



SYSTEMS-CENTERED® NEWS

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

“Seeing” the System

We are all members in living human systems all the time, for example, the system of a marriage or a work group. Being able to see the system increases the likelihood that we can contribute more deliberately to influencing the systems in which we are members. And in turn, the system influences who we can be and how we behave.

I began with this idea in leading a five-day workshop on using SCT in organizations. Throughout the training, participants worked in triads and rotated between the roles of coach, client, and observer. The observer's job was to watch the system that the coach and client were developing. By the second day, members expressed frustration and puzzlement, “I have no idea how to see a system” or “Why bother with the system.” In theory discussions each day, we talked about the different system variables, like relatively closed or open boundaries to the flow of energy/information or the capacity of a system for discriminating and integrating information. As the group developed past its fight phase, some of the frustration lessened, still, the puzzlement about “seeing systems” remained. By the fourth afternoon, the group initiated a discussion on what they were learning to watch in observing the system. By the last day, the group went beyond seeing the system to exploring how they both saw and apprehensively sensed the system, having learned to hear its music and not just its words.

Another example illustrates how two psychiatric residents learned to think about the therapy group they were leading as a system. In supervision, they were describing how a group member consistently started the group talking about some difficulty in his life. Both residents were frustrated with this and felt critical of the member. After some exploration, they began to realize how they relied on this member to get things going. They then understood how the group also “relied” on this member to get things going. With this shift in perspective, their frustration with the individual member went down and their interest in how to help the group explore the group issue went up.

I have one last association to how essential it is to learn to see the system and its impact. I recently had the privilege of hearing Phil Zimbardo, best known for his Stanford prison research (Zimbardo, 1971). He simulated a prison using healthy undergraduates as both guards and prisoners, originally planning for a two-week simulation. After screening on personality measures, the undergraduate volunteers were randomly assigned to the role of guard or prisoner. After six days, the study was halted as the “guards” were becoming increasingly sadistic. From his sobering study, Zimbardo proposes that the situation determines the behavior of the people more than their own personalities. Chillingly, the behavior seen in this simulation was very similar to that in the recent Abu Ghraib incident in Iraq.

When I heard Zimbardo, he was being given the American Psychological Association award for Group Psychologist of the Year (the same award, that Yvonne Agazarian received ten years earlier). Ironically, after the talk, a colleague told me how a number of social psychologists were publicly criticizing Zimbardo for his heavy focus on “situation” as the determinant of behavior and

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his failure to give more emphasis to personality. The emphasis on the system as a stronger determinant than personality challenges many long held beliefs!

Zimbardo's research supports SCT's emphasis on the system context. In fact, SCT's emphasis on learning to see the system and not just the people provides an important set of tools for the challenges that the Stanford prison study dramatizes. It is by "seeing" the system context that all of us become better able to see how our behavior relates to the context and is part of creating the system context.

-Susan Gantt

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FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Members,

In the last issue of the Newsletter, we told you that we would be sending out an e-mail inviting you to fill out an on-line survey. The goal of the survey was to find out how important it was to the membership to keep particular sections of the Newsletter in a printed form, as opposed to publishing them on the website. The results of the survey were very clear! Forty of you, or approximately 20% of the membership, made your opinions known. This information is helping to guide us in the next phases of our growth and transformation.

In brief, this is what you told us. You definitely want to keep Yvonne Agazarian's Emerging Theory, and the Theory, Research and Applications sections in print. Trailing somewhat far behind (about 30%) was Thumbnail Sketches. At the end of your list of your priorities were Reports and Updates, the Members Forum, and Program Notes.

This led the Newsletter Action Group to do some intense functional subgrouping. In the end, we decided to move slowly. In this Newsletter you will notice that there are no reports from the training centers. We arrived at this decision for a number of reasons. First, there was the results of the survey. Second, we only received one submission from a center. (In the past, we might have chased after these reports, but this time we decided that this was the wind of change blowing.) Third, it also made functional sense. By moving the reports from the centers to the Website, each center will be able to post updates whenever they want to. They will also be able to post events relevant to their particular area, such as SCT parties, openings in training and therapy groups, etc.

As the Website becomes more versatile and user friendly, we hope that it will become a vital conduit through which we can build our community at every level. The Web Action Group is currently in the process of figuring out the nuts and bolts of making this happen. Remember that all of this is an experiment, so please keep the feedback loop open and let us know how this is working. It is the only way that we can self-correct!

In the last issue of the Newsletter, we published an interview with Yvonne Agazarian about the Licensing process and the journey of self-correction that she and

SCTRI have gone through in regards to Licensing. As a developing system, the Newsletter is a forum in which the Licensing groups and all members of SCTRI can contribute their emotional and intellectual intelligence to this emerging process. We continue to invite your responses as Licensing Groups and as interested members of our community. Any submissions we receive will be published in the next issue.

This issue of the Newsletter is a somewhat slimmer edition than the previous issue, but no less potent or relevant. Yvonne has written a very stimulating column on the historical development of our understanding of the “person” system. For those of you who have watched SCT theory evolve this will be a particularly satisfying read. Katarina Billman has given us the final installment of her series on a business consultation that was uniquely challenging. This article gives us all an example of SCT in action in which the rubber meets the road, bottom lines are affected, and the capacity to “think systems”

has a great impact on the survival of a team within a multinational corporation. Finally, Mark Johnson has contributed a scintillating article about “Attention as a System” in which he investigates our understanding of the neurobiology of attention, the training of attention in mindfulness meditation, and the importance of attention in self-correction and attunement.

In the rest of the Newsletter, you will still find Thumbnail Sketches, Reports from the various Action Groups, Program Notes and the Members Forum.

The Newsletter group hopes that you enjoy this issue immensely and wishes you the very best in every aspect of your lives. Who knows exactly what will emerge in our next issue!

-Michael Robbins
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EMERGING THEORY BY YVONNE AGAZARIAN

1992 – 2007

One of the things that we can all be proud of is how “ongoing” a theory of living human systems is. As we theorize, we try to put theory into practice, and as we try it out in practice, our theory increases our depth of understanding. A theory of living human systems increasingly belongs to all of us in SCTRI, and many of us are in the process of contributing to what we will understand next.

This article is the first of a series, in which we trace our thinking, how our thinking influenced our practice, which then influenced our thinking and so on. This article will center on the development of the theory of the person system. Subsequent articles in this series will trace the emergence of a deeper understanding around the various challenges in the phases of system development, like functional subgrouping, the retaliatory impulse, roles, the crisis of hatred, separation and individuation, and the maintenance of a working group.

In 1992, when the time came to take our systems ideas across the boundaries from our training groups to the outside world, I turned to Friends Hospital, where I had been consulting to the staff from the early 1980’s. Friends Hospital gave us immediate support and encouragement, as well as the space and publicity that we needed to start training in SCT. The first brochure that Friends designed advertised “A Systems-Centered Approach to Group-as-a-Whole Therapy.” This in turn led to developing the Friends Series, which some of you may remember and may have been part of. The Friends Series developed into a multi-level training, in which graduates from one level took staff positions in the next level, and then, moved up again, taking more responsibility for the development of the system. Currently, this is the same model for the emergent system of SCTRI which allows us to learn as we go, and to create systems where those below and above in the hierarchy learn at a level appropriate to their mastery.

I will be starting each article with a verse from the Friends flier that went out in the spring of 1992. This one is about systems’ boundaries.

System Boundaries

Inside the boundaries in space and time, group systems appear, outside the boundaries in space and time, group systems disappear.

Outside the group boundaries in space and time, social roles appear, inside the group boundaries in space and time, member roles appear.

Boundaries define the difference between outside and inside, between the past and the present and the future, between the wishes and fears and the living reality, between realities that change and realities that don't.

Boundaries are the difference that makes the difference in managing the different demands of different times of different roles and of different places.

Boundaries make it possible to stand at the fork in the road, to contain the energy in the system, to explore the different paths, to the primary and secondary goals.

It is interesting how much we knew in 1992, (even if we didn’t yet know we knew.) Also of interest is what we did not yet know. You will notice that we had not yet identified the “person system” in the verse above. Nor in fact, were we clear about the relationship between the person system and the systems of member, subgroup and system-as-a-whole.

Looking back, one thing many of us notice on our journey, is that in the earlier stages of translating the theoretical ideas into practice, we tend to split! Our first formulations, in spite of our best efforts, come out with implications of “good” or “bad.” This is probably not merely the influence of our

Aristotelian language, but also that early stages of thinking tend to be biased towards black and white. This is both a liability and an asset. The asset is that it is the first step in developing the differences that new theory introduces. The liability is that black and white thinking makes it impossible for the theory to transform.

