



Sensitivity Training – An Introduction to Concept

Prof. Minal M. Nistane

Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies, Prof. Ram Meghe Institute of technology & research, Badnera-Amravati, Maharashtra, INDIA

ABSTRACT

Sensitivity training is often offered by organizations and agencies as a way for members of a given community to learn how to better understand and appreciate the differences in other people. It asks training participants to put themselves into another person's place in hopes that they will be able to better relate to others who are different than they are. Sensitivity training often specifically addresses concerns such as gender sensitivity, multicultural sensitivity, and sensitivity toward those who are disabled in some way. The goal in this type of training is more oriented toward growth on an individual level. Sensitivity training can also be used to study and enhance group relations, i.e., how groups are formed and how members interact within those groups.

Keywords-- (Sensitivity training, organization development, training & development)

Some people never understand why they feel and act as they do and how the others feel about them. Some people are insensitive to the effects of their behaviour upon others and their orders upon subordinates. Laboratory training helps such people to understand the impact of their behaviour on others. Most of the people concentrate on what they are going to say rather than what the others are saying. This training develops the communication skills of the employers and develops them as good listeners. It also helps the participations to form into informal groups and teams and work more effectively.

The origins of sensitivity training can be traced as far back as 1914, when J.L. Moreno created "psychodrama," a forerunner of the group encounter (and sensitivity-training) movement. This concept was expanded on later by Kurt Lewin, a gestalt psychologist from central Europe, who is credited with organizing and leading the first T-group (training group) in 1946. Lewin offered a summer workshop in human relations in New Britain, Connecticut. The T-group itself was formed quite by accident, when workshop participants were invited to attend a staff-planning meeting and offer feedback. The results were fruitful in helping to understand individual and group behavior.

Based on this success, Lewin and colleagues Ronald Lippitt, Leland Bradford, and Kenneth D. Benne formed the National Training Laboratories in Bethel, Maine, in 1947 and named the new process sensitivity training. Lewin's T-group was the model on which most sensitivity training at the National Training Laboratories (NTL) was based during the 1940s and early 1950s. The focus of this first group was on the way people interact as they are becoming a group. The NTL founders' primary motivation was to help understand group processes and use the new field of group dynamics, to teach people how to function better within groups. By attending training at an offsite venue, the NTL provided a way for people to remove themselves from their everyday existence and spend two to three weeks undergoing training, thus minimizing the chances that they would immediately fall into old habits before the training truly had time to benefit its students. During this time, the NTL and other sensitivity-training programs

I. INTRODUCTION

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The most commonly used OD intervention is sensitivity training. It is also called laboratory training as it is conducted by creating an experimental laboratory situation in which employees are brought together, in group, to interact in an unstructured environment. The members are encouraged to interact with new members and new individual behaviors.

were new and experimental. Eventually, NTL became a nonprofit organization with headquarters in Washington, D.C. and a network of several hundred professionals across the globe, mostly based in universities.

During the mid-1950s and early 1960s, sensitivity training found a place for itself, and the various methods of training were somewhat consolidated. The T-group was firmly entrenched in the training process, variously referred to as encounter groups, human relations training, or study groups. However, the approach to sensitivity training during this time shifted from that of social psychology to clinical psychology. Training began to focus more on interpersonal interaction between individuals than on the organizational and community formation process, and with this focus took on a more therapeutic quality. By the late 1950s, two distinct camps had been formed—those focusing on organizational skills, and those focusing on personal growth. The latter was viewed more skeptically by businesses, at least as far as profits were concerned, because it constituted a significant investment in an individual without necessarily an eye toward the good of the corporation. Thus, trainers who concentrated on vocational and organizational skills were more likely to be courted by industry for their services; sensitivity trainers more focused on personal growth were sought by individuals looking for more meaningful and enriching lives.

