

How Human Relations Got Its Name: The Journal As Boundary Object

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The Project

This project revises the accepted histories of what are variously termed “soft managerialism”, Organization Development, and Human Relations

Also attempts to revise the history of management ideas and practices per se

Based on newly acquired archival sources

Proposal

Revised understanding of the relationship between Kurt Lewin and the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations.

It was in the post-World War II era that Human Relations came to have the particular work/organizational orientation as it has now .

Boundary Objects

Concept of 'Boundary Objects' (Star and Griesemer 1989, Bowker and Star 1999) used to understand how the journal Human Relations helped in the development of the 'management' field: 'human relations'.

Ability of certain objects/artefacts to act as a **bridge** and facilitate collaboration across diversified groups

The diversified groups belong in **different social worlds**.

How the Boundary Object Works

By creating grounds for collaboration across these worlds, by way of their interpretive flexibility

But no “deep sharing” required

This sharing is possible because of a ‘dual’ identity of the Boundary Object

In addition, ‘boundary-spanning activities, such as face-to-face meetings, visits to each other’s loci of practice, or internships, are necessary to support their role’ (Nicolini et al 2012: page no.)

The main factors

- TIHR (with the Tavistock Publications) and its staff, notably J.R. Rees, E. Jaques [Naming of the Institute](#)
- Research Center for Group Dynamics (at M.I.T) [TIHR-RCGD](#)
- Editorial Committee AND Editorial Advisory Board for the Human Relations journal [EC](#)
- Institute of Human Relations in Yale
- Department of Social Relations at Harvard
- The War [ISS](#)
- British politicians and senior military officers in the British Army
- Foundations and Trusts (Alan Gregg and Elmhirst Trust)
- Mainstream scientific community
- Industrialists and industrial experiments

Central Tension

‘... there is still a considerable amount of resistance in scientific circles to the type of approach of such groups as the Institute of Human Relations, and a lack of appreciation, as yet, by the general community of the potential value of the contributions which the social sciences have to make to society.’

(RFTA (no exact date) REPORT ON INSTITTUE ACTIVITIES) (estimated date Dec. '45-Oct. '46)

How the journal created a shared goal

- War-time context
- Against resistance of mainstream scientific research methodology
- The British and the US Institutes had their own social agenda, but they collaborated [Parallel interests](#)
- There was funding from Rockefeller Foundation (Alan Gregg) and the Elmhirst Trust

How the journal created a shared goal (contd.)

- There was backing from the British politicians and senior military members [BP](#)
- The naming of the journal as 'Human Relations' perceived to be attractive to the industrialists and administrators
- Industrial experiments (as well as War-time experiences) found outlet in the journal : found acceptance in the US and Britain and the Continent
- The policies drawn up by the Tavistock Group for the journal were quintessential [Policies](#)

Outcome

- By the end of 1947, the Institute's work had spread to different industries.
- By May 1948 journal had 'set a new standard for scientific publications in the medico-social field in this country.'
- There has been 'a large number of visitors and requests for training from the continent and the U.S.A.' (1948)
(RA TIHR 1948 401A Tavistock Square Clinic May 1st, 1948 Document no. 139)
- By 1949 there was financial stability and even hope for university recognition [Success](#)
- By 1951 the journal 'reached a steady circulation of over 1200 and is recognised as a focus for serious work in group relations'. But the lion's share of editorial time continued to be given by the TIHR.

Achievement

- ‘It was always appreciated that the Journal of Human Relations, the scientific journal, was a necessary activity not only to establish the status of our work but also to carry as many social scientists as far as possible in our drive towards the development of a more actively therapeutic brand of worker in this field.’ (RA TIHR May 8, 1947 Tavistock Square Clinic 401 A Pg. 4)
- ‘...something has been achieved by the Institute towards the breaking down of the resistance of scientific bodies and the overcoming of public apathy.’ (RFTA (no date) REPORT ON INSTITTUE ACTIVITIES)

Conclusion

The journal Human Relations was not an outcome of the Lewin-circle – TIHR relationship, nor a simple documentation of the organization specific meaning of Human Relations. Rather, it was the journal around which the relationship and the field formed.

Naming of the Institute

Two parallel issues about the naming of TIHR as early as March 1946:

The need for separating the ‘sociatric activities’ from the ‘therapeutic ones’ of the Tavi and in this J. R. Rees suggests to Alan Gregg that after much deliberations they have jointly concluded that the naming of the organisation should be based on a term Gregg had coined

The perception that the name ‘Human Relations’ had obvious advantages in dealing with ‘administrators and industrialists’ and that the term ‘does define the role that we are seeking to play more accurately than any other single phrase.’

(RF TA 1946 14th March 1946 (Letter from Rees to Alan Gregg))

‘...I am inclined to think that the use of the term “Institute of Human Relations” is a sensible one, just as you point out, in its being rather well adapted to dealings with administrators and industrialists and other persons might fail to understand the potentialities that are not too well implied by the word “clinic”. I would also be inclined to think that the term “human relations” is one which will become more current and better understood even though at first it may seem a bit vague and what is sometimes called here “scopy”.

RFTA April 4, 1946 (letter from Alan Gregg to John Rees)

TIHR-RCGD tie-up

The tie-up of the Institute with the Research Center for Group Dynamics at M.I.T,
'employing a similar approach to social problems, presented the opportunity of redoubling the significance of the proposed journal by making it international in character and in content.....each institution agreeing to develop and foster the writer and reader connection in its own hemisphere. It was emphasised on the American side that, whereas a purely British journal has but slight appeal in the United States, an Anglo-American journal in this field would in time find wide support there.'

