

# Functional subgrouping

## - a way to facilitate exchange in a group

### **Purpose:**

- to support integration of similarities and differences in a group, through meeting between similarities first and through that interrupt the normal human tendency to polarize between differences
- to open up patterns of isolation through sharing inner states in subgroups

### **Psychomotor exercises:**

Grasp something with your hand, hold it for a while and let it go again. (Choose something that can tolerate falling to the ground). Sense how muscles are working in your forearm when doing all three - grasping, holding and letting go. Try with both hands.

In couples - say hello while shaking hands (grasping). Hold the handshake for a little while (holding). And then let go of the other persons hand (letting go). Notice what happens in you bodily and emotionally in the 3 phases, gripping, holding and letting go - and talk about it afterwards.

Take hold of another persons arm, hand, shirt (grasping), hold the contact for a little while (holding), and then let go of the other again (letting go).

Take hold of yourself, of some part of your body (grasping), hold the contact for a little while (holding) and then let go again (letting go).

Train the transition from grasping, holding and letting go of the other - and grasping, holding and "letting go" of yourself.

### **Functional subgrouping in a group:**

One group member brings in a feeling/experience/inner state. (Grasping and holding). When done he/she looks around in the group and "passes on the ball" by saying for example "Anybody else?" (letting go)

Another group member "catches the ball" (grasping) by:

- Repeat what the person who just spoke brought in - in eye contact, focusing on the essential words in resonance with affect, emotion, depth, tone of voice, energy level, etc.
- Let go of the eye contact - and "grasp" yourself, feel yourself
- Bring in your version - build on what the other brought in, adding your version (holding)
- Look around in the group and "pass on the ball" (letting go) to the group verbally and nonverbally

In this way a subgroup can explore a feeling/emotion/experience/inner state/impulses together. Nobody is supposed to carry an experience alone.

### **How to manage differences?**

Differences are natural and valuable - there will always be different states present in a group at any given time - and also inside one self. We process and grasp what happens to us by going through different reactions - sometimes even polarized reactions. The challenge is

how to make the differences crossfertilize each other so they can be integrated and the system can develop. Functional subgrouping regulates the exchange in a group, so similarities talk to each other first - and differences come in later.

If you are sitting with an emotion/state/experience, that is different from what a subgroup is working with, you have a number of possibilities:

**You can ask** if the group is ready for a difference.

If the subgroup has explored what they are exploring sufficiently, there will typically be a readiness. It will feel like a free choice to shift focus.

**You can wait** with bringing in your difference until you have sense that the other subgroup is finishing. In doing that you train yourself in being in resonance with both your own inner state and where the group is.

**While you are waiting** you can explore, what supports you in including yourself with the difference you are experiencing as an important voice in the group - as important as the aspect being explored in the foreground. If you look at the difference you are experiencing as only yours, it will typically be painful or frustrating to wait.

If you cannot find a way to include yourself with the emotion/state/experience you are having, then **bring in your difference in a short form and ask if there is anybody else** sitting with something similar. Others can answer by raising their hands. The subgroup formed this way can stay in roaming eyecontact, while the other subgroup is finishing it's exploration. Through this process the group is training itself in containing and giving space to differences without having them polarize to each other.

If you are having an emotion/state/experience that you know or feel can easily trigger the experience of isolation in you, use the above described possibility, so you become part of a subgroup which can share the experience nonverbally (and later maybe verbally).

The method and principles described above are sometimes used in Moaiku workshops in their full form - and other times in simpler ways.

The simplest form is to ask others who recognize elements of what a group member brought in, to raise their hands. By doing that a subgroup is made visible - and more people can be part of containing what was brought in.

Another form is to build on the previous speaker without paraphrasing the version the person brought in. You build on each other in a more fluid form.

Which form is used on Moaiku workshops depends on the goal at a given moment. Is the goal to get inner states in circulation in the group? Or is the primary goal that individual group members come in with what they are holding, which sometimes take more words.

Functional subgrouping is a method developed in SCT - Systems Centered Therapy, founded by Yvonne Agazarian. References: Agazarian, Y.M. (2006). Systems-centered practice: Selected papers on group psychotherapy. London: Karnac Book