Person System

This is certainly true of the evolution of our understanding of the person system over the years. Early training had an implicit and unwelcome disapproval of our person system, as if it was the person system that was the restraining force to taking up our member system. As our understanding of the person system became more complex, we recognized the isomorphy in all systems, whether the system be person, member, subgroup or group-as-a-whole. The challenge was to see it! If we could see it from a systems perspective, we would be thinking at a level that transcended our evaluative responses.

Isomorphy

von Bertalanffy in his *General Systems Theory* (1968) did much of the pioneering work in defining the constructs of systems. Our never ending challenge is to understand all the implications of his definition of isomorphy.

Isomorphy means, that in a defined hierarchy of systems, the structure and function of any one system will generalize to every other system in the hierarchy. This has enormous implications. It means that whatever one learns about the structure and function of a member system can be generalized to the person system, the subgroup system, and the system-as-a-whole. This is a revolutionary idea to all of us who are used to thinking about people and their intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics. It is not, however, an easy idea to grasp, particularly for us clinicians, who are used to thinking about the dynamics of people. It took a longtime to define the properties of the person system in relationship to the hierarchy

Energy

It was clear that the person system is the conduit for the universal energy that exists in all living human systems. It was not clear how to explain this universal energy or what to call it. I did not want to confine living system energy to the existing structures of religion and other spiritual pathways, even though, of course, life energy is common to both.

Our theory groups wrestled with this over the years, and temporarily, we compromised by calling it "green stuff!" Our biggest challenge was to find a way of describing how a system comes into being. So we filled the blackboard with green dots, signifying energy - the energy of infinite potential - the life force - etc. The next question was to suggest a way in which a system emerges from the infinite potential for structure in these green dots. We wondered if the green dots themselves could organize themselves into a boundary.

As soon as we defined a boundary, the organization of green stuff energy was determined by its context. Thus organizations of the green dot energy outside the system will be different from the potential organizations of energy inside the system.

We had already defined that systems come in threes, illustrated by three concentric circles: a central circle (the member system) which contains the energy fuel through every system in the hierarchy, a middle circle (the subgroup or role system) which organizes the energy, and an outside circle (the system-as-a-whole context).

We use arrows to illustrate how energy is directed across the boundaries to the inner circle. We borrow the definition of "vector" for our arrows, so that we can assume that each arrow has a direction, a velocity and a target. The arrows direct energy from the outside to the inside, from the green stuff to the core of the system. The first system is the person system. The arrow then connects the central system to the middle system where it is organized into role clusters, which as they interact, form subgroups. The flow of energy and information then crosses the boundary into the person-system-as-a-whole, which defines the system context (the person-system in this case.)

The vector between one system and another is from the middle system. Thus, the middle system both defines the system-as-a-whole and also crosses the boundary as "member energy" to the next system in the hierarchy. In other words, it is the organization of energy in one system that is directed, as energy fuel, into the core of the next system. It is thus that the flow of energy and information is transferred up and down the hierarchy of living human systems. What determines whether these energy exchanges are driving or restraining forces is how relevant the member roles are to the goals of the new context (role, goal and context).

Neurobiology

We were surprised to find that an important source came from neurobiology. Initially, listening to, meeting and reading Siegel's (1999) books was our next pathway. The difficulty was that most of us in SCT knew very little about neurobiology. It was certainly a brand new field for me and I did not even have its vocabulary, let alone any clear idea as to how it would contribute to our developing theory.

Applying Siegel's definition to living human systems, the first system is the source of the flow of energy between the emerging human system and the mother, then the parents, then the family, and so on, as the flow of energy and information crosses the boundaries between the many complex systems that make up society. In other words, the *flow of energy and information* between the person and the outside world influences the survival, developmental and transformation of all living human systems. It was easy to draw this in terms of circles and arrows!

SAVI

For those of us who love theory, there is an exciting connection between the flow of energy and information across boundaries, the inherent entropy in the communication process, and the SAVI system that Anita Simon and I developed in order to chart the implications of the balance of flows between entropic and negentropic communications. (Better known to those who have taken SAVI as red light, yellow light and green light behaviors.) Particularly useful is the fact that

the SAVI grid offers interpretations of the relationship between individual communications and the group's. It was, in fact, in doing informal research with SAVI that I discovered that the communication pattern of the group had more influence on its members patterns of communications than any of its members had on the group communications. Even communications from the leader were washed out and absorbed into the system grid. These results were useful in supporting the hypothesis that "who one can be in a group system has more to do with the system (and its phase of development) than one's own individual potential."

Subgroups and Roles

Our next challenge was to understand what we meant by subgroups when we defined the person system. It was by finding an appropriate label for person system subgroups that we began to understand the function of roles. A sophisticated isomorphy. Just as the person system plays a role in developing the member system, so in turn the member system plays a role in developing the subgroup system and the subgroup system plays a role in developing the system-as-a-whole. The fuel for all systems up and down the hierarchy comes through the "green stuff" that flows from the universal energy through all living human systems.

But how does the flow of energy and information in the "green stuff" result in subgroup roles? In clarifying our understanding of the equivalence between subgroups and roles, our major debt is to attachment theorists. Attachment theory, is probably one of the most researched theoretical systems in the field of psychology, and certainly easily translated into systems thinking.

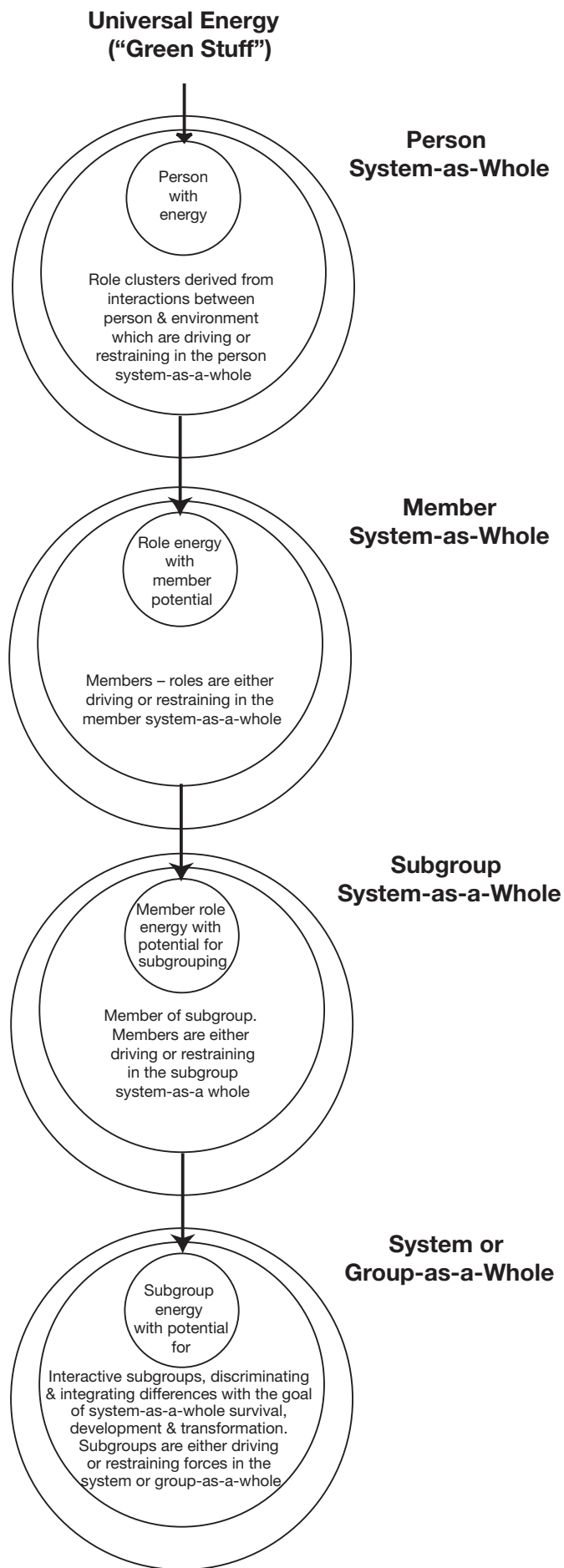
Attachment Theory

Two major aspects of attachment theory were of particular help. First, the discrimination between the "secure," "avoidant" and "ambivalent" characteristic of small children, which translate easily into our system definitions of roles. (For example, centered roles are secure, while avoidance or ambivalence are role responses that attempt to manage the conflicts that are being generated by the system.)

Another important generalization between Attachment theory and systems is the recognition that the Attachment style of the mother is a predictor of the system role developed in the child. In other words, the 'flow of energy and information' in the mother-child system context is a predictor of the system roles that emerge in the child.

Roles have a specific cluster of behaviors that can be recognized by others, an internal experience characteristic of the role, and, most important, exist either in context or out of context. Roles that are in context contribute to the goals of the system that the person is in. For example, the mother or father role is in the context of parenting, with the goal of the children's welfare, whereas the roles of husband and wife or domestic partners are in the context of managing the business of a marriage. Much misery in marriage comes from crossing into incompatible roles - bathing the baby is no time to talk about the credit card bill, nor is coming on sexually in the middle of balancing the budget.

