

# **T-Groups Revisited: The Significance of Sensitivity Training to Managerial Learning and Development for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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Abstract

Although T-Groups have faded over the years, the process of engaging in sensitivity training has influenced managerial learning and development. With the emergence of emotional intelligence and teams in today's work environment, we propose that T-Groups should be revisited that focus on helping managers and leaders in organizations develop sensitivity around self- and other-awareness; and to experience how to create the right context for dealing with such sensitivity in teams. Research on T-Groups have shown that such training groups develop individual and group functioning in terms of learning, task, and group dynamics. This study explores the use of mapping Real and Ideal conversational spaces using the Conversational Space Inventory (CoSI) (Lingham, 2004) for students enrolled in the Masters in Organizational Development and Analysis program in a mid-western university in the US engaged in a one-week T-Group session. The CoSI was administered to three T-Groups (with an average of 8.67 members per group) over two time periods: once after the group has had one day among themselves and the other at the last

day of the T-Group (after five days). Results show that the conversational space of each group evolved toward the ideal space, with marked improvements on effectiveness, satisfaction and psychological safety between times T1 and T2. We also show that the ideal spaces for each group were very similar at both times. We also show that the Ideal spaces for regular task groups and T-groups are very different with T-groups focusing more on the emotional involvement, relational, individual, and reflective aspects that are critical for managerial learning and development.

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## **Introduction**

In today's work environment where organizations are more team-oriented, managerial development programs are becoming more focused on two particular areas: developing competencies that build relational skills and abilities such as Emotional Intelligence and learning how to create and develop successful work teams. In response to this need, organizations and universities are incorporating more of such programs into their training and curricula, respectively. Also, research on emotional intelligence in groups (Druskat & Wolff, 2001); moods and emotions in groups (Kelly & Barsade, 2001; Barsade, 2002); team learning (Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001; Kasl, Marsick, & Dechant, 1997); affect and managerial performance (Staw & Barsade, 1993); and the importance of talk (Glinow, Shapiro, & Brett, 2004) have emerged in recent years. Yet all of these aspects can be experienced in a T-group setting as initially designed. In this paper, we argue that T-groups should still be part of managerial development with the focus being on developing the ability to create the right context for the group integrating learning, group dynamics and time perception.

Although Training Groups (or T-groups) seemed to have wilted and died since the late 1970s, this process has nourished many forms of managerial developmental techniques used today such as 360° feedback methods, diversity training, countless organizational change efforts (Highhouse, 2002) and have been used as a methodology to help individuals in organizations improve their learning at the individual, group and organizational levels (Seashore, 1982, Schein & Bennis, 1965).<sup>1</sup> It is therefore not surprising to find some universities in the US still using T-Groups as part of their curriculum today. The purpose of this kind of training is to help participants (sometimes called delegates)

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<sup>1</sup> The authors mention that T-Groups have also been called D-Groups (development) and study groups. In this study we focus on T-Groups where groups stay together for a week in a retreat.

to learn about group dynamics, leadership and change. Although there are numerous methodologies and research in groups, in essence T-groups as a laboratory method continue to be alive and well. However, to date, no research has studied the psychological space created in T-groups over the course of its training in terms of the experience of team members (or delegates) at the individual and group levels. In this paper, we propose that focusing on both individual and group levels of the T-group experience would emphasize the context the groups want to create for themselves and also how they as individuals can help nurture a psychologically safe yet effective context where they as members feel satisfied. We also propose that such a focus would help managers and students gain better insight into emotional intelligence and experiential learning. In this study, we use the Conversational Space Inventory (CoSI) (Lingham, 2004) which was developed from Conversational Learning (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002) to measure the psychological space of T-groups along 10 dimensions and to show how such spaces affect members' ratings on performance, member satisfaction, and psychological safety.

The birth of T-groups began with an attempt to better understand race relations in 1946 (Reichard, Siemers & Rodenhauser, 1992) at the State Teachers College in New Britain, Connecticut. The leaders at this workshop were Lewin, Lippit, Bradford, and Benne. After the passing of Lewin in 1947, the four remaining leaders founded the National Training Laboratory in group Development (NTL). The 1940s and 1950s saw a blossoming of T-groups in parallel with group research with its focus on group dynamics. T-Groups began with a more sociological or Lewinian approach (focused on training) which later turned into one that was more psychoanalytic or Rogerian (focused on therapy) (Highhouse, 2002).