During the 1960s, new people and organizations joined the movement, bringing about change and expansion. The sensitivity-training movement had arrived as more than just a human relations study, but as a cultural force, in part due to the welcoming characteristics of 1960s society. This social phenomenon was able to address the unfilled needs of many members in society, and thus gained force as a social movement. The dichotomy between approaches, however, continued into the 1960s, when the organizational approach to sensitivity training continued to focus on the needs of corporate personnel.

The late 1960s and 1970s witnessed a decline in the use of sensitivity training and encounters, which had been transformed from ends in themselves into traditional therapy and training techniques, or simply phased out completely. Though no longer a movement of the scale witnessed during the 1960s, sensitivity-training programs are still used by organizations and agencies hoping to enable members of diversified communities and workforces to better coexist and relate to each other.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To explain the concept “Sensitivity Training”.
- To highlight the benefits & multiple organizational outcome from “Sensitivity Training”.
- To help people understand themselves better and to develop specific behavioral skills.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research paper is an attempt of descriptive research, based on mainly secondary data collected from various sources, such as reference books, magazines, journal, & research papers & websites which are sited at the appropriate places related to above.

IV. GOALS OF SENSITIVITY TRAINING

"The ultimate goal of the training is to have intense experiences leading to life-changing insights, at least during the training itself and briefly afterwards.

Sensitivity training was initially designed as a method for teaching more effective work practices within groups and with other people, and focused on three important elements: immediate feedback, here-and-now orientation, and focus on the group process. Personal experience within the group was also important, and sought to make people aware of themselves, how their actions affect others, and how others affect them in turn. Trainers believed it was possible to greatly decrease the number of fixed reactions that occur toward others and to achieve greater social sensitivity. Sensitivity training focuses on being sensitive to and aware of the feelings and attitudes of others.

By the late 1950s another branch of sensitivity training had been formed, placing emphasis on personal relationships and remarks. Whether a training experience will focus on group relationships or personal growth is defined by the parties involved before training begins. Most individuals who volunteer to participate and pay their own way seek more personal growth and interpersonal effectiveness. Those who represent a company, community service program, or some other organization are more likely ready to improve their functioning within a group and/or the organization sponsoring the activity. Some training programs even customize training experiences to meet the needs of specific companies.

V. IN PRACTICE

An integral part of sensitivity training is the sharing, by each member of the group, of his or her own unique perceptions of everyone else present. This, in turn, reveals information about his or her own personal qualities, concerns, emotional issues, and things that he or she has in common with other members of the group. A group's trainer refrains from acting as a group leader or lecturer, attempting instead to clarify the group processes using incidents as examples to clarify general points or provide feedback. The group action, overall, is the goal as well as the process.

Sensitivity training resembles group psychotherapy (and a technique called psychodrama) in many respects, including the exploration of emotions, personality, and relationships at an intense level. Sensitivity training, however, usually restricts its focus to issues that can be reasonably handled within the time

period available. Also, sensitivity training does not include among its objectives therapy of any kind, nor does it pass off trainers/facilitators as healers of any sort. Groups usually focus on here-and-now issues; those that arise within the group setting, as opposed to issues from participants' pasts. Training does not explore the roots of behavior or delve into deeper concepts such as subconscious motives, beliefs, etc.

Sensitivity training seeks to educate its participants and lead to more constructive and beneficial behavior. It regards insight and corrective emotional or behavioral experiences as more important goals than those of genuine therapy. The feedback element of the training helps facilitate this because the participants in a group can identify individuals' purposes, motives, and behavior in certain situations that arise within the group. Group members can help people to learn whether displayed behavior is meaningful and/or effective, and the feedback loop operates continuously, extending the opportunity to learn more appropriate conduct.