Attachment theory research confirms the idea that



interpersonal relationships develop as a system. In this system, through role induction, compatible role relationships develop as both a compromise of personal potential, and a solution to managing the differences that are inherent in all system relationships. We are particularly proud of the fact that one of our members, Una McCluskey (2005), is integrating aspects of both systems and attachment theory. As we know from our own work on roles, “coming together” with a significant other, at whatever phase of development our system is in, requires finding sufficient similarity to make it possible to relate as members of the system, while the differences between members of the system are experienced as a painful compromise of the potentiality of the personal self. This is a good example of how, in the context of the member system, the experience of necessary compromise is significantly different when the context is the person system.

A good illustration of the effects of failing to recognize the personal experience in the context of the member system, is the tendency for people to blame parents for the frustrations of not getting unconditional positive regard rather than recognizing that both parent and child must find a subgroup system if they are to find pleasure in each other. Pleasure is always there, but is often an unavailable experience until the perspective changes from the person system to the member, subgroup and system-as-a-whole.

It was the connection between role systems defined (by implication) in attachment theory that gave us the necessary construct to recognize the isomorphy between the person system and all others. It solved a problem that we knew we had, but did not yet know how to address. The essential problem was: Given that subgroups are the middle system of the picture we draw of systems (three concentric circles that look like a target with three rings) what was the middle ring in the person system? Once we understood that “roles” were in fact subgroups, we no longer had a problem. The person system energy is the fuel that enables the person system to cross into the member system context in a member role. In other words, it is the person system energy that transfers across the boundary (from the person system middle ring as a member role in the member system.) In turn, the middle ring of the member system is the source of energy as it crosses the boundary into the subgroup system. And once again, the middle ring of the subgroup system is the source of energy that fuels the system of the group-as-a-whole.

Roles as Driving and Restraining Forces

I do not want to go too deeply into the discussion of roles, as that is an important subject matter for another of these articles. However, what is relevant here are the characteristics of roles when they serve as driving forces in the context of the member system, and when they serve as restraining forces. (It is truly amazing how simple everything becomes when one not only intuitively it but finds a language to communicate it!)

Roles that are driving forces are in context. They are related not only to person system goals, but also to member system roles. Thus, when “role, goal and context” is put into practice, the member role will support the goal of the context, with roles that vector the context energy towards the goals; a

driving force.

There is often a conflict between person goals and member goals. When the individual becomes aware of how the different contexts (person and member) have different meanings, the person has a choice between, on the one hand taking things just personally, and on the other hand recognizing the personal conflict and making the choice to bring themselves into the member context as a driving force. (Perhaps this makes it clear why the ability to cross between person and member systems is a pre-requisite for all intermediate work.)

Thinking about subgroup roles as driving and restraining forces is another example of how, once one understands what one is trying to say, the pejorative goes out of the label. We have tried using adaptive and maladaptive roles as descriptors of their function. However, this dichotomy precludes the understanding that restraining forces in one context can be driving forces in another. To be saddled with a nomenclature of “maladaptive” not only does not support this understanding, but also sets roles in stone and out of context.

Roles that are restraining forces are old subgroup roles. Roles that are restraining forces are roles that were developed in a different context, which related to the context of the phase of development in which they were developed. Old roles are always a solution to a conflict - a solution that makes it possible to have intimacy in the relationship as well as issues with authority. In entering an SCT group, social roles are most often restraining forces. However, they can also be driving forces when they set the climate. Thus, in the context of developing a supportive environment, social roles are certainly a driving force. However, when they manifest as a flight defenses, they are restraining forces. Certainly, in the fight phase, social roles are a major restraining force to the necessary exploration of the retaliatory impulse. However, in the work phase, for example, social roles may lighten the climate and thus make it easier to work.

One last important note: Whether or not a role behavior is a driving or restraining force will depend not on the behavior, but on what happens next. For SCT leaders, as ideally every intervention is a hypothesis to be tested, a lot can be learned about a here-and-now input from what happens next, and whether in fact the system moves towards its goals, in spite of apparent restraining forces, or whether the restraining role forces take it off task and into a diversion from work.

That is all for now. I look forward to continuing these articles in our next Newsletter.

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THEORY, RESEARCH AND APPLICATION

FROM FLIGHT TO COOPERATION: A BUSINESS CASE – PART 3

This article is the last in a series of three articles. One purpose of this series is to look at an application of SCT theory, methods, and techniques to the world of business. A second purpose is to share with you my learnings from a challenging team development assignment that I did as an OD (Organizational Development) consultant a few years ago.

The target system was a business management team of a large global company, which was exhibiting evidence of fight behaviour within the Authority phase of systems development. The second article, which appeared in the previous issue of the *Systems-Centered News*, discussed the management team's work when preparing to host and present an international "kick off" event. I intervened by orienting the group to role, goal and context, using methods of boundarying, vectoring and functional subgrouping to increase intra-system information transfer (within the management team) and intersystem information transfer (between the management team and the 250 conference participants from different countries working for the same organizational unit). The article also discussed the meeting that followed, which focused on clarifying role, goal, and context related to the business and phase of development goals of the team. In this last article I will share with you my last two consultations with the team. The first meeting was a one day session and the second was a two day session 6 weeks later.

Fifth Meeting – Day 6 – Fork-in-the-Road Day

A critical intervention that I made at this meeting was to help the group become aware of a fork-in-the-road at the very beginning of the day. The initial plan had been to continue to work towards the team's ten month goal of building trust within the system. In this session we had planned to practice giving and receiving feedback. However, a few days before the fifth meeting with the team, I was informed by the team leader that the global unit manager (to whom the team leader reported) had requested a three hour meeting with the team on the day following our meeting. During a phone conversation with the team leader I came to understand that he did not know whether the global unit manager planned to inform the team about an already decided upon global reorganization, potentially resulting in dissolution of the management team in its current form, or whether he planned to prepare the team for other changes without yet announcing the specifics.

My judgment was that it would not be functional to continue working with the team according to our initial plan without taking into account this new information. As a consequence, I made a fork-in-the-road intervention; asking the team if it preferred to continue to do the work according to the previously planned agenda (train to give and receive feedback, linked to the team's explicit goal of building trust,) or to use the day to prepare for the meeting with the global unit manager, with the goal of taking up its' authority in an attempt

to influence the future organizational structure of the unit. I already had information from previous meetings that the team had discussed functional and dysfunctional organizational structures to support its' business goals.

The team members were quickly in agreement that they wanted to use the day to collect and integrate information on the future organization of the unit which they could then present to the global unit manager during the next day's meeting. In SCT language, the group chose a fork and re-vectored its energy to a new task. The re-vectoring was to move from intra-system information transfer to prepare for intersystem information transfer between one level of the system hierarchy to the one above it. In other words, the team chose the fork to train in becoming an active change agent, rather than potentially a compliant or defiant observer in relation to decisions coming from top management. I then made a team intervention by clarifying that the work that might result from this fork was risky, since global management might have already made a final decision about the future of the organization. Was the team willing to do the work and stay at the edge of the unknown? The team members again said yes, and their commitment was solidified.

We started to work with the new explicit goal in mind. The team did impressive work collecting and sharing relevant information on organizational structure, including linking that structure to current and future business contexts and goals. I served as task and process leader, so that all members, including the team leader, could fully focus on the information exchange. Vectoring, by means of force fields, was used to identify the advantages and disadvantages of various organizational structures linked to role, goal, and context. By the end of the day the team had come up with a proposal for a future organizational structure of the global unit.

The atmosphere in the team was light and empowered. All voices had been heard and integrated. Team members were proud of the work they had achieved which resulted in a very clear and specific proposal, including criteria. On the sixth day there was evidence that the system had the capacity to tolerate frustration with the unknown, while staying in functional roles and exchanging and integrating information in an environment that was mostly free of noise. I left the team at the end of the day wishing them good luck in its meeting with the global unit manager. I trusted the team to carry through their challenging task, and its ability to functionally influence the system above.

Sixth Meeting – Days 7 and 8 – Integrating Learnings, More Task Work and Good-byes

We met again in mid-December six weeks later. The team members were still very pleased about the work they had accomplished at our previous meeting and its consequences. As a result of that work, the management team system had successfully influenced the system above it. Based on mutual information collection and exploring together characterized by clarity, specifics, factual proposals and building on ideas (SAVI squares 5, 6, 8 and 9) proposals from different

subgroups within the management team and the managerial level above it had been integrated into the final decision. It turned out that the global unit manager had a different organizational structure in mind but was influenced by the management team's clear recommendation, which included clear supporting criteria. The result was that the role of the management team remained part of a new organizational structure to support the units goals. All system levels perceived themselves as winners and as benefiting the organization. To me, this was evidence that the team had been in the Work phase of development during its important three hour meeting.