Having been involved in T-Groups as delegates and trainers, the experience of the psychological space created as groups meet together is

very complex and in fact, chaotic. Previous common models of group development have been presented as linear (Tuckman, 1965; Bennis & Shepard, 1956), life-cycle type models (Mills, 1967) and pendular or recurring-cycle models (Bion, 1959). Gibbard, Hartman and Mann (1974) argue that all the three models are incomplete suggesting that an integrative model would be more accurate. Homans (1950) asserted that the integrative model of a group is complex and organic and language may not be the best way to analyze group interaction. In this paper, we propose to measure and map this integrative psychological space using the 10-dimensional Conversational Learning model (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002). Apart from being an integrative model, the instrument (the Conversational Space Inventory or CoSI) (Lingham, 2004) which was developed from this theory can be used to map out the Conversational Spaces of T-Groups and even show their evolution over the span of a one-week training session. In this study, we will map out the members' ratings of their Real and Ideal Conversational Spaces at the beginning of their T-group session (T1) and at the end of the training session (T2) along with their ratings on effectiveness, satisfaction and psychological safety.

### ***Theoretical Framework of Conversational Learning***

The role of conversation has been studied in organizations as occurring in the context of organizational change (Ford & Ford, 1994; 1995); as the space within which groups exist (Frey, 2002); as a function of creating the right conditions for effective leadership in work teams (Hackman, 2002), and as a part of the team learning process (Edmondson, 1996; Dixon, 1994). The construct “conversational space” has only been recently studied as the integrative construct to understand teams (Lingham, 2004).

Grounded in the theory and practice of Experiential Learning, Conversational Learning is a process whereby individuals construct meaning and transform experiences into knowledge conversations (Kolb, Baker & Jensen, 2002). As a construct, the authors define Conversational Learning as one that occurs in a space bounded by the five dialectics around three aspects (learning, perceptions of time, and group dynamics)<sup>2</sup> while also offering it as a way to understand group and organizational interaction. In this space, individuals can not only learn, but also assist others to learn and to develop. When described as “Conversational Learning Spaces,” one would expect the main outcome focus as knowledge creation or knowledge generation. However, the three aspects (i.e., learning, group dynamics and time perception) I used to circumscribe such spaces go beyond just knowledge creation or generation. Lingham (2004) therefore used the term “Conversational Spaces” as a more appropriate description that captures the three aspects of this space.

The roots of the research in Conversational Learning go back to the works of Dewey (1938, 1964), Lewin (1951), Piaget (1965), James (1977), Vygotsky (1978), and Freire (1992) (Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002). The authors mention that the precursors to conversational learning were drawn largely from the literature in Group Research – especially research on group dynamics (Lewin, 1951; Bales, 1949, 1979; Bion, 1959; Schutz, 1966), group growth and development (Mills, 1967; Schein, 1993; Star, 1989; Engstrom & Middleton, 1996), acceptance and trust (Rogers, 1970), and as communities of practice to create or generate knowledge (Brown & Duguid, 1991, 2000; Nonaka, 1994; and Wenger, 1998). Philosophical works such as Habermas’ emancipation through ideas speech situations (1984), and Gadamer’s ontological definition of conversation (1994) as a process of coming to an

