

“The Grid[®] Difference”

A Historical Perspective of Grid Methodology

Written & Delivered by
Rachel McKee

May 31, 2005
Grid User’s Conference
Belfast City, Northern Ireland



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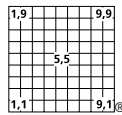
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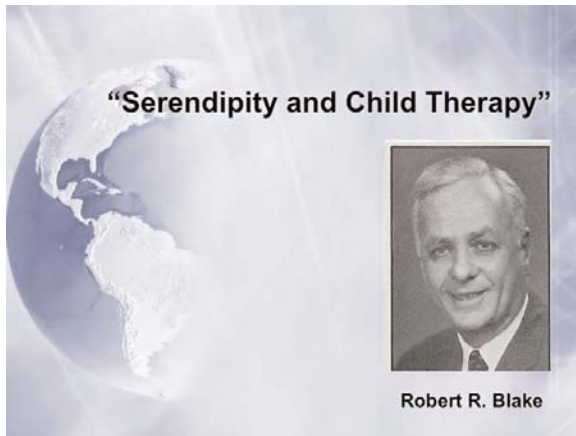
Grid User’s Conference, Belfast City, Northern Ireland



When I was first asked to prepare a presentation on the history of Grid, I started by reviewing Dr. Blake’s autobiography, but it didn’t tell the whole story.

I spent three years writing a book with him that was never published about the childhood origins of Grid Styles. I knew from our work on that book that an experience in 1948 fresh out of graduate school was really the moment of truth that pointed him squarely in the direction of Grid.

And to my knowledge, that story has never been told...



One of Blake’s favorite words was “serendipity” and this experience was just that. It was a very short period of time that triggered a genius-level generalization that he then pursued until his death in the summer of 2004. If you’ve ever been to a Grid Seminar, you know the moment I’m talking about—the moment when people suddenly see their actual behavior in vivid terms, often for the first time. We call this moment “Tipping” in a seminar, and you may be surprised by all of the work that went into creating that key moment. The power to change truly starts with that moment, when emotional doors are opened, allowing the change process to begin.



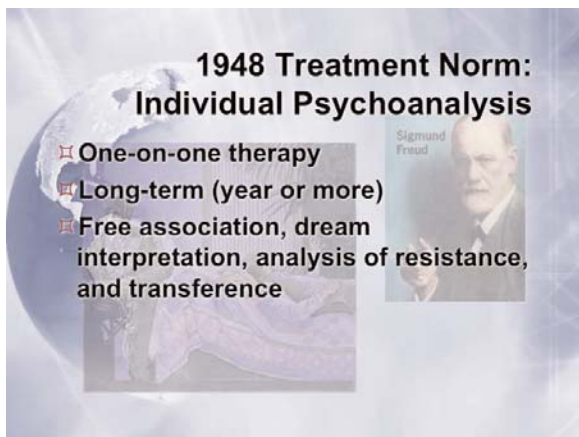
Believe it or not, the insight originated right here in the UK and in child therapy. Wilfred Bion really started it all with his 1948 publication “Experiences in Groups”.¹

In the years following WW II, Bion was an imminent figure in the developing field of psychoanalytic child therapy and Object Relations Therapy. Bion explored a revolutionary notion that the family was the critical unit of change for any child. Therefore, therapy must involve not just the *child*—not even just the child and the *parents*—but ultimately the entire *family unit*.

This notion is so commonplace today, but not in 1948. At that time, the norm for therapy was psychoanalysis.

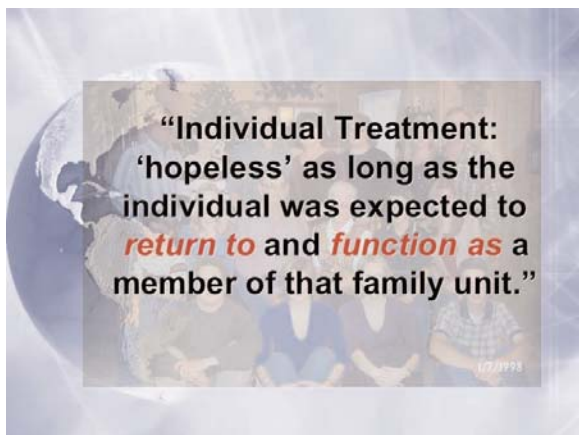
Psychoanalysis involved long-term and intensive, one-on-one therapy with a clinician that included slowly unraveling a person’s problems by interpreting past events.

