

Developing Supporting Groups : a manual for facilitators and participants. Howard Kirschenbaum, Barbara Glaser, University Associates 1978.

Howard Kirschenbaum and Barbara Glaser are co-directors of the National Humanistic Educational Centre in Saratoga Springs, New York. These co-directors have gained extensive experience in leading seminars and conducting workshops on humanistic education and parent education amongst other things. The book is published by University Associates Publishers and Consultants, who engage in international publishing and consulting in the areas of human relations training, research and education.

The book — Developing Support Groups — is a manual for both facilitators and group participants. It emphasises an experiential learning approach to education and utilizes many learning-by-doing techniques which have been shown to result in positive growth for participants.

The manual presents a very structured logical approach to initiating and maintaining a professional support group. 'A professional support group is by definition a small group of professionals with a common area of interest who meet periodically to learn together and to support one another in their ongoing professional development'.

The term embraces groups that get together to accomplish a task, to improve the theoretical knowledge and to gain insights into other ways of executing a task. The professional support group facilitates and develops the maintenance function of a group and also aims at securing long term stability in the group. The book recognizes the long term aspect of support group needs and a group's rate of development, although its principle focus is on the 'How' of professional support group development.

The information presented by the authors is simply stated and gives the impression of superficiality but this is not the case. The great value of the manual lies in its simple and easy-to-read style of presentation. The style used does however often obscure the depth and importance of the aspects dealt with.

A related shortcoming is the span and variety of type of professional backgrounds which the book tries to cover. Its applicability is broad and

examples used in the book are varied but do not involve any military examples which would endear a military profession to think it of value in this milieu. It is therefore left up to the interpretation of the military reader of the book to identify and make the information given relevant to the military situation. The suggestions made in the book are pertinent to effectivity within a military context.

The manual, although recognizing certain personal skills of support group participants, does not deal with them. However, although it does not teach or deal with these skills, it does supply an appropriate list of books which discuss and develop these skills and abilities ie such as listening skills, decision making processes and styles, logical thinking training.

The book itself should be read in toto. It presents simply and logically the process by which a group develops. Points which are often taken for granted and which both hamper the maintenance function and hide the deeper functions of groups, are stressed. The chapters all have significant relevance for the effective functioning of a group and should be read as aspects which must be accented for group effectivity and successful development. The manual is practically written and does not delve into any single theories.

A letter, quoted by the authors, which justifies the effectivity of the methods explained in the manual should serve to confirm the usefulness of reading and using this publication : 'Because I am an independent consultant, the professional support group provides me with a unique opportunity to have a 'staff meeting' for my one-person organization. I have utilized the group to solve problems I was having with my business, to provide feedback on new consulting approaches, and to stretch my professional thinking.

In looking back at the past two years of my participation in the professional support group, I am quite pleased to realize that my initial hopes have been far surpassed. The support group has been an arena for limit-stretching creativity, presentation of exciting new ideas, honest sharing of professional questions and concerns, sincere personal caring among the members, and lots of laughter. A nice, and somewhat unexpected, fringe benefit of participating in this professional support group has been the development and nurturing of some wonderful personal friendships.

I have left each meeting with a good warm feeling

of a night filled with learning in a caring atmosphere.

I have really appreciated the capacity of our support group to look critically at issues and at our own functioning without resorting to destructive criticism. This has provided me with several models for intellectual honesty, group self-evaluation, and personal feedback.

I have experienced more personal growth in this group than in situations geared expressly toward personal growth. The group dynamic encourages members to view themselves as extremely capable and resourceful — one of the primary and essential ingredients in any personal-growth strategy.

I like the blend in our group between spontaneity and structure. I look forward to each session's revolving support time. The range of issues in itself has been stimulating — and it has been exciting to see solutions take form. The structured learning sessions have been enlightening — I enjoy learning about new areas, and like the challenge of applying them to my work. The best evaluation of the support group is probably that I am very much looking forward to our third year. It has been exciting to see how we have evolved over time to meet the need/interests of the people in the group. And, I anticipate more of the same in the future.'

LT Colin Leo