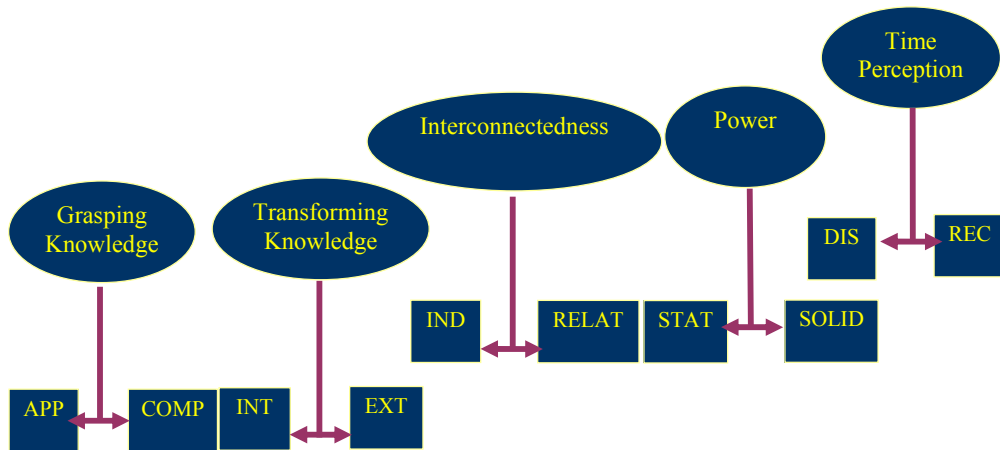
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<sup>2</sup> This grouping is not presented in Baker, Jensen & Kolb (2002). I present the 10 dimensions proposed along these three aspects.

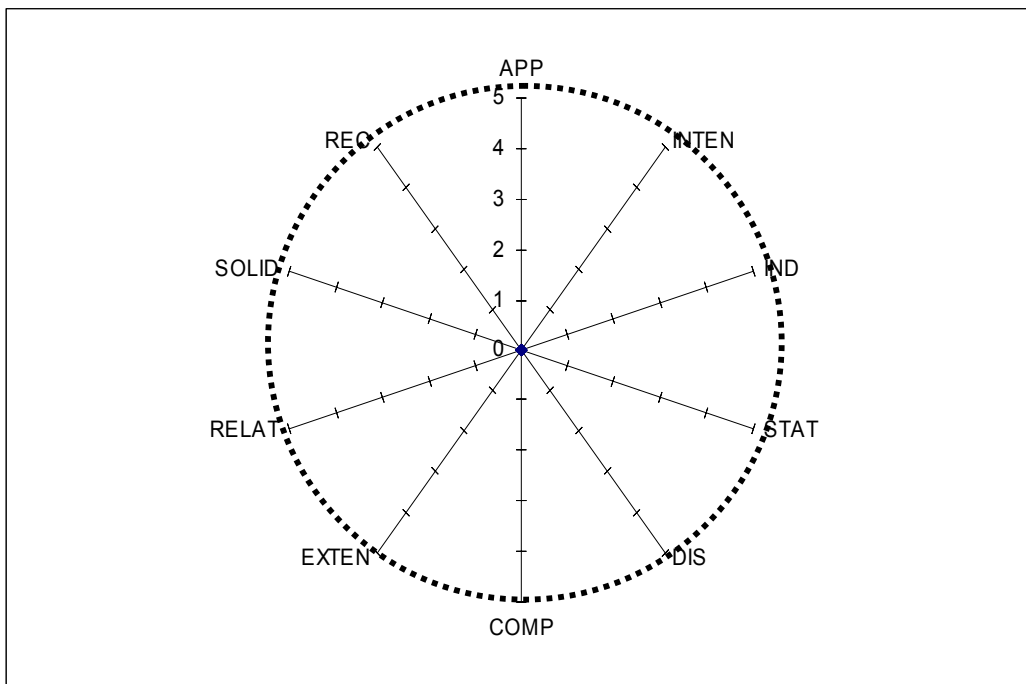
understanding, were instrumental in the development of the concept of conversational learning.

The model employed for this study is a space where the meaning making process is one where understanding is achieved through the interplay of five sets of opposites and contradictions. Baker, Jensen, and Kolb (2002) propose that a good conversational learning space has creative tension in both poles of each set of dialectics, meaning that the space is high in each of the ten poles that circumscribe the space itself. A good space is therefore one that would embrace and integrate each pole of the five dialectics providing members the possibility to pursue new understanding through the questioning of existing assumptions and prejudices. These five set of dialectics circumscribing the phenomenon “conversational space” involves learning (grasping and transforming knowledge), dynamic group processes (interconnectedness and power) and time perception (linear and cyclic time).

