioners of group relations work to further the thinking about and practice of group relations frameworks in a collegial space. It is a space to explore together a range of ideas and issues pertaining to group relations such as:

◆ How do we understand the various concepts that together constitute, and contribute to group relations frameworks?

◆ What does our practice mean? What is its relevance for application in various contexts?

◆ What dilemmas does it throw up? What challenges and opportunities does it offer in terms of conceptual and theoretical advances in the taking up of roles in the various systems that we belong to?

◆ How does it intersect, engage with, and learn from other traditions? Where are the boundaries drawn, and why?

◆ How do group relations practitioners make sense of their contexts – personal, social, and professional, when using these frameworks?

◆ How would we want to shape group relations work in the future? What would we like to do within the space of GRI towards this?

Koodam is conceived of as a peer learning space. Hence all participants, including the convenors of a particular edition and the presenters, also take up the role of members.

The first edition of Koodam in 2018 had a generic primary task: "to broaden and deepen one's thinking about and practice of group relations work through collective exploration." The idea of having a particular theme embedded in the primary task was a first-time experiment in Koodam 2020, which was defined as "to broaden and deepen one's thinking about the application of group relations frameworks in family, organizational and social contexts, by offering one's thoughts and experiences towards generating insights through collective reflection". The idea is to have every edition of Koodam build on the previous one, offering a new interpretation to what this business of thinking together about the theory and practice of group relations frameworks is.
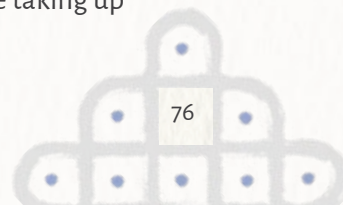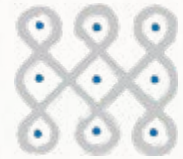
About Group Relations India

Group Relations India (GRI) was founded in 2013 with the vision of an institution that is committed exclusively to group relations methodology, and of making the potential of this methodology available to members from a wide section of Indian society, having different representations and interests. It is conceived of as a 'home for GR' in India.

GRI seeks to promote experiential learning about individual, group, organizational, and systemic processes using group relations frameworks based on systems psychodynamic and socio-analysis approaches, which pay particular attention to unconscious processes.

Towards this end, GRI offers a variety of educational programs and workshops for the enhancement of skills and competencies in this area. It also networks with like - minded professional bodies and organizations to further this aim.

Visit our website www.grouprelationsindia.org or write to office@grouprelationsindia.org | programmes@grouprelationsindia.org to know more about us and what's on offer.