

# TCI or Theme-centred interaction

## A model for interaction in groups

When I met training colleagues from other European countries for the first time I was very surprised that the TCI model was so unknown to them. Later I found out that there is also very little English and French literature about this pedagogical model. In Germany on the other hand there is nearly no social or pedagogical training that does not refer to the TCI. And of course there is a huge amount of literature about it – mostly in German.

Here I want to take the opportunity to present to my trainer colleagues some of the basic elements of the TCI which is for me a very helpful model to work with many different kinds of groups.

### 1. Origin

The TCI was developed in the 1960s by Ruth Cohn. She was born in 1912 in Berlin and had to emigrate in 1933 to the USA. After World War II she created together with other famous psychologists (as Carl C. Rogers, Fritz Perls, Alexander Lowen) the humanistic psychology. Later on she was working in the pedagogical field.

The leading idea of this movement was to strengthen and develop the positive resources of everybody and to promote human respect, joint responsibility, creativity and cooperation. This idea became also the guideline for the TCI model.

### 2. The Model

The model is strongly focused on cooperation in groups and teams. It can be used in any kind of learning or working group, at schools, in kindergartens, at university, in business, in political and social organisations, in all kinds of trainings.

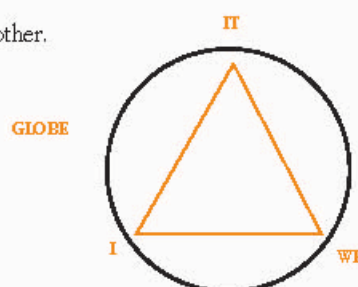
This model is

- a) a help for the perception of team and group processes
- b) a help for the planning of team and group processes
- c) a help in finding out the next concrete steps of action.

In groups always the same 4 basic elements play a very important role:

- the motivation and the mobilisation of the resources of the individual (“I”)
- the interaction in a group: slowing down and speeding up dynamics can be recognized and influenced in a constructive way (“WE”)
- the respective issue as a point to refer to for all persons concerned (“IT”)
- all the factors that influence the organisation in terms of time, of materials, of institutional and social frame work (“GLOBE”)

These 4 elements are closely linked to each other.



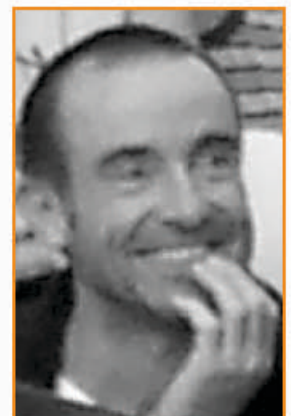
- I** - every involved person with his/her strengths, weaknesses, motivations and the actual condition
- WE** - the dynamic of the group, that is the developing quality of the relations and of the cooperation in the group
- IT** - the task, matter, aim, contents, subject – basically, the reason why a group comes together
- GLOBE** - the environment, framework, basic conditions of the organisation, the political situation

### 3. The dynamic balance

During a longer period (i.e. in a training) none of these 4 basic elements may be neglected, but all of them must be integrated in a process of dynamic balance. It means that a trainer should keep an eye on these 4 elements during the training or seminar.

How can these factors be influenced by the trainer in a constructive way?

by Peter Wicke



To give some examples:

### **“ I ” to strengthen and activate the individual to make visible their resources**

During the preparation the trainer can imagine who is coming in which state of mind and with what kind of circumstances and expectations. How can s/he build a personal bridge for every participant to enter the training?

What will be the trainer's attitude towards the participants (empathy, taking serious, openness)? And how will s/he manage to show this attitude?

The trainer can prepare questions and impulses that support the personal access to the group and the process for every participant.

S/he can offer individual working time (time for thinking and personal notes, work with pictures, symbols or imagination) and working time in pairs and small groups.

### **“ WE “ to support contact and meetings to support the working atmosphere to clear up relations and tensions**

During the preparation the trainer can think about the group, where the participants are in their process (phase of building the group, working abilities, differences, relations, tensions).

S/he can use games and songs, shared activities, joint tasks, work in varying small groups.

Use of group dynamic exercises as feedback or cooperation.

### **“ IT “ to make clear what the common “it” is to work on the common issues and aims**

During the preparation the trainer can make clear: What is my aim? What is my task? What is my supposition about what the participants might want and need? What might be a 'hidden' issue?

S/he should clear up the aims and expectations with the group.

The trainer should give the possibility that all of the participants can find and express their individual access to the topic.

S/he can use speeches, texts and other media.

Use working groups that are directly linked to the issues.

### **“ GLOBE “ to arrange it consciously to take seriously the basic conditions and boundaries**

The trainer must think about the framework of time and space.

S/he should create a good working atmosphere. Is there a seating plan?

He/she should think about the basic conditions of the institution or organisation.

Think about the 'globe' of the participants, where they come from and where they go back to.

#### **Examples:**

Of course many of these elements influence each other, for example working in small groups: this supports the activity and integration of the individual ( “ I “ ) and also the contact in the group ( “ WE “ ). At the same time they are working on a special issue ( “ IT “ ).