The five dialectics are: 1. Apprehension (APP) ↔ Comprehension (COM); Intension (INT) ↔ Extension (EXT); Individuality (IND) ↔ Relationality (REL); Status (STA) ↔ Solidarity (SOL); Discursive (DIS) ↔ Recursive (REC). A figural representation is shown in Figure 1 and the corresponding mapping shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 1. Figural Representation of the Theory of Conversational Learning.**



**Figure 2. Mapping system of Conversational Space.**



*Apprehension ↔ Comprehension.* Central to the theory of Experiential Learning (Kolb, 1984) apprehension and comprehension represent the dialectically related ways in which we grasp knowledge and that integrated knowing occurs through equally embracing both. The Apprehension-Comprehension dialectic involves ways of grasping knowledge in the conversational space. Apprehension is defined as “Concrete Knowing”, which is experienced as the immediate, feeling oriented, and one that involves the tacit areas of knowledge. It is a subjective process largely based in older regions of the human brain that serve as physiological and emotional gatekeepers that monitor the emotional dimensions of learning. Comprehension is defined as “Abstract Knowing”, which is experienced as the linguistic, conceptual, interpretive process based in the newer left cerebral cortex of the brain (De Bono, 1969; Gazzaniga, 1985).

In a T-group, apprehension is manifested as the dealing with feelings and reactions and being open and receptive to new experiences. Grasping knowledge through apprehension can be experienced as members being personally involved in issues raised in the conversation. Seashore (1982) mentions that in a T-Group, members learn from their own behavior, feelings and reactions. Anyone who has been involved in a T-Group has been struck by the amount of emotional involvement and energy expenditure (Bradford, Gibb & Benne, 1964). Therefore, the Ideal conversational space of a T-Group should have high Apprehension. Comprehension, on the other hand is manifested as the rationalizing and evaluating of ideas or issues that are raised in the conversation. There is a tendency to analyze and break down issues into their component parts and to conceptualize or theorize about issues in the conversation. As part of the goal of a T-group is to develop an intellectual understanding of human behavior, this pole should also indicate a healthy T-group space. We anticipate this aspect to be not as high in the Ideal Space of a T-Group.

*Intension ↔ Extension.* Apart from how knowledge is grasped, Kolb (1984) articulates that the transforming of knowledge is also central to the theory of Experiential Learning. Kolb states that “simple perception of experience alone is not sufficient for learning; something must be done with it” (1984: 42). Kolb, Baker, and Jensen (2002) mention that this dialectic of knowledge transformation in the conversational learning space involves the praxis of both action and reflection.

In the conversational space of a T-Group, intension is manifested when members tend to be in a more contemplative space where the behavior is that of observation, listening, and caution. In this pole of the dialectic, members tend to take the time to look at all sides of an issue before acting on it. As part of the intent of T-Groups is to allow members to reflect on their experiences, we expect this pole to be high in its Ideal Space. Extension is manifested as the desire to get things done or to try things out as experimenting on issues rather than to contemplate on them. Members would tend to be results-oriented and practical. As a T-Group is focused on development, the initial stage of a T-group may be more a balance of Intension and Extension due to the ambiguity of the goal (Schein & Bennis, 1965). The ideal Space, however, should be more inclined toward Intension.

*Individuality ↔ Relationality.* As groups exist at two levels (individual and group), group members experience both themselves as individuals and in relation to others. Kolb, Baker and Jensen (2002) cites Hunt (1987) and Jordan (1991) presenting this dialectic as the intersubjective process whereby as individuals they maintain a sense of self while at the same time are aware of and open to the influence of others.

In the Conversational Space in of a T-Group, individuality is experienced as the freedom for members to be unique individuals in the team with the ability to act independently. Members also tend to share their own unique

life experiences. One of the goals of sensitivity training is to help members realize that the uniqueness of an individual can impact the group (Seashore, 1982). The other is to promote self-disclosure to raise self awareness (Jourard, 1959; Luft, 1969; Hanson, 1987) to develop learning at the intra-personal level (Reichard, Siemers & Rodenhauer, 1992). We therefore expect the Ideal Space of a T-Group to be high on Individuality. Relationality is focused on interconnectedness and achieving agreement about issues. The experience of such a space is that of connecting with others – a sense of relatedness. Such a space in a team is one where members want to be connected to one another with the emphasis on connected knowing and empathy. Relationality is experienced as the desire to be connected to other team members through the acting and agreeing on issues in relationships with team members. Simply, members tend to try to fit into the group. As the T-Group process involves raising not only self awareness but also other-awareness (Hanson, 1987) and to be better acquainted with them (Schein & Bennis, 1965), we expect this pole to be high in the groups Ideal Space.