On the first day of our last two-day meeting, we started by reviewing the goals set ten months earlier. The team now viewed itself as strong and unified, which was operationalized in its explicit team development goals.

Short-term explicit goal assessment: The team had successfully planned and hosted an international kick-off event for members of its unit within their planned time frame of two months. (The planned kick-off had been cancelled on two occasions the year before, due to fights within and between systems). The meeting had been evaluated as a success by the management team, conference participants, and by members of the company hierarchy above the management team.

Long-term explicit goal assessment: The team members now trusted each other. We defined trust as an expectation of a future positive outcome based on experiences from the past. The team's rating of interpersonal trust among members had moved from 3 to 8 on a 10 point scale.

Developmental goal: The team had developed from flight-fight to work. My criteria were the observations I did in the last two days of the team's work, together with information from the force fields of the last two days that the group produced. The team evidenced through its behaviour that it continuously worked to clarify roles, goal and context, that it used common sense reality testing, used both emotional and intellectual intelligence, and that it could apply spirit of the law norms rather than letter of the law rules.

After lunch on the first day of the last meeting, the team leader took over the task leader role. The specific task was to review the teams business goals, decide on changes in priorities related to long-term goals, and formulate short-term business goals and activities for the next fiscal year. In SCT language the team was able to go into the past to obtain relevant facts, after which it explored their experience in the here-and-now, and then linked that exploration to a future plan. This was a nice example of a group working in exploration/reality rather than explanation/constructed reality. I was again in process leader role and continued to intervene when noisy communication happened and when the team occasionally shifted into constructed realities, such as negative predictions.

In an early afternoon session I took on both task and process leader roles again as I led a "giving and receiving feedback" training session. This was the session that initially had been scheduled to take place at the prior meeting. After this, for

the rest of the day and most of the second day, the team continued to work on the specific business tasks it was responsible for within the organizational hierarchy. Different members took up task leadership for different themes. I made the observation that the team was now able to share leadership (give and take authority) among its members, without evidence of fight, which was a major change from how the team had been at the beginning of the assignment.

I chose to be considerably less active than in earlier meetings based on three criteria. First, the system was proving its ability to cooperate in the service of its business goals without corrective interventions from its consultant. Second, I wanted to phase myself out of the consultant role in order to decrease the team's dependency on me, as this was the last day of the assignment. Lastly, intuitively, I had a greater trust in the team's ability to self correct, which was isomorphic to the overall increase in trust among the members and in the group-as-a-whole. Based on these three criteria, my goal was to stay in quiet attunement with the team until it was time to review the last two days of work, complete a final force field of driving and restraining forces in relation to the team's goals, and say good-bye.

Here is the team's force field from our last day of work:

Driving

Well balanced agenda

Enough time/good time management

Positive atmosphere

Task was clarified for each theme

Team members reminded us about task and time

Everybody participated

Team leader was appropriately active

We were applying corrective actions toward our goals

Restraining

Too little water in meeting room

Reflections Three Years Later

As I end this series of three articles, one reflection is how easy this all seems when looking back, while remembering how challenging and frustrating it was for all of us involved to get beyond fight, to survive as a system and eventually develop and transform. Luckily, negative predictions don't work backwards! I still wonder if I undid the role locks in the team. If I did, I am not aware of it. At the time I knew nothing about role locks or how to undo them. Did I miss opportunities to work on role locks, or did it happen without me being aware of it? This is the end of this story, with some new questions, of which this was one, arising to balance the answers. Some people call it exploration... Anybody else?

-Katarina Billman

ATTENTION AS A SYSTEM

"Everyone knows what attention is. It is the taking possession of the mind, in clear and vivid form, of one out of

what seem several simultaneously possible objects or trains of thought” (James, 1890).

Previous Newsletter articles have addressed both attunement and attachment in relation to SCT theory. In these, the connections between the systems constructs of survival, development, and transformation have been plotted against the development of attachment style, and the undergirding of that style, attunement. This article looks at a third variable, attention, as the foundation of attunement. In simple terms, it is arguable that attachment requires attunement and that attunement requires attention.

SCT's basic skeleton for any human living system “defines a hierarchy of isomorphic systems that are **energy-organizing, goal-directed, and self-correcting** (Agazarian, 1997, p.18). By employing this definition we can readily see that attention itself is among the subsystems of central nervous system activity. Importantly then, attention is both a noun and a verb, process and product.

Attention As Energy-Organizing

As James' definition shows, attention involves some aspect of both intention, and thereby direction, of an individual's stream of consciousness. A variety of attentional models have emerged since the 1970's coincident with the dawn of more cognitively based therapies (See especially Posner, 1975). Kahneman's (1975) limited capacity model of attention added arousal to the mix as a necessary component of attentional activation and deployment. Capacity theory (Kahneman, 1973) identifies attention with effort. That is, attention is seen as work, and work as we all know, requires energy.

More recently, Olshausen, Anderson, & van Essen (1994) offered a model that is very congruent with SCT. In their neurobiological model, they see attention as a process that modulates *how information flows within the brain* (italics added). In SCT theory, energy and information are intertwined, as can be seen in reviewing the following definition of energy: “The ability to work, which in SCT is defined in terms of the transfer of information in communication transactions (matter/energy) across the boundaries within, between, and among the hierarchy of systems” (Agazarian, 1997, p. 302).

It appears then, that at least part of what gets organized in living human systems is attention itself, which represents raw energy in terms of perception, sensation, memory, and thought. As output, attention spans the hierarchy of cognition from consciousness to unconsciousness, depending on aspects such as arousal and effort.

Attention As Goal-Directed

When we take into account the system goals of survival, growth, and transformation, it is easy to see how attention, as a subsystem is critical for living human systems. Not surprisingly, discussions of the attention system invariably lead to questions about the nature of consciousness, with the mind-body question not far behind. It is well beyond the scope of this article to address any such side bars in depth. Suffice it to say that no theory of consciousness can ignore the role of attention. As Prinz (2004) has noted, “when attention goes, phenomenal experience seems to go with it” (Prinz, 2004, p. 209).

In terms of survival, we know that infants who disattend to their environments fail to thrive. Attentional neglect may of course be reactive to environmental failures, but nevertheless, the infant's inattention must be seen as a factor. Similarly, such basic human behaviors as rooting, crying, and wakefulness can be seen as dependent upon attentional processes for their functionality. Disorders of attention can have severe if not fatal implications for infant development.

Development, too, depends on attention. The simplest connection here is to learning processes. For there to be growth children must be able to gather and hold information. The recent explosion in the prevalence of ADD and ADHD (regardless of opinions as to the ultimate validity of these diagnoses) attest to the criticality of attention in normal development.

What goals then does attention serve? It transmutes the raw material of experience (stimuli, whether internally or externally generated) into the basis for attunement. No attention (from both child and care-giver), no attunement. From there, it's a fairly straightforward leap to contend that without attunement, there will be disordered attachment and the well-described attendant dysfunctions (character disorders, adjustment disorders, depression, anxiety, etc.).

Attention As Self-Correcting

Here's where it gets really interesting, as it seems that self-correction and attention are mutually dependent processes. Living human systems self-correct, per SCT, by discriminating and integrating differences. In obvious ways, this incessant 'compare-and-contrast' function depends on attention. But what makes it self-correcting? Or more pointedly, how does attention serve the integration of energy/information for the system-as-a-whole?

Recent interest in the convergence of psychotherapy and mindfulness (see especially Siegel, 2007) have once again put attention at the center of theoretical discussions in psychology. Studies in “mindfulness based cognitive therapy” (Teasdale, 2004) anticipated this development, as did Jon Kabat-Zinn's (1994) work in the 1990's. While a comparison of these models is beyond the scope of this article, a commonality is worth mentioning: the role of attention in the seemingly anomalous instruction across therapies to attend to experience while simultaneously, per SCT, not taking things “just personally.” Teasdale (2004) offers a telling synthesis, which asks us to move away from what he calls “analytical” self-focus into “experiential” mode. I'm imagining our Buddhist friends nodding in agreement as this principle is well known to meditation practitioners. In research with depressed patients using these two methods, only the experientially focused group saw their depression scores decline. In fact, the reverse happened in the analytic group, i.e., their depression scores actually increased. Hence one of the ways attention can serve self-correction is by directing our consciousness to our actual lived experience. In SCT terms, it can vector our energy towards reality.

Additionally, self-correction can be seen to depend on attention for each of the three basic dimensions of attention itself as identified by Siegel (2007): alerting, orienting, and executive function. Siegel defined alerting as “sustained

attention, vigilance, and alertness that create the ability to enhance and maintain readiness to respond as a preparation for anticipated stimuli” (p.113). Orienting, he saw as “the capacity to specifically select certain information from a variety of options in a process of scanning or selection” (p.113). Lastly, executive attention, he boiled down to “effortful control,” and therein included planning, decision making, error detection, and the regulation of thoughts and feelings among others.