Another primary principle of sensitivity training is that of feedback; the breakdown of inhibitions against socially repressed assertion such as frankness and self-expression are expected in place of diplomacy. Encounters that take place during sensitivity training serve to help people practice interpersonal relations to which they are likely not accustomed. The purpose is to help people develop a genuine closeness to each other in a relatively short period of time. Training encounters are not expected to take place without difficulty. Many trainers view the encounter as a confrontation, in which two people meet to see things through each other's eyes and to relate to each other through mutual understanding. There is a difference between the scientific study of group dynamics (a branch of social psychology) and the human relations/group workshop aspect. The popularity of sensitivity training during the 1960s was due in large part to the emotional, experiential aspect. Yet many pragmatic advocates of sensitivity training felt it was necessary to avoid working with the most emotional converts, and conducted experiments in a laboratory in as realistic a situation as could be approximated, seeking a scientific approach more characteristic of psychological studies.

Other programs, not so concerned with the scientific validity of their studies or with freedom from distraction, offer full-time training programs during the day. Participants can choose on their own whether or not to maintain contact with the office for the duration of training. Others offer part-time sessions for several hours a day, and the participants' daily routine is otherwise uninterrupted. Sensitivity-training programs generally last a few days, but some last as many as several weeks.

VI. T-GROUPS

Within most training groups (T-groups), eight to ten people meet with no formal leader, agenda, or books—only a somewhat passive trainer. Trainers do not necessarily direct progress, just help participants to

understand what is happening within the group. In defining a T-group, Robert T. Golembiewski explains the major distinguishing features as follows: "it is a learning laboratory; it focuses on learning how to learn; and it distinctively does so via a 'here-and-now' emphasis on immediate ideas, feelings, and reactions."

The learning takes place within a group's struggle to create something meaningful for itself in an essentially unstructured setting. Issues that traditionally arise in such a setting include developing group norms and cohesion, reasons for scape-goating, selective communication channels, struggles for leadership, and collective decision-making patterns. Power struggles and decision-making conflict are the most prevalent problems as groups work toward establishing an identity and meet individual member needs. More specifically, group members can help each other identify when they are: attempting to control others or, conversely, when they are seeking support; punishing themselves or other group members; withdrawing from the group; trying to change people rather than accepting them; reacting emotionally to a given situation; and ignoring, rather than scrutinizing, behavior between group members.

Ultimately, T-groups were not a tremendously successful part of the sensitivity-training movement. This was in part because T-group trainers do not actually teach, but help people learn by assuming a more passive role. This sometimes confuses and upsets those who expect and desire more guidance. Another reason is that despite the intensity of the learning experience, most participants have difficulty quantifying exactly what they have learned and why it matters.

VII. IN ORGANIZATIONS

Organizational goals appear to be the antithesis of those of sensitivity training. Sensitivity training is fueled on emotional outbursts in group settings, possibly leading to a change in attitude toward another individual. Desired results include more openness, spontaneity, and sensitivity to others. And while organizations are made up of people who interact and could benefit from such training, the goals of an organization are often more related to increased production or higher profit margins than modifying means of interpersonal communication. To make sensitivity training work in organizational settings, the training must be adapted to the goals of the particular organization.

In its orientation as a study of group dynamics, sensitivity training is similar to the general concept of organizational development, a process by which organizations educate themselves in order to achieve better problem-solving capabilities. However, most sensitivity programs do focus on individual behavior within groups, while organizational development focuses on the group and how it works as a whole. Also, sensitivity-training groups are often composed entirely of people who are strangers to each other, while organizational-development programs seek to educate groups of people with shared working histories and

experiences. Finally, the end goals of these training programs differ significantly. Sensitivity training, if successful, leads to self-awareness and insight that will help its participants in all aspects of life (including the work-place). Organizational development places more of its focus on becoming aware of one's role within work-place dynamics, leading to more effective group functioning (one of sensitivity training's goals, but with a more defined group in which to function).

VIII. CONCLUSION

Sensitivity training involves such groupings as -T groups (T for training), encounter groups, laboratory training groups, and human awareness groups are all names usually associated with what is known as

sensitivity training. Sensitivity training is about making people understand about themselves and others reasonably, which is done by developing in them social sensitivity and behavioral flexibility.

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