The dynamic balance might be disturbed if there is one person speaking for a long time ( “ IT “ ), because there is no integration of the other three elements of that dynamic balance.

If a group is only concerned with itself for a long time ( “ WE “ ) it will get uninteresting because there is no aim, no clear issue, no task ( “ IT “ ).

If you had rainy days and today the sun is shining ( “ GLOBE “ ) you should take it into consideration, to work outside or have longer breaks. Otherwise there might be disturbances in the group.

## **4. TCI as a fundamental attitude**

TCI is not only a training method. It is also an attitude as mentioned above. The central demand of the TCI is a humanistic appreciating attitude towards the involved people and towards the task of a group.

This fundamental attitude leads to two basic postulates that can be seen as guidelines that should lead us as trainers or as participants during the group process:

### **1. Postulate: CHAIRPERSONSHIP**

"Be aware of your inner circumstances and your surrounding. Take every situation as an offer for your decision.  
Take and give how you want – responsible for yourself and the others."

(Everybody has to take his or her own responsibility for their own behaviour in the group. And everybody is free to mention or not, what he or she wants. At the same time everybody is responsible for the group process.)

### **2. Postulate: DISTURBANCES TAKE PRIORITY**

"To ignore disturbances is inhuman and inefficient. It leads to sham work, to insincere relationships and inefficient solutions"



(If you ignore or try to oppress your own disturbances (sleepiness, boredom, hunger, irritation, disagreement) – as a trainer or as participant – they will break through somewhere else. It is inefficient for the group, for the topic and for yourself. Take your own responsibility.)

## 5. Advice for communication

Some additional advice for communication has been worked out during all the years of using and teaching TCI by many trainers, that are based on the postulates. They are no laws or rules that shall regulate communication. They want to be a kind of alleviation for the daily exchange with other people. Experiment with them!

### 1. Speak only for yourself.

Don't talk for others or "the group". Show yourself, take the whole responsibility for what you want to say. Don't hide behind "the group wants to..." or "We want a coffee break!" Others might be inspired to take their own responsibility.

### 2. Don't ask questions - or explain their background.

Of course questions for information are necessary. But often questions are a way to avoid the expression of an opinion. ("Do you really think that... is the best way?") Questions are often suggestive or urging. Your own direct comment might be inspiring for more interaction.

### 3. Side-talks have priority.

They are disturbing and at the same time they are often important. They won't happen if they aren't important for the group process.

Perhaps someone does not dare to speak in front of the whole group. Perhaps there are faster speakers in the group and a person needs more support. Someone might have fallen out of the group process and signals his boredom or misunderstanding that others also might feel.

### 4. Only one person at a time.

No one can listen to more than one person at the same time. Every person has the right to speak and to be heard.

### 5. Be authentic and selective in your communication.

Be conscious what you think and feel and choose what you say and do.

To be authentic means to be in contact with my thoughts and feelings. They give me the information about what I need, wish or should do. But I won't say everything. I will select it in consideration of the kind of relationship that we have, of the topic that we deal with, of the group situation that we have and of the courage that I have at the moment.

### 6. Be aware of your body signals – and of those of the others.

If I learn to listen to body language, my own and that of the others, I get additional information for the exchange and interaction.

Often the body sends its signals already before we speak about something.

And often the voice sends a different message than the body, additional information that I can take into account.

### 7. Express your personal reactions and don't interpret the other person.

Sometimes it feels like it is a good moment for an interpretation of a statement of another person. You will find that they are seldom correct. Often they provoke a defence or an attack or they are an obstacle for the dialogue. On the other hand direct personal reactions, my own thoughts and feelings will lead most times to further activity and support spontaneous interaction.

These words of advice I experience as helpful and challenging in my interaction again and again. But as said above they should not be taken as rules or laws but as an invitation to play.

## 6. End

"I believe that you never can convince a person. You only can express your opinion again and again and create situations in which this opinion can be heard and in which you live authentically according to your own values.

What the other person does with this opinion – that's not under my influence." (Ruth Cohn)

From the very beginning the TCI was a fascinating idea for me. It seemed to be able to include so many different groups and training situations into ONE frame. And it seemed not to neglect the actors, the participants, the trainer, the team, the clients and the training spot. It seemed also to be able to include all my different ideas about training into one big system, into one model.

And through the years I am more and more surprised: IT WORKS !

And it turns out not only to be a good training method but also my position about the "job" of being a trainer changes a lot. Today training is for me not only a job, it is much more. It is turning out to be a kind of living, a way of understanding "the world" and myself and so it's also my way of social and personal development (with the assistance of the TCI). And today I am very happy that I am in this process of lifelong learning and developing together with people.

## 7. Information / references

The most important address concerning the TCI is the website [www.tzi-forum.com](http://www.tzi-forum.com).

The E-mail address is [sekretariat@tzi-forum.com](mailto:sekretariat@tzi-forum.com).

The programme and the guidelines for the TCI diploma are available in German and English.

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(All the translations into English have been made by the author. All mistakes and misunderstandings are his responsibility.)

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