Psychoanalysis was the norm for the profession, but deep down, Blake knew this was flawed for bringing about lasting change. Everything he had seen up to that point in medical hospitals and university settings reinforced Bion’s assumption about the family being the unit of change.



Blake saw the problems play out over and over again in clinical settings where a patient was removed from his or her family environment for treatment. *Even if* the treatment was successful, it was ultimately created in a vacuum, and was so often quickly undone when the patient left. As Blake put it, individual treatment was “hopeless” as long as the individual was expected to *return to* and *function* as a member of that family unit.

Blake felt that long-term individual psychoanalysis, even though valuable, was impractical for the average person. He also felt the approach ultimately indulged both the therapist and patient. The time and energy spent in psychoanalysis did not merit the Herculean leap that people still had to make, which was “What do I do *now*, when I go home or back to work *now*?”



Not to mention that the psychoanalysis approach created the ultimate dependency relationship on the therapist. The deeper paradigm that Blake wanted to shatter was the “I need you to fix me” mentality of personal change. The power to change fell squarely on the shoulders of the psychiatrist as the person responsible for change. Blake wanted something more realistic and challenging for helping individuals change, and he saw that opportunity in group therapy.

1 Bion, W. R. (1948b). *Experiences in groups, Human Relations, Vols. I-IV, 1948-1951*, Reprinted in “Experiences in Groups” (1961).



Blake also felt that over-emphasis on the past didn't help the person in the moment—in the current, day-in and day-out relationships. He also supported the new group approach of focusing change on "*here-and-now*" behaviors and actions rather than focusing on past events. Unlike one-on-one therapy, group therapy "cut to the chase" so to speak. Group therapy explored problems in "real time" by addressing the behaviors as they occurred.

This new concept of Group therapy was born during WW II when shell-shocked soldiers started arriving in England by the trainload requiring treatment. Because of the sheer numbers, therapists had no choice but treat

the soldiers in groups. Necessity being the mother of invention, they soon stumbled on an amazing discovery: when treated in groups, the *group itself* contained more resources for effective therapy than individual therapy typically achieved. Change happened more rapidly, and with more personal conviction.



When the UK shifted to socialized medicine after the war, London's Tavistock Clinic enjoyed new opportunities for research in group therapy, and it was to Tavistock that Blake received an 18-month Fulbright Scholarship in 1948. The serendipity happened during these 18-months at Tavistock. He found himself at the right place at the right time for igniting his lifelong passion.

Blake worked as a co-therapist with Henry Ezriel conducting rigorous therapy with groups, some remaining intact for a year or more. Along with Bion, Blake also had the opportunity to work directly with John Bowlby (the father of attachment theory), and Melanie Klein, another prestigious clinician researching object relations therapy in children.

Ezriel and Blake explored the impact of power and authority on groups. The therapist traditionally represents an authority figure expected to "prescribe and guide" patients through treatment. But Ezriel and Blake challenged this notion. They deliberately *limited* their guidance and then explored the "unconscious group tensions" that developed. Over time, common experiences (the lack of guidance) emerged as common patterns of behavior.

Blake was captivated by the model of group behaviors that Bion had defined. The results he achieved with Ezriel completely aligned with Bion's model, and later aligned (as you will see) with Blake and Mouton's Grid theory.

Bion's Group Model

- **Dependency** (1,9): reacting with *dependency* when the authority figure is seen as a *nurturer*
- **Fight** (9,1): reacting with *resentment* when the authority figure is seen as *enemy*



- **Flight (1,1):** *move away* when the authority figure is seen as *worthless*
- **Pairing (5,5):** *pairing* with another person when both are threatened and *mutual support* is needed

All four styles are unrealistic. In each, individual reacts to “*force*” the therapist into a role of “*fixing*” the group. (The therapist is an “object” that must be manipulated).

Eventually, groups give up on manipulating the therapist and begin experimenting with managing their own course. This is the “Work” group style, and this is when genuine insight and change begins. The ultimate goal of the therapy is to *completely transfer* the responsibility for treatment *into the group itself*.

- **Work (9,9):**
 - assuming a work orientation based on the *here and now reality* of what’s going on
 - this is the point where every group starts helping itself

These sessions stimulated the first generalization about the *organization* being the unit of change. He saw the implications for bringing this power to change into an organization so that every person at every level could truly experience this “work” orientation.

