Change in Self-Identity in a Management Training Conference

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In this experiment, the amount of feedback (communicated objective public identity—COPI) was systematically varied and was related to responses on questionnaires asking about self-perception.

Three hypotheses were tested: (1) the major hypothesis—the greater the amount of COPI, the greater the change in self-identity; (2) the greater the centrality (importance) of a dimension of self-perception to the subject, the greater the change in his self-identity on that dimension; (3) the lower a person's self-evaluation (or the higher his dissatisfaction) on a dimension of self-perception, the greater the change in his self-identity along that dimension.

The setting for the experiment was a two-week conference in human relations training for 20 middle-management personnel. Questionnaire measurements of self-identity were made at the beginning, half way through, and at the end of the conference. In addition, a follow-up questionnaire was mailed to all participants ten months after the end of the conference to measure the permanence of change in self-identity. Major support for the hypotheses was expected during the second week of the conference (by which time the experimental manipulations had been introduced), with less change for the postconference period and little, if any, change during the first week.

Some support for the first and third hypotheses was found, while there was no support for the second hypothesis.

The research reported in this paper was of an exploratory nature. It attempted to test the effectiveness of a human relations training laboratory and to provide evidence for a theory about self-identity.

A person's conception of himself, or his self-identity, depends partly on what he believes others think of him (his subjective public identity). His subjective public identity is in turn based primarily on perceptions others actually have of him (his objective public identity), which others communicate to him (communicated objective public identity). The causal chain is as follows: objective public identity → com-

municated objective public identity → subjective public identity → self-identity.[1] This does not mean that self-identity exactly reflects objective public identity—the causal chain is complex. For example, not all that others think is communicated, not all that is communicated is heard, nor does all that is heard get accepted. In addition, persons attempt to manage the impressions they desire to make on others. Nevertheless, the perceptions a person has of himself are largely based on perceptions held and communicated by others.

This discussion of the influence of COPI on self-identity deals with the process by which a person's perceptions of himself become congruent with the perceptions held by others. In other words, "Do I see myself as others see me?" In a T Group most feedback consists not only of perceptions of others but also of prescriptions of how the recipient of feedback should behave. How much a person attempts to improve his behavior will depend in part on the direction and amount of change others would like him to take. The essential proposition of this study was that change in self-identity would be influenced by the amount of feedback of both perceptions and prescriptions. This study attempted to manipulate the amount of such feedback. Research into such variables influencing self-identity can be of value both in measuring the effectiveness of different training designs and in giving clues for new methods of training.

Subjects, Research Setting, and Procedure The setting was a two-week conference in human relations training for 20 middle-management employees of a large corporation. The design of the conference consisted mainly of two training groups (T Groups). One of the characteristics of this type of training is greater ease in giving and receiving personal feedback (COPI) than exists in most situations. In addition, the potency of feedback is great because the T-Group experience increases the attraction of members to one another and to the group. Research reported by Festinger (1954) indicates that the more a person is attracted to a

[1] For more complete statements of self-identity theory on which this research was based, see French and Sherwood (1965), Miller (1963), and Sherwood (1962, 1965).

group, the more that group can influence the person's per-
ceptions of his own abilities. The experiment attempted sys-
tematically to vary the COPI received by the subjects.

Data were collected at five points in time: Monday (the
second day of the conference); Friday morning and Friday
afternoon of the first week; Friday of the second week (the
last day of training); and ten months after the conference
ended, to test whether any change in self-identity (SI) was
permanent or whether there was regression to the precon-
ference level. On the second day of the conference, each sub-
ject filled out a questionnaire containing 19 bipolar scales
measuring different dimensions of self-identity (e.g., re-
served, talkative, ability to summarize discussions, and so
on). Respondents indicated their perception of themselves at
the present time (self-identity); and from these 19 scales they
chose four that represented areas of behavior in which they
would personally most like to change by the end of the train-

Table 1.   Data Collection and Procedure

First Week	
Monday—	Self-identity questionnaire: 19 ratings of self-perceptions.
	Subjects chose 4 scales representing behaviors they would most like to change, and rated these 4 on self-evaluation, centrality, job utilization.
Friday Morning—	T-Group members rated each subject on 2 of his chosen scales. On both scales they rated the subject on his present position and the position to which they would like him to move.
Friday Afternoon—	Each subject was given a graphic summary of T-Group members' ratings of him on 1 of his chosen scales.
	Subject met with two other T-Group members to discuss this written feedback and to receive verbal feedback on 1 of his chosen scales which had not been rated by the T-Group members.
	At the end of discussion, the subject again rated himself on the 4 chosen scales.
Second Week	
Friday—	Second administration of self-identity questionnaire.
Ten Months Later—	Third administration of self-identity questionnaire.

ing conference. These four scales were utilized in the experimental conditions described below. For these four *chosen* scales the subjects also indicated: (a) the extent they used the skill on their job (job utilization); (b) satisfaction with their present self-perception (self-evaluation); and (c) how important this behavior was to their total evaluation of themselves (centrality). The data-collection sequence is described in Table 1.