*Status ↔ Solidarity.* Kolb, Baker, and Jensen (2002) articulate that the tension of status and solidarity opens a hospitable space where individuals engage in conversation with mutual respect and understanding toward one another. Some measure of this two dimensional space of status and solidarity (Schwitzgabel & Kolb, 1974) is critical to sustain conversation. A healthy interaction, according to Wilber (1995) involves components of hierarchy (status) and heterarchy (solidarity). A similar position is articulated by Miller (1986) where inequality can be temporary or permanent. Such a space is based on respect and understanding toward one another.

In a T-Group, status emphasizes the one's position or ranking in the team, which focuses on hierarchy. It is manifested as having the need for leadership to help guide, decide and help others learn. When a T-Group

first meets, there may be a dependence on the trainer (Schein & Bennis, 1965) but that it would later reduce (Bradford, 1975). The intent is to have minimal amount of formal leadership. Therefore, we expect the Ideal Space of a T-Group be low on Status. Solidarity in a conversation is expressed as the extent to which one is linked interpersonally with others in a network of relationships, which focuses on egalitarianism. Solidarity is manifested as the desire to be equals or peers, where leadership is shared. Members learn from one another, decide as a team and have strong personal relationships with each other. This aligns with the purpose of sensitivity training: to develop group norms to control “air-time” of group members (Bradford, 1975). As such, we expect this pole to be high in the Ideal Space of a T-Group.

*Discursive* ↔ *Recursive*. Baker, Jensen and Kolb (2002) mention conversational learning occurs within two distinct but interconnected temporal dimensions: linear (discursive) and cyclic (recursive) time. The discursive process that is guided by linear time is the epistemological manifestation of individuals’ ideas and experiences that are made explicit in conversations. The epistemological process focuses on task related issues that are addressed in the conversational space. The recursive process is one that is guided by cyclic time and is an ontological and subjective manifestation of individuals’ desires to return to the same ideas and experiences generated in the course of a conversation. The ontological process focuses on individual team members’ interests that are addressed in the team’s conversational space. Such interests may or may not be aligned with the task.

In a T-Group, discourse is experienced as the desire for members to move on based on agendas and time constraints either imposed by members of the team or given to them by members outside of the team. Such a conversation would be focused on the completion of the task at hand. As the intent of T-Groups is to have minimal form of agenda in the

process, we expect this aspect to be low in the Ideal Space of the group. Recourse is experienced as the tendency to return to previously discussed issues (or to stay with issues) that captures the attention of team members. Due to the focus of dealing with emotions and having the freedom to voice members' concerns (Seashore, 1982), we expect the Ideal Space of a T-Group to be high in Recourse.

As organizational researchers are gravitating towards understanding teams, studying the Real and Ideal Spaces of T-Groups based on these 10 poles would provide group researchers with a sense of the impact of this type of particular group training and its difference from other types of group settings. It is hoped that the findings in this study would help further research on T-Groups. As can be seen from the dimensions of Conversational Learning, having members respond to how they experience the Real Conversational Space and what Ideal Space they would like to have would help them understand how to develop an internal context that promotes developing emotional intelligence in groups and team learning. A comparison of the extent to which the T-group process aligns with current research on teams and emotional intelligence is shown in Table 1, demonstrating the value such a process could have using Conversational Spaces as a backdrop.

**Table 1**  
**A Comparison of T-Group and Recent Team Research using Conversational Spaces, Mental Models and Emotional Intelligence along the Dimensions of Learning, Group Dynamics and Time Perception**