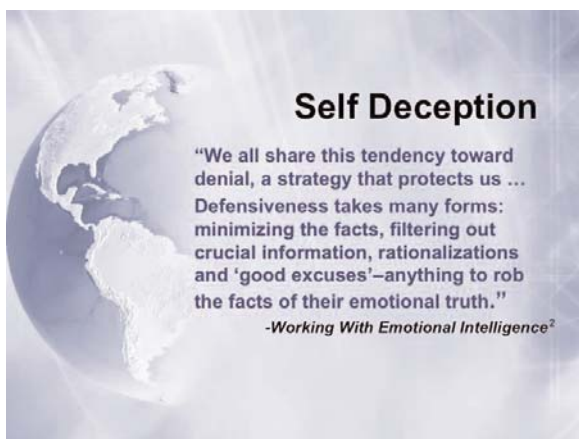
“The longest night at Tavistock...”

Dr. Blake was also a great storyteller. He told me a story about a memorable patient with an extreme win/lose “Fight” reaction. The patient told Ezriel that if he did not help the group, he would kill himself. Blake said Ezriel maintained his role of not being helpful, without fail. This infuriated the patient, who stormed out of the group. Ezriel had called the man’s bluff, and held the tension, not giving in.

This was by far the most exciting form of treatment that Blake had ever seen attempted by a clinician, and it amazed him even more after a sleepless night when the man showed up the next morning ready to work in his group. This event and many like it during those months thrilled Blake. For the first time he saw genuine potential for meaningful and lasting treatment.

Another critical learning point for Blake from Tavistock was how *self-deception* played out in groups compared to one-on-one therapy. They knew that individuals are often blind to their own unsound behaviors, which creates a strong *resistance* to change.

Furthermore, they knew that individuals *rejected* self-awareness when *imposed* by a therapist, but experience profound *motivation* to change when awareness came from within the group. Blake also knew that

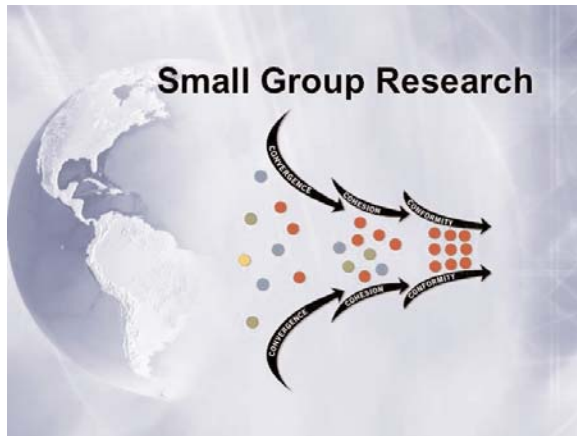


2 Goleman, Daniel. *Working With Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Bantam Books, 2000, p. 64-65.

within-group awareness meant that ongoing support was more likely when group members comprised “units” of change. (a family, coworkers, etc.)

So, Blake saw great potential for using group dynamics to harness change. He did not yet know *how*, but spent the next 40 years exploring how through rigorous research and application. He never experienced a more respected model for research than the Tavistock Clinic, and always used that UK model as the benchmark for sound research methods.

Most of you will this graphic below from *The Power to Change* which depicts the forces of group dynamics.



Another major influence on Grid OD was small group and inter-group research. Blake and Mouton explored three primary issues related to group dynamics.

The first was that group *relationships* greatly influence individual motivation, perception, and action.

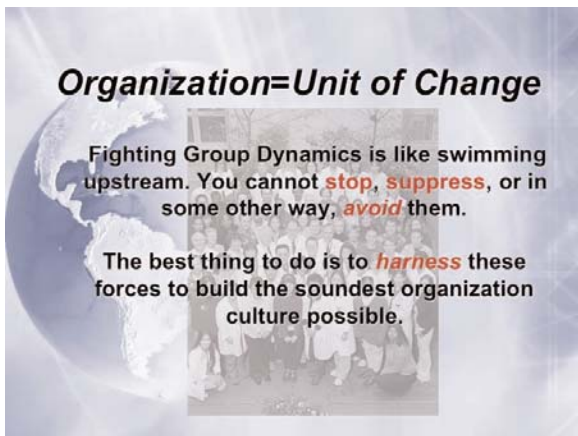
The second was that group members *conform* to behaviors more strongly when *competing* with other groups. Reinforcing their continued interest in power and authority, Blake and Mouton explored win/lose power struggles within and between groups.

The third influence was the idea that “super-ordinate goals” (a shared goal) between groups was the most compelling way to harness efforts away from conflict and toward a shared solution.