From an SCT perspective, these three dimensions can map onto system goals very directly, i.e., survival requires alerting, development requires orienting and transformation requires the full array of higher executive functions. All three have self-correction elements embedded within them. Alerting allows us to know the critical difference between mother and “not-mother” (a difference identifiable within days for newborns). Orienting allows us to elect persons for attachment purposes who fulfill our basic needs. Executive functions allow us to profit from experience, a characteristic that separates functional from dysfunctional adults.

Conclusion

Thus from an SCT definition of a system, attention appears to meet all three criteria for being a system. Nobel prizes await those who can map the neural circuitry and lay out the three-dimensional attentional hierarchies contained within each of us. For now, we can be content in the knowledge that the deployment of attention that SCT trains us in, e.g., centering, the distraction exercise, looking for comprehensive and

apprehensive information, etc., all represent effective ways of promoting all system goals regardless of our current phase of development.

-Mark Johnson

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THUMBNAIL SKETCHES

A Surprise

I am surprised that I grieve the cutting of the news from the centers. I had not taken in how much satisfaction I received from those fellow training group participants who would jump in the newsletter boat and row with me. I also got satisfaction from the members who said a definitive “no” to my requests. I grieve that it is the ones who waved us out to sea who have prevailed.

-Bettie Banks

Sometimes folks have observations that bring us up short, amuse us, inform us, or touch us in some way. The following observations came out of the conference this fall in York, UK.

Thank you for the good and interesting 5 days we had in York! I’m so pleased that we had such a good and dynamic group. Now, back in Sweden I’m full of energy.

-Solveig Westergren, the OD Group

Usually I’ve done consecutive Foundation groups in York with Susan and then with Yvonne. A few have asked what I thought the difference between them is.

With Susan it’s like being on a passenger train cruising firmly and clearly, maybe without knowing how far you’ve

come.

With Yvonne it’s like being on a roller coaster with unexpected twists and turns.

They both arrive at the same place but the journey feels very different.

-Andy Friis, Foundation Group

And, in case anyone thinks that SCTers are all work and no play...

SCT Training Week; September in York

I hadn’t planned on coming to SCT in York this year, but then I found I wanted to, and I could. Coming back felt like returning to a place which goes back episodically in time through my life, like drilling to take a core sample of mud or ice. I arrived, remembering past arrivals, not knowing how many people I would know, and I found that I knew many. This should not have surprised me, but somehow it did, and I enjoyed it - it felt like coming home, and I had deep pleasure in the feelings of belonging and mutuality that I found.

The sun shone after a damp and dreary British summer and York was golden; the knowledge that autumn was waiting round the corner lent extra luster to the days. There was a sweetness to the experience – the weather, the sense of belonging, the spirit in which work was done – and, as always with sweetness, the need for balancing squirts of lemon or

vinegar to save us from being sick. The large group in particular held the sweet and the sour, and I, among many, could savor both.

There is a particularly cherished tradition associated with this annual conference, and that is that many of the participants go after the day's work to a nearby pub. I didn't like the fact that the choice of pub had changed, but managed to swallow my authority-issue related irritation at this, along with several pints of good English beer, properly described as "bitter." How sweet, a pint of bitter, in the company of friends, after a day of SCT!

-Mike Maher

This submission came from a woman who was inspired by her group's hard work in exploring differences.

Adam and Eve

I.
We connect through the universality of our ass holes:
oblivious to ass hole privacy rules
embracing animal instincts
uninhibited by perverted minds.

Oblivious to shame, judgment, differences.
Unabashedly human bodies
sniff each other's vulnerability
without fear or repulsion.

Visceral, primal, sensual knowing.
Unconditional acceptance.
A sacred trust.

II.
We cover our universal shame:
naked, irreverent ass holes
public property,
invisible only to their owners.

Spoken into existence in hushed tones.
Disgraceful, snickering, profanity.
Restricted access lest curious eyes
explore frontal differences carefully hidden
beneath centuries of fig leaves. Genital
concealment maintained through acceptance
of perpetual mistrust.

-Julie Mallory Church

Then, there are the applications of our learnings, those carefully gleaned bits of growth that give rise to excitement, hope, pleasure and a sense of accomplishment. The following is a poignant tribute to this process.

As John Lay Dying...

My husband called from work to tell me he had just learned that a friend of ours was diagnosed with inoperable liver cancer.

Joel, my husband, had worked with John's wife for several years. In addition to them working together the four of us were building a friendship. John and Marylou lived in the West Village and we live in Gramercy Park, so it was an easy walk from each other's apartments. They, like us, met later in life and we celebrated with them at their wedding.

The news was a shock and saddened us deeply. John was 46 years old. They were determined to do everything within their power to extend his life. They experimented with various Eastern and Western protocols.

Marylou and John called me to ask if I could help. They wanted me to be part of this process and were not sure of the role that would suit their needs. I wanted to remain in the role of John's friend. We agreed.

John and I decided to meet for lunch every Tuesday at a different restaurant in the Village and explore where things would go naturally. Our lunches were filled with conversation about everything, often steering back to the illness and how he was feeling. I, too, shared about myself and our friendship deepened.

Months went by and John became weaker. He became too ill to leave his apartment. I would bring our meal to him. Our conversations and openness continued.

John's condition worsened, he was too weak to speak except to state the most necessary wants and emotions. We both wanted to connect but could no longer rely on words. I told him about my experience with eye contact that I was having in my SCT Training Groups. He was open to the opportunity to connect on a nonverbal level. We started to focus on a feeling that he was experiencing in the moment or a feeling that he wanted to tolerate and learn more about within himself. We would look into each other's eyes, exploring anger, sadness, gratitude, love, frustration, self-soothing.

John had the capacity to make contact. The time that we shared was intensely rich. He was too ill to speak but his ability to connect with eye contact remained strong. He and his wife were able to use this skill and remain connected in the last days of his life.

I feel gratitude for the opportunity to learn and to explore.
I feel grateful for the precious time shared with John.

-Gail Spindell

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For the latest information
on SCTR training
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SYSTEMS-CENTERED® TRAINING PROGRAM

SCT TRAINING OVERVIEW

There is a wide variety of training opportunities at the four levels of training described below, as well as specialty training with SAVI (a communications model) and with SCT applied to couples and organizations.

Systems-centered training combines group work practicum (where you learn by working as a member of a group), and theoretical and technical training. You can learn about SCT by attending training events at the level that matches your interest and resources, i.e., time, energy and money. These training tracks range from exploring SCT to making a commitment to formal training. The approach to training is functional with less emphasis on “checking off” certain experiences and more on mastering the theory, methods, and techniques at each level of training.

Levels of SCT Training: *Exploration, Foundation Training, Intermediate Training, and Advanced Training*

Exploring SCT: For Curious People

In exploring SCT you can attend foundation or specialized training events once or as many times as you find useful. Some find the training group valuable for their own development; others want to learn the theoretical approach well enough to compare it to their own; others use elements of theory and technique in their current practical applications. At this level of participation, you are your own guide, sipping or drinking deeply as your interests and resources permit.

Foundation Training: For Learning SCT

Some people discover enough value in SCT theory and practice to consider making SCT a primary orientation to their work. The Foundation training emphasizes learning to use SCT methods with one’s self and gaining the personal development and training that comes from working in an ongoing training group with sufficient intensity to explore and contain one’s own issues with authority. At a minimum, a training group and some work with theory are foundations for further work in SCT. If you find yourself exploring this shift into more structured training, you should make contact with an SCT Mentor to find out more about the training process.

Intermediate Training

Intermediate training is for those interested in using SCT as their major theoretical orientation and working toward the goal of becoming a licensed systems-centered practitioner. Members apply for Intermediate training experience after having learned to use SCT as a training group member, to understand basic SCT theory, and to

understand and contain the dynamics of their own authority issue. The Intermediate level of training introduces more focus on theory, on the technical skills of SCT, on managing role boundaries, and on containing the dynamics of a system. Intermediate training includes the Intermediate Skills Training, the Intermediate Mentor Training, and the Authority Issue Group. The Skills Training focuses on the technical skills of defense modification in Modules I and II. The Intermediate Mentor Training focuses on the management of oneself in relation to changing roles and contexts. The Authority Issue Group is a training group working the issues of Module III in depth. At the Intermediate level, participants also work in a Theory group and in an ongoing Consultation group in addition to their ongoing training group.

Advanced Training

Advanced training activities emphasize integrating comprehensive and apprehensive knowledge in role, related to goal and context in application settings. One major advanced training track is working as a member of a peer licensing group to build a working group, develop criteria for assessment, and implement a peer assessment process. Joining the Board of Directors is another context for advanced training. An advanced training track is also offered at the annual conference for post-Authority group members and a special advanced training group is offered each summer. Advanced members also work with mentors to develop training opportunities.