(Devon: T/S/2/D Other Reports: 15th December 1948, Document No. 169. A)

Recommendations for the journal

An Appreciation Of Developments to Date Of The Quarterly Journal

“Human Relations”

V. Recommendations for Joint Editorship.

Financial and business arrangements : The following arrangements are recommended for considerations by the M.I.T. Group:

- The journal should be printed in England (where paper was rationed) and the required number shipped to the U.S.
- All profits should be shared equally between the two Institutes. Losses for the first year would be guaranteed by the proposed Tavistock Publishing Company.

(RF TA August 10th, 1946 (also Devon: T/S/2/D Other Reports))

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Recommendations for Joint Editorship

'The journal will be run by an Editorial Committee, *or in the case of joint editorship* by an Editorial Committee with an American and a T.I.H.R. section.' (emphasis added by authors).

V. Recommendations for Joint Editorship.

The First Issue : It is requested that, if possible, the M.I.T. group should contribute between two and four articles to the first issue. Further, if possible, the Tavistock group would like very much to see a conceptual article by Lewin as one of the original contributions. **This is just a suggestion**, however, and the selection of American contributions (either from the M.I.T. group or from others) is left entirely to the discretion of the M.I.T. Editorial Committee.

Editorial Committee and Advisory Board : It is recommended that an Editorial Committee be set up within the Research Centre of Group Dynamics at M.I.T., and that an Advisory Board be established. The membership of these Committees is naturally left up to the M.I.T. group, but it would be desirable to be able to announce at least a partial list of American Advisory Board members in the first issue. It is mentioned, for information, that the Tavistock group has had direct working contact during the war years with H.A. Murray, Rensis Likert, J.L. Moreno, and W.C. Menninger, and it would be appreciated if these names were considered when the Advisory Board members were being selected.

(RF TA August 10th, 1946 (also Devon: T/S/2/D Other Reports))

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Editorial Advisory Board

In addition to the Editorial Committee, there will be an Editorial Advisory Board. This board will be an active body, and not the usual “list of names” found on scientific journals. It is intended that the Board should be actively responsible for working out, in discussion with the Editorial Committee, the development of journal policy to keep it in line with the real needs of the field.

The principles of selection of this Board have been as follows:-

- Full professorial status or its equivalent. (This in order to solve certain problems of elimination.)
- A balance between medical and non-medical people in various fields of human relations.
- A personal record of active participation in the development of social science action research.
- A keen interest on the development of the journal.

(RF TA August 10th, 1946 (also Devon: T/S/2/D Other Reports))

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Parallel interests

..... It seemed to me that their interests in developing an integrated approach to the social sciences was very much akin to our own. In view of this I tentatively explored with them the possibility of their assuming joint editorial responsibility with us for “Human Relations”. On my return to England, the Publications Committee felt that such a tieup would be of great value, since it would establish the sort of direct contact with American social science which we very much desired. Detailed proposals for joint editorship were therefore drawn up and sent to Lewin. A copy of these proposals is enclosed. Two days ago we received a cable from Lewin accepting our invitation to edit the journal with us.

RF TA 1946 14 September, 1946 (Letter from Elliott Jaques as Technical Secretary to Alan Gregg)

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British politicians and military officers

The really scientific work of W.O.S.B. has not yet been written up for the scientific reader... In view of what I think you said the other night at Stafford Cripps' flat, do you think it would be a sensible plan if Sutherland and Trist... were asked to do this....If so, it sounds to me as though the Rockefeller Foundation would make a grant for that, and they pretty certainly would if you sent a line about it to Gregg.

..it seems to me that it can only be done by those who have been in it from the beginning like Sutherland and Trist, and will only carry the cachet of scientific validity if it is written by them.As I read it [Gregg] seemed very interested in the possibility of something being written about the inner history of the management of what one might call “resistances” in the army's organisations, but equally interested in the general writing up of a serious scientific record which would be available for the many people in the States, Europe, and elsewhere who want it and are clamouring for it....if you him that you were prepared officially to encourage the records to be written up in this way, he would be quite likely to support it.

December 1945 (Letter from Rees To General Sir Ronald F. Adam)

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Integrated social science

‘..... Similar work to that being attempted by the Institute is already fairly well advanced in the United States. One of the first attempts to integrate the social sciences and relate them to specific community problems was the development of the Institute of Human Relations at Yale University. Another was the Psychological Clinic at Harvard University with its explorations in personality which were of such great value to the British Army social scientists during the War. As a result of war time developments we now find a major emphasis in the social sciences in the United States towards the integration of psychology, psychiatry, sociology and cultural anthropology. Examples of this trends are the Research Centre for Group Dynamics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Department of Social Relations at Harvard University

RFTA October 9th, 1946 (Appendix E)

A Statement of Aims and Policy

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Policy

‘The Tavistock group, as a matter of policy, desires to evade any appearance of keeping its journal to itself, even within the United Kingdom, since any attitude of that kind could only stifle the development of the journal, and would be opposed to the fundamental principle of the group – that it should establish close working relationships with all other organisations and individuals engaged in social science action research. Thus, not only is it desirable that joint editorship should be established, but that contributions should come mainly from persons who are not members of the Tavistock group. Only in this way can the journal become a real force in the development of integrations of concepts and techniques in the social science field.’

(RF TA August 10th, 1946 (also Devon: T/S/2/D Other Reports))

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Success of the journal

‘There is greater equanimity, a greater sense of financial security and social acceptance by the community and by the various governmental committees and departments, and a hope of university recognition, which was not even apparently desired two years ago.’

(AG Diary October 12, 1949, Wednesday, London, / Tavistock Square Clinic/ 401A (RF)...pg ???)

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