The group dynamics research proved to Blake and Mouton that, like the family, the *organization* was truly the unit of change for any individual expected to function as a part of that organization. Their research proved that organizations were not simply a collection of individuals, but a powerful unit of change. These dynamics represent a more highly organized, often invisible, *culture* that compels powerful uniformities of behavior, including “hidden” forces like convergence, cohesion, and conformity.



These group dynamics are simply a fact of life. Fighting them is like swimming upstream, and when you try, the difficulty increases exponentially. You cannot stop, suppress, or in some other way, avoid them. The best thing to do is to generate awareness, manage, and ulti-



at the University of Texas. In 1952 Jane enrolled in one of his classes for her doctoral program. She became his teaching assistant, and his ultimate collaborator.

In 1964, Blake and Mouton's OD work led them to form Scientific Methods, Inc. in Austin, Texas. Jane Mouton shared his passion for rigorous research, and with a Master's degree in mathematics, she became the driving force in their instrumented design work.

T-Groups: A Revolutionary Approach



mately *harness* these forces to build the soundest organization culture possible.

Blake spent 10 years after Tavistock with The National Training Laboratories in Bethel, Maine, working with T-Groups.

In T-Groups, the facilitator provides some guidance and interpretation, but does not "lead" the group in the traditional sense. The lack of structure and limited trainer involvement provided space for participants to explore behavior and impact.

It was during this time that he also began his collaboration with Jane Mouton. Blake was a tenured professor

While working with NTL, Blake and Mouton began focusing their OD and university research on variations of the T-Group experience. They were searching for a way to shift the power into the group, and T-Groups were the next logical step.

Enthusiasm for T-Groups was tremendous. Corporate leaders began flocking to T-Group sessions at NTL in the 50s and 60s, seeking ways to transfer the learning to the workplace. Blake and Mouton also began offering T-Group classes at the University of Texas that experimented with self-directed groups. These became some of the most popular university classes at that time.

They also began a ten-year worldwide effort with Exxon and other clients during that time, eventually leading Blake to vacate his tenured position at the university.

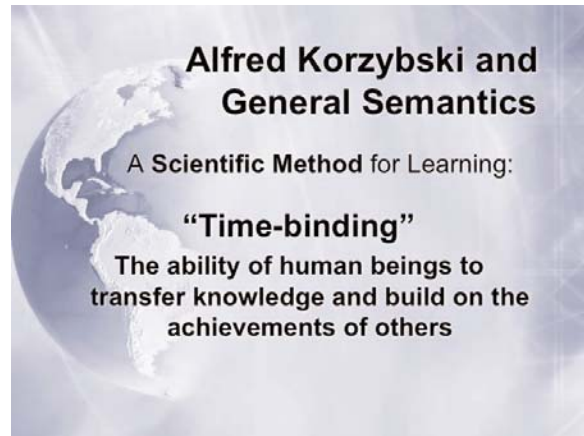
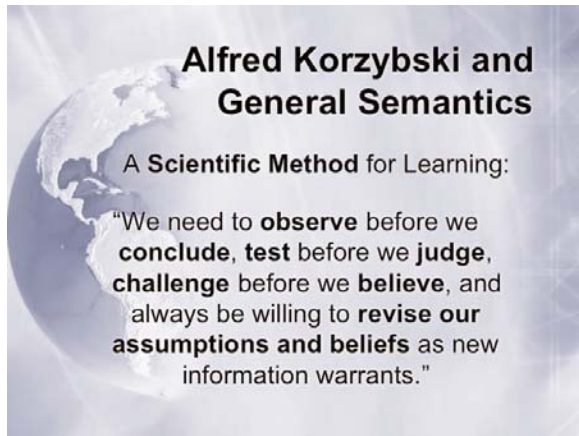
General Semantics

General Semantics was another key influence on Grid OD.

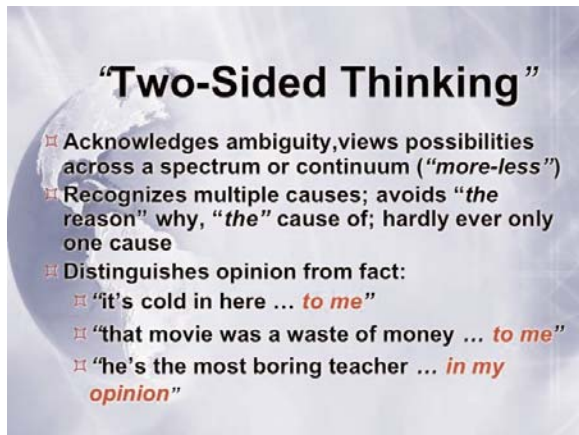
General Semantics, developed by Alfred Korzybski, proposed using a "scientific method" for thinking and learning by continually *challenging* assumptions and beliefs and *revising* them as new facts and data warrant. You can see how the statement on this graphic captures the "9,9" spirit in a perfectly encapsulated form.