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USE OF THE SCT® TRADEMARK

Only licensed practitioners of SCT can call themselves
Systems-Centered anything!

All others call themselves **systems-oriented** and
MUST be careful not to link that nomenclature to
SCT or Systems-Centered.

Anyone who wants to use SCT materials or the terms
SCT or *Systems-Centered*, and who is not licensed, must
apply for a Project License by contacting the trademark
holders, Yvonne Agazarian or Susan Gantt
(in SCTRl Director role).

SCT PROGRAM NOTES

This section contains official information about the evolving SCT training program. In this issue we are focusing on the Intermediate level of SCT training.

ANNOUNCING A NEW THREE-YEAR INTERMEDIATE TRAINING GROUP AT SCT CONFERENCE 2008

SCT Conference 2008 will introduce a new 3-year Intermediate level course combining experiential work with in-depth theory and force field work on the phases of system development (diagnosis, dynamics, driving and restraining forces). Members will be working together for 3 years to develop their capacity to experience and contain the dynamics of system development through the use of SCT skills as members. This experiential work will be the context for in-depth learning about phases of development, and linking phases of development to force fields and research. The group will meet each of the five mornings of the Conference, Monday through Friday, with experiential work before the break followed by theory and force field work. The membership will be closed, allowing the group to experience and study its development over the three years.

This innovation is designed to meet two gaps in our training identified by members and trainers. One is a wish to have an ongoing in-depth training for members who are committed to using SCT as a major tool in their work but who may or may not decide to continue to licensing. A second is to have an ongoing Intermediate level training experience for members who are working at the Intermediate level but have no training group available to them in their area.

The criteria for joining the group is: attendance at all three yearly sessions, a demonstrated ability to work at the Intermediate level experientially, membership in ongoing Theory and Consultation settings (can include phone groups,) and a working knowledge of SCT protocols (the "Gold Sheets") acquired in Intermediate Skills Training.

Since this is a new event, not everyone who is ready at the experiential skill level will have had the Intermediate Skills Training. Some members may be able to arrange to take the Intermediate Skills Training scheduled for York, England in September 2008, or, if there are enough members who need intermediate skills the Trainers Group will work with you to plan an additional Intermediate Skills Training in the USA in the summer of 2008.

The group leaders are Claudia Byram and Joy Luther. If you are interested in joining, contact either Claudia (Claudia.byram@verizon.net or 215-561-0341) or Joy (JoyLuthersoffice@aol.com or 512-343-9609).

CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS (CE'S) FOR SCT TRAINING

SCTRI is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists and offers CE's for psychologists at the Annual Conference and at Core Curriculum training events (Skills, Mentor and Authority Issue training groups). We also seek CE's on a local basis for social workers, mental health counselors, and marriage and family therapists in the area in which the Annual Conference is held. Trainers may also provide CE's for psychologists for training events they lead.

Certificates of attendance can also be obtained for the Annual Conference and Core Curriculum trainings and through individual trainers, with the member submitting these to their professional organization for possible acceptance as CE's.

SCTRI is interested in providing CE's for other professions if members are willing to provide the time, energy, and resources to obtain provider status for offering such credits. If you are interested in further information about obtaining CE's, please contact Dick Ganley, CE Group liaison, at dickganley@aol.com or 610-664-5730.



SCTRI 2008 Conference

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**5-Day Conference:
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SCT[®]RI REPORTS AND UPDATES

SCT[®]RI IN A NUTSHELL: THE ORGANIZATION

SCTRI is a volunteer organization. All roles (except Administrators) are filled with volunteer members who have time, energy and resources for the tasks. Working in an SCTRI Action Group is a learning environment for applying SCT in the service of task goals.

Board of Directors: Sets policy, oversees organizational direction, structure and function. This group meets twice yearly; selects, supports and guides the Director; and is made up of members at the advanced training level and beyond.

Director: Carries the organizational vision and values, oversees implementation, represents the organization to the larger world.

Research Director: Develops the research function with goals of fully integrating research into SCTRI and crossing the boundary to the larger world.

Steering Group: Implements policies and links Action Groups. Selected by and acts with the authority of the Board of Directors between its semi-annual meetings; meets weekly.

System Mentors: Keep an eye on the overall functioning of SCTRI and system-centered training with the goal of maintaining the spirit and values of SCT. Mentors consult to members and Action Groups as needed, and hold the final authority for accepting recommendations for licensing individual members as SCT practitioners.

Action Groups: Small groups of members carrying out specific aspects of the work of SCTRI.

Currently:

- Annual Conference
- Continuing Education
- Curriculum Development
- Electronic Communications/Web
- Fundraising
- Membership
- Newsletter
- Research
- Trainers

Administrators: Carry out organizational tasks under the supervision of the Director and the Steering Group.

STEERING GROUP

Your Steering Group continues to meet weekly to maintain the vision and policies of the organization and oversee the daily operational functioning of SCTRI in between meetings of the Board of Directors. Our agenda is full and our weekly informal research confirms that the work is both satisfying and energy generating.

We are particularly pleased with our work during the past

six months. We have completed the process of getting final IRS approval of our non-profit status, a process that was not without its challenges! One of these challenges was when the IRS sent us a series of questions related to our trademark and whether the organization existed for public and not private gain and a tight deadline to respond to the questions. Needless to say, we passed the IRS test and we now have our legal non-profit status. Our gratitude, in particular, goes to Susan Gantt and Kathy Lum who shouldered the “first responder role” for this task. Indeed, it eventually led us to creating a “first responder” role in the Steering Group, with each of us assuming the role for six months at a time. Through this role, one Steering Group member will be responsible to respond to correspondence or queries that come in between our weekly meetings and to make sure that the issue raised in the correspondence is put on our agenda.

We also are pleased with our increasing ability to do the work on making linkages within our organization so Action Groups are not working redundantly or in isolation from each other. We have established formal linkages with the Research Director and have worked with the Treasurer to clarify the responsibilities of this new role and to begin to establish a working relationship. We continue to meet with the Conference Co-Directors on a monthly basis and have taken an active role in staffing the '09 Conference Co-Directors role. We have also discussed policy issues with the Web and the Membership Action Groups. Such linkage work, coupled with constant discriminations between policy consultation and implementation, has led us to gain more experience in thinking at a vision level. We are excited to see our development in this area. We have also made a commitment to actively train ourselves to maintain the visioning function of the Steering Group by reminding ourselves to look “up and out” to our basic values and the planned future of the organization as we make decisions.

We are very proud of the continual growth and complexity of SCTRI as well as with the attainment of our status as an independent organization. With this growth and development comes increased responsibilities. We are heartened by the energy and dedication with which members continue to come forward and contribute their skills and creativity to the development of SCTRI. We feel the energy of the organization as we work, and it is this energy that builds the platform on which we stand to look up and out.

*-Susan Gantt, Dorothy Gibbons, Joy Luther
& Michael Silverstein*

CONFERENCE 2008

San Francisco here we come! The planning process for the SCT 2008 Annual Conference, April 5-11, is well under way. The Conference Coordinating Group (CCG) has been meeting monthly since June on the last Thursday of the month on the phone bridge. Our goal is to build the structure for the Conference to happen - from vision, to planning, to "C-Day" April 2008, through packing up and passing the torch for Conference '09. We function as an SCT work group with the Co-Directors, Susan Karpenko and Jim Peightel leading us. We've been surviving, developing, having fun, and getting our work done.

Our Program Coordinator, John Straznickas, tells us that our membership has delivered! He has received a full slate of innovative proposals that relate to our Conference theme of "*Building Strategies for Change: Bridging Theory and Practice.*"

In response to participant feedback, our pre-Conference Institutes on April 5 & 6 will continue with a choice of 1-day and 2-day events, facilitating greater participant group cohesion, and further depth of experience. A partial listing of our weekend offerings include a SAVI Intermediate Institute - *Deepening your SAVI Skills: Giving and Receiving Savvy Feedback*, led by Ben Benjamin and Amy Yeager; and *Bodynamics: Muscular Intelligence - Improving Your Centering Skills*, led by Merete Brantbjerg.

Our Friday afternoon workshop will be a dynamic conversation between the audience, Walter Stone, MD, a renowned group psychotherapist and self-psychologist, and Yvonne Agazarian, founder of systems-centered therapy. We will explore different ways of understanding patients' body language. We are also very pleased to welcome Mary Dluhy, MSW, who will be co-leading a workshop with Susan Gantt on "Social Dreaming." Mary is the former director of the National Group Psychotherapy Institute Training Program and Co-Chair of the Annual Meeting of the American Group Psychotherapy Association. She has been instrumental in introducing work with social dreaming in the USA.