Experimental Conditions Manipulations of COPI that a person receives with respect to a dimension of his self-identity should be reflected by

Table 2.   Characteristics of Experimental Conditions

Conditions	Characteristics of COPI
A	One scale which had previously been chosen as a dimension on which the subject would like to change: —he was rated on this scale by the 9 other T-Group members in terms of present position and prescribed position —these ratings were fed back to him in written form —his behavior on this scale was discussed with two members of his T Group.
B	One scale similarly chosen by the subject: —he was not rated on this scale by T-Group members —his behavior on this scale was discussed with two members of his T Group.
C	One scale similarly chosen by the subject: —he was rated on this scale by the 9 other T-Group members in terms of present position and prescribed position —these ratings were not fed back to him —there was no scheduled discussion of this scale.
D	One scale similarly chosen by the subject: —he was not rated on this scale by T-Group members —there was no scheduled discussion of this scale.
E	The remaining 15 scales: —these scales were not chosen as dimensions on which the subject would like to change —he was not rated on these scales by T-Group members —there were no scheduled discussions of these scales.

Note: The amount of feedback (COPI) was designed to decrease from Condition A through Condition E.

Condition D differed from Condition E only in that D contained a *chosen* scale. It was assumed that for a chosen scale, the subject would more actively seek out feedback (COPI) along this dimension than he would in behavioral areas where he was less committed to change his behavior.

changes in his self-identity along that dimension. Five conditions with different amounts of COPI were produced, varying from Condition A with the greatest amount of COPI to Condition E with the least COPI. For the first four experimental conditions, only *one* dimension of self-identity (measured by one scale) was used for *each* condition. These scales were the ones chosen by each subject from 19 and represented four areas in which he would most like to change. The fifth condition (E) dealt with the 15 scales which were not chosen by the subject. The five experimental conditions are summarized in Table 2.

The amount of COPI in the five conditions was also varied by the assignment of scales to conditions. Rather than randomly assigning the four chosen scales to the four conditions, selection was made so that the scale with the greatest possibility of communicating Objective Public Identity was assigned to Condition A. For example, the scales assigned to Conditions A and C, where participants had to rate present position and prescribed position, were ones that the researchers felt the raters had more information on which to judge

Table 3. Average Change in Self-Identity Scores[a]

Condition	First Week	Second Week	After Conference	Total Change
A—Chosen, rated by others, fed back, discussed	.00	1.30**	.25	1.55**
B—Chosen, discussed	.05	1.26**	.17	1.68**
C—Chosen, rated by others	—.15	1.16**	.37	1.37**
D—Chosen only	.40	.55*	.79*	1.79**
E—Unchosen scales	—	—	.18*	.35**

* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

[a] Units are steps on the seven-point scale used to measure self-identity. A positive score represents an increase in perceived skill and a negative score is a decrease. Since some subjects failed to respond to all scales, the N varies between 19 and 20; therefore, the total-change column does not represent the total change in all cases. For Condition E, the 15 unchosen scales were averaged for each subject, making an N of 20. Data on Condition E were not collected at the end of the first week of the conference. Significance was determined using Fisher's t. Unless differences between means are negative and thus opposite to the expected direction, all tests are one-tailed.

the participant. Of these two scales, the one assigned to Condition A was the one with less disagreement among the raters on the direction of change they wanted for the participant.

Hypotheses and Results

As indicated in Table 3, significant change in the 19 self-identity scores did occur over time. Most change in self-identity took place during the second week of the conference with less change (though still statistically significant for two of the five conditions) for the postconference period. There was no consistent change during the first week of training. While it is not surprising that the second week was the more significant (for it is probably during the second week of two-week T-Group laboratories that most learning takes place, and it was at the end of the first week that the experimental COPI was introduced), it is interesting that change during the first week was so minor and that change after the termination of the conference was comparatively large.[2]

The effects of systematic feedback of COPI on differential amounts of change in self-identity for the five experimental conditions will now be explored.

Hypothesis 1

The greater the amount of COPI, the greater the change in self-identity (SI).

The peer ratings and subgroup discussion that were part of the experimental COPI accounted for only part of the COPI that each subject received during the two-week conference.[3] COPI that was specifically fed back as part of the

[2] What the lack of consistent change in the first week means for a theory of T-Group training is not clear. It may be that what is learned during this time is of a different nature from that which the 19 scales measured, or it may be that certain problems have to be solved in a T Group (e.g., establishing interpersonal trust) before members' behavior can be profitably examined.