Blake and Mouton appreciated two aspects of general semantics in particular, that of *time-binding* and *two-sided thinking*.

Time binding is the unique ability of humans to build on the achievements of previous generations to expand learning and understanding. Language and writing serve as the ultimate tools for time binding, and



that influence can be seen in how prolific Bob and Jane were about publishing, and “offering” their work for continuous improvement. They published over 350 books and articles in their careers.

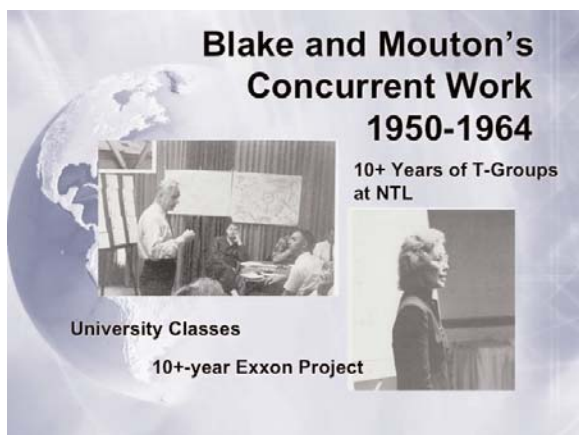


Two-Sided thinking acknowledges ambiguity in the reasons for differences. It views possible causes across a spectrum or continuum (depicted as scales in Grid designs), rather than being satisfied with black/white reasoning.

There's a gut level reaction in people to avoid conflict by quickly assessing differences in black and white terms and entrenching assumptions instead of exploring differences objectively. The fear of conflict and self-deception work together in groups to create seemingly insurmountable win/lose barriers to two-sided thinking.

Two-Sided thinking was the perfect companion to Bob and Jane's fascination with power and authority in groups. They saw power and authority as absolutely critical to group behavior, and they saw an inability to consider differences objectively as a key barrier to achieving 9,9. Blake and Mouton knew that any attempt at creating the “work” mentality would have to involve instilling two-sided thinking into any work group.

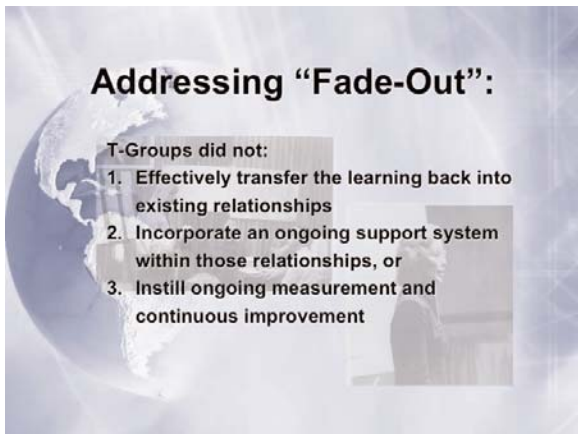
General Semantics is also what ultimately led to the development of instrumented team learning, or synergy, the learning methodology underpinning Grid OD.



In the years that followed those insights at Tavistock, Blake and Mouton embarked on a rigorous journey. They sought to do what no one thought could be done—to create a structured learning process, apparently *without* structure, or at least without the traditional expert-student structure.

Those years of research and the T-Group experience solidified two fundamental assumptions for Blake and Mouton. Both assumptions dealt with “fade-out”—the inability to effectively transfer learning back to existing relationships where change was needed. No matter how powerful and enlightening the T-Group learning experi-

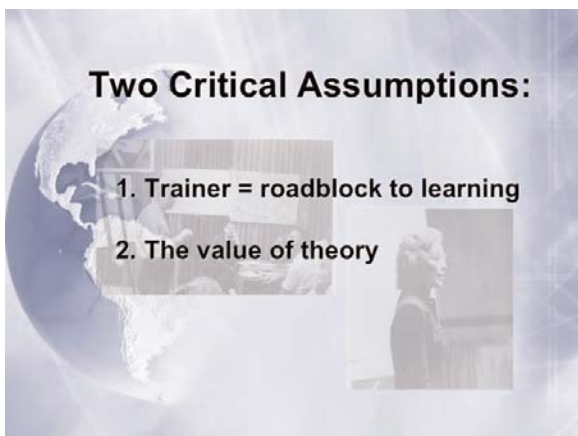
ence was, fade-out prevented meaningful and lasting change from transferring and growing back in the organization.