We will be continuing our Conference tradition of having a Monday evening Conference community dinner to greet old friends, make new ones and savor some local color and cuisine. This year's event will be a four block walk or cab ride from our hotel at Saha Restaurant, described on its website as "Yemenese Arabic-fusion." Susan Karpenko has personally sampled the fare. It's plentiful and delicious!

The site of our Conference is the Holiday Inn-Golden Gateway Hotel conveniently located in the heart of San Francisco. You can get to many local sites by hopping on a cable car outside the Hotel. By staying at the Conference hotel you will also get a discount on your Conference registration. The local planning group is already active in making sure attendees will know their local neighborhood, and have a range of options for Bay Area adventures during our free Wednesday afternoon. If you've always wanted to visit this beautiful City by the Bay - now's your chance. Please join us for SCT Conference 2008!

-Susan Karpenko & Jim Peightel

CONTINUING EDUCATION

The Northeastern Society for Group Psychotherapy (NSGP) has expressed an interest in continuing to co-sponsor SCTRI events, which will allow us to again provide Continuing Medical Education credits (CME's) for the 2008 SCTRI Conference in San Francisco. As a member of the CE Group, Fran Rapoport, in conjunction with Norma Safransky has spearheaded the grassroots effort, has been pivotal in making this possible. Fran is moving on to do other work for SCT in the local San Francisco area, while Norma has joined the CE Group and will serve as the liaison for CME's with NSGP. Good luck to Fran in her new endeavors! Welcome Norma, we look forward to having you as a member!

In addition, we have worked to clarify the boundaries between the CE Group and the Conference Coordinating Group, recognizing that the Conference Coordinating Group, rather than the CE Group, fills the Conference CE Coordinator and Conference On-site CE Coordinator roles. Coordination of efforts is maintained through having the Conference CE Coordinator attend CE Group meetings. In reality, this is a technical distinction at the moment, as both the Conference CE Coordinator (Jan Quirl) and the On-site CE Coordinator (Tomi Dominguez), are members of the CE Group, although clarifying the boundary has saved energy by reducing ambiguity, contradiction, and redundancy - a good example of SCT norms facilitating our work.

If you are interested in joining a fun group, developing SCT action group skills, volunteering or earning work exchange, and making a meaningful contribution to SCTRI, you may want to consider joining the CE Group. If you want to discuss this, or have any questions regarding CE issues, please feel free to contact me at dickganley@aol.com.

-Dick Ganley

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

In looking back at our last Newsletter report we find that the same projects and processes are still on our agenda: developing curriculum resources for people who don't have training in their immediate area, deepening training resources for intermediate and advanced level members who are not planning to move to licensing and integrating curriculum with other work groups, especially the Trainers and Web groups. We now also want to focus on how to integrate into the skills-building curriculum the skills for building a systems-centered system, which becomes the environment for work. This is the major leading edge for our training identified from the work of recent Licensing Groups. (The work of each Licensing Group is self-correcting for the system-as-a-whole, providing feedback about areas of strength and weakness in our training.)

We invite those of you who have experience in SCT and ideas about curriculum to join us! This is an opportunity to contribute to building the training system we all work in.

-Claudia Byram, Fran Carter, Susan Gantt, Dorothy Gibbons & Eileen Jones

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS _____

We welcome writers! Thinkers! People with feedback for the Website!

The Website is in another transition as we install new underlying organization and programming that make us more robust and flexible. Soon (perhaps by the time this Newsletter is published), sections of the Website will be able to be easily edited, developed and updated by the “owners” of that section. That means for example, the Organizational Development interest group will be able to have its own section of the site to develop and speak to organizational consultants; the SCTRI Curriculum Development Group will have direct access to editing and updating information on SCT training curricula, and so on. As a volunteer organization, with energy for work and change coming from the bottom up, putting members and Action Groups in charge of the Website is an exciting tool for development – even transformation! We hope you will join us in the months to come!

*-Claudia Byram, Rowena Davis, Lucy Fine, Sally Kleyn,
Roelof Langman, Kathy Lum, Jan Roggeveen
& Michael Silverstein*

FUNDRAISING _____

Joy Luther, a long term dedicated member of our group, is unfortunately leaving us to direct her energy towards other objectives. We are, however, very grateful to her for all the contributions she has made towards the group and its goals.

We keep clarifying the different contexts in SCTRI that can benefit from fundraising, as we consider our past, present and future needs. On behalf of the Board of Directors we are developing various informed and realistic fundraising strategies for the growth and development of our organization. We received \$500 in seed money from a generous donor to assist in raising funds to help support the Website. The money was used to purchase 100 handsome tote bags with the SCT Website address on them. They are being sold for \$12 each. The full amount of \$1,200 will go towards the Website. We are now in the process of finding appropriate grants for research as well as for community outreach.

- Verena Murphy, Jim Peightel, Elaine Pratt & Jan Vadell

SUMMIT MEETING - MAY 2007 _____

SCTRI's most recent Summit Meeting took place on the phone bridge on Tuesday, May 15. The Summit Meeting is hosted twice a year by the Steering Group and is an opportunity for all SCT training groups, interest groups, Action Groups and regional centers to send representatives to functionally subgroup around the leading-edge work and exciting discoveries that are being made in the various groups throughout the system. Over the past two years, the Summit has evolved from a meeting in which members are giving reports about their groups to a lively, energizing group where members are exploring together how their groups are putting

SCT theory into practice.

In our most recent meeting in May, we explored the Person/Member boundary and how we use the spontaneity and apprehensive information from our person systems to enhance our member systems so that we are not all “cookie cutter” members. We explored how our personal energy, talents, and apprehensive knowledge contribute to the subgroup and the group-as-a-whole when we align our person system to the goal of the group. We discovered, as we reviewed work from our own training groups and interest groups, that it is often the person who is “stuck” and having difficulty aligning with the group’s goal who is carrying important information for the group. As we explored, we recognized that taking something “personally” is often functional, as it tells us and the larger group that something really matters. But if we take the experience “just personally,” then our intense apprehensive experience (often hatred) can get drowned inside our personal reactivity. When this happens we and the group lose the opportunity to metabolize this experience so that it becomes a source of creative energy for ourselves and the group.

We also discovered that groups also have a “person system” and that a group often regresses to the Authority phase when it takes something just personally. Members of several Licensing Groups, the Newsletter Group and the newly named Reality and Roles in Race and Differences Special Interest Group who were at the meeting recognized ways in which these groups had taken corrective feedback from the system just personally. These members also explored how their groups used the energy of their personal frustration in reaction to the feedback to vector them towards their goals. We discussed how all living human systems are energy-organizing, goal-directed, and self-correcting, and if the system receives corrective feedback that feels too different from an outside system, it makes sense that the system would need to re-organize its energy, re-commit to the goal and find a way to self-correct in order to reach that goal. It also makes sense that, just as an individual may get thrown into chaos when faced with a difference that is too different, a group too, experiences the chaos, often going into blame, outrage, depression, or anxiety before getting grounded in its member system.

We explored the importance of attunement in giving members and groups feedback and that the more attuned the person is to the person system of a group as well as to an individual member, the more likely the group or person will be able to integrate the information.

At the end of the meeting, we began an exploration of SCT jargon and how this jargon can arouse an authority issue and can be a barrier to SCTRI communicating with the larger world.

Our next Summit Meeting is Tuesday, December 11 at 10:00 AM EST. The phone bridge number is 1-641-594-7018 PIN 181505#. We hope you or a representative of your group can attend and join our exploration of the exciting things that are happening throughout our SCT community.

-Dorothy Gibbons

SYSTEM MENTORS

The most exciting news from the System Mentor group is the development and transformation of the SCT Practitioner licensing process. This past summer 14 work samples were submitted by Licensing Group V; the next step was evaluation by System Mentors for the degree to which the samples met the criteria set forward by their licensing group. Given the number of samples and the flow of work samples coming up from other Licensing Groups, the System Mentors invited already-licensed SCT Practitioners to join the evaluation team. Four took up the invitation: Susan Cassano, Nina Klebanoff, Larry Ladden, and Susan Lange. Together, this group of eight developed reliability in work sample ratings, divided up the remaining samples and then met to develop overall feedback to the Licensing Group. The exciting part of this step is that as Licensed Group members develop skills and reliability in assessing work samples, this function can move out of the System Mentor role and be held by SCT Practitioners.

As many of you know, each Licensing Group pioneers for the system-as-a-whole. The clear and comprehensive work samples submitted enabled us to give specific leading edge feedback to each member, identifying the focus of continued consultation for development of skills, as well as to see the leading edge for our training-as-a-whole. The work of Licensing Group V highlighted a need for better training in building a systems-centered system and a deeper understanding of applying SCT appropriately in context – specifically, the difference between therapy goals and consultation goals. It is now up to all of us in the system to see how this information can flow back into training and consultation.