One common criticism of T-Group training is that it places the trainee in a "cultural island" and attempts to change his interpersonal behavior without modifying any part of his usual social environment. The critics predict that any change during the training session will be short-lived; since the same social environment exists as before, which may lead to regression back to pretraining behavior. In this study not only did regression fail to occur, but the trainees reported increased change ten months after the training session. (Part of this may have been due to the setting of a level of aspiration by the choice of specific dimensions for behavioral change.)

[3] While there were advantages in using the training conference as a research setting, there was the danger that the experimental manipulation of COPI would be insignificant due to the influence of COPI

research design occurred only for Conditions A and B. What the experiment attempted to do for Conditions C and D was to increase the probability that the subject would accept COPI produced by the other training activities and/or increase the probability that others in the T Group would send COPI during other parts of the training.

As mentioned, it was during the second week of the conference that the greatest effect of the experimental manipulations was expected, and for this time period the scales for Conditions A, B, and C each showed significantly greater change in SI scores than the scale for Condition D ($P=.05$). While this finding is in support of the hypothesis, the fact that the first three conditions did not differ significantly among themselves in the amount of change is not in line with our prediction. This may be due to a lack of sufficiently large differences among A, B, and C in the amount of COPI. But we have no independent measure to determine exactly how much COPI was produced in each condition.

Condition E, which contained the least amount of feedback, showed less change than the other four conditions for the total time period ($P=.01$). While this finding is in line with the first hypothesis as being due to differential amounts of feedback between the first four and the fifth conditions, it is also possible that the difference is due to a greater willingness on the part of the participant to change on these first four scales. After all, these were the scales chosen by the participant as the ones on which he would most like to change during the conference.

Considering the small number of subjects in this study and the possibility that the effects of the experimental manipulations could have been swamped by COPI from other parts of the training, it can be concluded that weak support was found for the hypothesis that change in SI is influenced by COPI. It was during the second time period that most change was

from other parts of the training. Since the 19 scales (and therefore the experimentally induced COPI) represent many of the same behavioral skills that are central to T-Group training, there was the chance that any differences in self-identity that the experimental COPI produced would be overshadowed by COPI produced by other parts of the training procedure.

expected, and it was in that period that most of the change in self-identity occurred.

Some attributes of self-identity are more important in the person's overall self-evaluation than are others. *Centrality* is used to describe the relative influence which different dimensions of behavior have in the person's evaluation of himself.

Hypothesis 2 The greater the centrality of a dimension to the subject, the greater the change in his self-identity along that dimension.

Centrality was measured in two ways. First, the subject indicated how important the scale was to his total self-evaluation, and second, how important the scale was to his job.

This second hypothesis was not supported. Using both measures of centrality and testing change in all three time periods, there was no greater change in self-identity for those individuals who marked the dimension as very central to their self-identity as compared with those who felt it was less central. The only trend that does come out (but it does not reach significance) is during the second week of the conference, where more change occurs for those individuals who saw the dimension as less central to their self-identity. This leads to an interesting post hoc suggestion that in a training conference, people might be more willing to explore new behavior in those areas where failure would not be so threatening to self-esteem.

Hypothesis 3 The lower a person's self-evaluation on a dimension, the greater the change in his self-identity along that dimension.

The hypothesis might also read: the greater the dissatisfaction with one's present self-perception, the greater the change in that perception. The principal support for the hypothesis was expected for the second time period with less, if any, support for the periods preceding and following.

Within each experimental condition subjects were divided into two groups: a "low self-evaluation" group of those who indicated low satisfaction, and a "high self-evaluation" group, containing those who indicated high satisfaction with their present self-perceptions. Average changes in self-identity were computed for each group of subjects.

As predicted, no significant support was found for the hy-

pothesis in the first or third time periods. Support occurred during the second week, where it was found that the lower a person's self-evaluation on a dimension, the more he changed his self-identity along that dimension. Significance levels for difference between low self-evaluation and high self-evaluation subjects were .10, .001, .025, and .10 for Conditions A through D respectively. It might be the case that one of the functions of initial meetings of a T Group is to increase the dissatisfaction of members with their present behavior by showing that attitudes and skills that had been accepted up to this point are not adequate to cope with problems that must be solved in the T Group. Perhaps it is during the second week of training that the strongest forces for change are felt.

In conclusion, our results give some support to the proposition that a person's self-identity is influenced by the opinions that others have of him which they communicate to him and that the more that is communicated, the more change there is in self-identity. The data also suggest that the state of the individual plays a part as well—for the more he is dissatisfied with his present self-perceptions, the more likely he is to change them.

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ENCORE *I am resolved to let the world of affairs break its neck rather than twist my faith to serve it.*
—MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE *(1533-1592).*