Like Bion’s assumptions, Blake and Mouton knew that “fade-out” was a severe drawback to any organization change effort.

The first assumption from the T-Group work was that they wanted to recapture the learning created by Ezriel’s sessions. Blake ultimately saw trainers as a roadblock to group members learning for themselves. Members could stop and examine their process when invited to do so by a trainer, but were unable to critique behaviors effectively without guidance.

The bottom line was that Blake and Mouton wanted the authority figure *completely removed* from the group learning process. No matter how non-directive the facilitator tried to be, he or she was still subtly dictatorial, even *more* dictatorial (because of its subtlety) than the harshest CEO, because the control was *hidden*. They wanted to create the same guidance in an objective setting where teams could “discover” and “manage” their own course for change.



The second assumption was that groups needed a way to make “intangible” behaviors more tangible—tangible enough for objective group discussion. Blake had seen Bion’s model come to life in the sessions at Tavistock. He knew that group behavior occurred in consistent patterns, but there was no way to create a shared understanding of those patterns without a tangible

framework. They saw the benefit of theory for “grounding” discussions so each group wouldn’t have to “reinvent the wheel.” A theory would accelerate the learning process by focusing group learning on behaviors without prescribing conclusions about “right” and “wrong” behaviors.

Their convictions regarding theory created a pitched battle with NTL that was never resolved. Blake grew frustrated with the lack of structure in T-Groups. The facilitators gathered 30 minutes before the daily general sessions to discuss what was happening in the groups, and those discussions had no structure. He pushed for developing a conceptual framework for focusing the learning in T-Groups, rather than having trainers use what he termed, “eloquent common sense.”

The sessions kept the trainers at an advantage for “prescribing” solutions rather than giving that power to the groups.

His convictions were so strong that Blake and Mouton ultimately rejected the NTL method as self-serving because it reinforced dependency on outsiders for guidance.



This cleavage with NTL pushed Blake and Mouton to search deeper and deeper to prove their “theory” about using theory. They finally published *The Managerial Grid* in the now famous 1964 Harvard Business Review article, “A Breakthrough in Organization Development.” They followed with the first edition of *The Managerial Grid* book later that year. They published five editions of *The Managerial Grid*, as well as over 40 other books during their three decades of collaboration.

Grid Theory was folded into an organization development process that finally and effectively removed the facilitator or “expert” from the learning process. Blake and Mouton called the learning process “instrumented team learning” or “synergogy.”

The Grid Organization Development process included individual, team, team-to-team, and ultimately culture development, making the entire organization a potential unit of change.

Instrumented Team Learning includes four core learning designs, which I will briefly review.

(TED) Team Effectiveness Design

- Uses prework and tests to establish common theory for “intangible” behaviors
- Measures performance on multiple levels within and across teams
- Creates “Superordinate Goal” for healthy cross-team competition and learning

Found in: Most Grid Seminars, scored activities

(CAD) Clarifying Attitude Design

- Platform for articulating and clarifying personal values and attitudes
- Makes “Intangibles” tangible
- Clarifies “acceptable” behaviors
- Creates shared benchmarks for measuring progress

Found in: Soundest Culture, Team Critique activities

(TMTD) Team Member Teaching Design

- Team members divide and teach each other from written content
- Testing measures teaching and learning performance
- Often includes “role-playing”

Found in: Synergogy Seminar, Manager Preparation Seminar, Medical Leadership Grid Seminar, Cockpit Resource Management

(PJD) Performance Judging Design

- Drives home the value of pre-defined criteria for giving feedback
- Creates “Superordinate” goal between teams
- Provides valuable practice in giving and receiving constructive feedback

Found in: The Grid® for Supervisory Excellence Seminar, HealthCare Grid Seminar, Cockpit Resource Management, Mastering Grid Skills



Dr. Blake wrote in his autobiography that, “Satisfaction from effort comes far more from the processes inherent in teamwork than in its products or achievements.”

The word “driven” does not begin to capture how Bob and Jane felt about furthering Grid. They examined every aspect of relationships through a Grid window, always looking for new insights through which to understand human behavior.

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