The System Mentors would also like to extend a big congratulations to our newly licensed Systems-Centered practitioners: Katarina Billman, Erica Ekedahl, Jim Grund, Attila Grünzeisz, Holly Johnson, Mark Johnson, Dave Schwing, Heather Twomey, and Sven-Eric Viskari, and to all of the licensing groups who have developed the process that enabled this important step!

*-Yvonne Agazarian, Claudia Byram, Fran Carter
& Susan Gantt*

TRAINERS

The Trainers Group has been meeting every two months, and lately has been discussing the recent Conference in Boston as well as looking ahead to our Conference next year. Our tasks include assessing the training experience at the Conference, determining if there are changes or additions for the next Conference, and staffing training roles using criteria. There seems to be a significant desire for a new offering at the Conference, an Intermediate Three Year Training Group (14 members replied on the same day an email was sent out to test the waters of interest in such a group.)

The Trainers Group discriminated the difference between this three-year group and the Intermediate Group that

currently meets mornings at the Conference. This Intermediate Three Year Training Group will be a closed group with the same membership and leadership, meeting Monday through Friday of the Conference, spanning three years. Meeting entire mornings rather than only a section of the morning, the structure of the group will include an experiential session, with the remaining portion spent on force field and phase of development work.

This group is not a replacement for the current Intermediate Group which will continue to be held at the Conference. It is for members who want a cohort group, may not have an ongoing training group context in their geographic area, are heading for the Authority Issues Group but may not be ready, or do not want to go onto licensing but want to continue training. To qualify members must complete Intermediate Skills Training.

We also have been discussing the possibility of matching more experienced trainers with those that are interested in becoming trainers at the Conference. There is interest in further expanding the pool of trainers that could take up training roles at the Conference.

Though our task work can take on momentum and soak up all of our meeting time, we see the value and importance of spending time at the beginning of our meetings sharing innovations that relate to our work as trainers. In hindsight, we sorely miss it when we jump right to the time sensitive issues. On the other hand, when we take the time to share our innovations, we often find ourselves energized and sometimes even more imaginative!

These past meetings we have discussed the recent consultative use of SCT methods and practice taken into hospital settings for doctors and staff. Both Susan Cassano in Austin and Susan Gantt in Atlanta have been active at the local level in their communities. The receptivity at all levels, from support staff to professional staff has been uniquely rewarding. In addition, there are members of local training groups that have voiced interest in observing other local training groups to see how different levels of trainings are reflected in actual experiential work, as well as how different leaders work.

-Rich Armington



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MEMBERS FORUM

This is a community forum for posting announcements on related trainings, personal life events, awards, letters to the Editor, and responses to articles that have appeared in our Newsletter.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF A GREAT LADY: ANNE ALONSO

Anne's legacy to group psychotherapy will be with us for many generations. Anne's legacy will also be with many of us as deeply personal. For all of us who knew of Anne, for all of us who loved her, and for those of us who saw her tenderness as she led her Kleinian group at our SCTRI Conference in Boston, we will remember her with love, gratitude, awe, and respect. She meant so much to so many. Anne died on August 26, 2007 from complications from surgery. She was 73 years old. Let us each take a minute to honor her.

The following question was posed by Norma Safransky on the SCTRI listserv.

Where does praise fall on the SAVI grid?

This response was received from Dan Collison.

This is interesting question that inspired a long reflection on my part. Depending on which meaning of praise and its content, I think praise can be coded as:

Square 4, Individualizing, Personal Information, Current.
Square 4, Individualizing, Personal Opinion / Explanation.
Square 6, Influencing, Opinion.
Square 6, Influencing, Command.
Square 7, Resonating, Inner Feeling.
Square 9, Integrating, Build.

Praise has various purposes depending on context. I speculate that it is perhaps a mammalian instinct that aids one in subgrouping with one's self and with others.

Mammals are creatures that herd (is subgrouping a special type of herding?) and nurture. Mammals are especially nurturing of the young (mammalian young, compared to other species, require lots of care and training before reaching the full potentiality of adulthood.)

"Praise" has several meanings and depending on the meaning and context can be Noise, Yellow Light or Green Light behavior. I think fundamental to all meanings and contexts for praise is that the individual doing the praising is in an existential state of joy.

When one is alone and shouts out, out of joy, perhaps this type of praise is Noise, or perhaps one is resonating (Square 7, Inner Feeling) with one's self.

When one shouts out of joy in a social setting, it is perhaps Yellow Light (Square 4, Individualizing, Personal Information, Current). Ululation is a primitive form of praise -- in terms of content, it states one thing only: "I am so happy!"

The following instances of "praise" really don't have much more information content than ululation and are also Square 4; Individualizing, Personal Information, Current or Resonating Square 7, Inner Feeling, with one's self:

"I'm singing in the rain! Just singing in the rain! What a glorious feeling, I'm happy again!"

"Praise God! I am filled with joy; what has come to pass is surely due to the actions of the Divine." This is perhaps Square 4, Individualizing, Personal Information, Current or Square 4, Personal Opinion, Explanation, or again Resonating Square 7, Inner Feeling, with one's self.

Some other instances of praise are:

"Nice job! In my opinion, that was a superior performance." -- Square 6, Influencing, Opinion

"Nice job. That's the way to do it -- do more of that." -- Square 6, Influencing, Command -- depending on context.

To make it a Green Light expression in a social setting takes a little more risk. Green Light expressions of praise might include:

"Nice jooooob! I am really tickled by how well you did!" -- Square 7, Inner Feeling.

"I am proud of you!" Yiddish has a special word for this sort of praise and pride combined together: "Nachas" which means: pride, joy, pleasure, gratification felt at the accomplishments of loved ones such as children and grandchildren. As in "Oi! That boychik is so smart! Three years old and already he can read! He gives me such nachas!" (www.bubbygram.com) The depth of the feeling of nachas and the praise we give to our young as they learn to walk, etc., once again suggests mammalian instincts for preserving the subgroup.

"Look at what you did! I can see why you are pleased with yourself and that pleases me to see how you feel about that." (This has the feel of a Build, Square 9.)

Among human utterances, praise is almost mammalian in its primitiveness. It signals one's joy to fellows. In terms of human "problem solving" perhaps it signals to fellow humans that one is in a playful mood (with permeable boundaries) a nurturing mood, a triumphant mood or that one is otherwise full of animal spirits, whatever that might entail.

Other animals (e.g., birds) also make utterances to signal other members of the group, but I speculate that only mammals do it out of "joy" and to signal playfulness and triumph.

Many times it implies "Anyone else?" or elicits

unthinking, automatic responses. Think of the shouts of praise that swell from a crowd when an athlete, musician, politician or other performer makes an impressive performance. Think also of psalms of joy and of songs of the joy of being in love. The automaticity of praise also suggests to me how primitive the instinct for praise is.

Interesting to me is that the most ancient/archaic of passages in the Hebrew and Christian Bible (like hearing a passage of Chaucer in the middle of a something written by Dickens) is a song of praise: "Miriam's Song" or "Song of the Sea" (it can be found in Exodus Chapter 15:1-21). The story of the Exodus is of course one of the rallying motifs for Jews (perhaps even the chief one) and is used in Passover rituals, prayers, etc., lest the group forget who it is and from whence it came. The Bible had its origin as the oral tradition of a nomadic, preliterate people; only when they were threatened with dispersion and exile (survival threatened) was it written down and later made canonical, as a way for the group to better preserve itself. "We have escaped our oppressors! We survive as a people! How great!" That this song of praise is the oldest passage, gives us an idea of the value of this heirloom. The care that was taken that it not be lost impresses me.

-Dan Collison

NEW PUBLICATIONS FROM MEMBERS

Gantt, S.P. & Agazarian, Y.M. (2007). Phases of system development in organizational work groups: The systems-centered approach for intervening in context. *Organizational & Social Dynamics*, 7(2), pp. 253-291.

Murphy, V. (2007). *A longitudinal case study on the effectiveness and efficiency in a systems-centered top management team*. Doctoral dissertation, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, OH.

O'Carroll, M. & Park, A. (2007). *Essential mental health nursing skills*. Edinburgh: Elsevier.

GRATITUDE

If you sit still
long enough
you will realize
that you are just an open space

that nothing sticks to you

that all of the positions
you have defended
are merely icebergs
floating in a warm sea

that your whole life
is simply a sand painting
on a beach

and that in fact
what you call yourself
is only a splash of color,
a hairs breadth
away from the waves.

And if you sit
just a little longer
and grasp at nothing,
not even at your own grasping,
there will emerge

Gratitude

singing through every molecule
arranging and rearranging itself
in a dance
that has no limit.

-Michael Robbins

CONGRATULATIONS to our newly licensed System-Centered Practitioners!

**Katarina Billman, Erica Ekedhal, Jim Grund, Attila Grunczeisz,
Holly Johnson, Mark Johnson, David Schwing, Heather Twomey
and Sven-Erik Viskari**

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