Dimensions	T-group	Dimensions of Conversational Space Inventory (CoSI) <sup>3</sup>	Manifestation of Each Dimension (CoSI)	Mental Models in Self-Managing Teams (SMWT) <sup>4</sup>	EI Competences <sup>5</sup> Shared mental models	EI Competences <sup>6</sup> Model of Team Effectiveness
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase your awareness of your own feelings in the moment; and offer you the opportunity to be responsible for your feelings</li> </ul>	Apprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concrete Knowing</li> <li>Based in older regions of the human brain</li> <li>Serve as physiological and emotional gatekeepers</li> <li>Dealing with feelings and reactions and being open and receptive to new experiences</li> <li>Can be experienced as members being personally involved in issues raised in the conversation</li> </ul>	<p><u>A psychological sense of ownership</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commitment to the group (Pearce &amp; Ravlin, 1987)</li> </ul>	<p>“Emotional contagions”: The mood of emotions of one individual are transferred to nearby individuals. <u>Indicators</u>: Mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures and movements with those of another person. (Kelly and Barsade, 2001)</p> <p>“Behavioral entrainment and interaction synchrony”: Refer to the completely no conscious processes by which one individual’s behavior is adjusted or modified in order to coordinate or synchronize with another. (Condon &amp; Ogston, 1967; Kelly, 1988; McGrath &amp; Kelly, 1986)</p>	<p><u>1<sup>st</sup> Condition: Mutual Trust about members</u></p> <p>Competences: Interpersonal understanding Indicators: Take time away from group tasks to get to know one another. Assume undesirable behavior takes place for a reason. Tell the team-mates what you’re feeling. Tell the team-mates what you’re thinking</p> <p>Perspective Taking Indicators: Ask everyone agrees with decision Ask quiet member what they think Appoint a devil’s advocate</p>

<sup>3</sup> Lingham, T., Richley, B.A. & Royo, C. (2004). “T-Groups Revisited: The Significance of Sensitivity Training to Managerial Learning and Development for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.”

<sup>4</sup> Druskat, V.U. & Pescosolido, A. (2002). “The context of effective teamwork mental models in self-managing team: Ownership, learning and heedful interrelating.” *Human Relations*, 55(3)

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, J.R. & Barsade, S.G. (2001). “Mood and Emotions in Small Groups and Work Teams.” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 86(1): 99-130.

<sup>6</sup> Druskat, V.U. & Wolff, S.B. (2001). “Building the emotional intelligence of groups.” *Harvard Business Review*, 79(3): 80-90

					<p><u>Indicators:</u> Smooth coordination, perception, appraisal and expression of emotion (ability to identify your own emotions) (Mayer et al., 1999)</p>	<p>Seek feedback Indicators: Asking your mates how are you doing Benchmark the processes</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase your understanding of group development and dynamics</li> </ul>	Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The part of rationalizing and evaluating of ideas or issues that are raised in the conversation</li> <li>To develop an intellectual understanding of human behavior</li> </ul>		<p><u>Indicators:</u> Empathy Understanding and analyzing emotions- understanding the meaning, progressions, and complexity among emotions.</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain a better understanding of the underlying social processes at work within a group</li> <li>Increase the sensitivity to others feelings</li> </ul>	Intension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manifested when members tend to be in a more contemplative space where the behavior is that of observation, listening, and reflection.</li> <li>Tend to take the time to look at all sides of an issue before acting on it</li> </ul>	<p><u>A need for learning</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training (Campion et al, 1993)</li> <li>Groups task design provides task feedback (Cohen, 1994)</li> <li>Sufficient knowledge and skills (Hackman, 1986)</li> <li>Education system and expert ( Pearce &amp; Ravlin, 1987)</li> </ul>	<p><u>Vicarious affect:</u> Events become evocative e through association with emotions aroused in observers by the affective expressions of others. (Bandura, 1986).</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the skill in facilitating group effectiveness</li> </ul>	Extension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Manifested as the desire to get things done or to try things out as experimenting on issues rather than to contemplating on them.</li> <li>Would tend to be results-oriented and practical</li> </ul>		<p>“Affective impression management”: Involves engaging in surface-level emotional displays in order to achieve goals, fit in or gain other rewards from the group. (Kelly and Barsade, 2001): Competences: Task orientation Influence</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experiment with changes in behavior</li> </ul>	Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experienced as the freedom for members to be unique individuals in the team with the ability to</li> </ul>	<p><u>A need for heedful interrelating</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication/cooperation</li> </ul>		<p><u>2<sup>nd</sup> Condition: A sense of group identity</u></p>	

Group Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase interpersonal skills</li> <li>• Increase your understanding of the impact of your behavior on others</li> </ul>	Relationality	<p>act independently.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on interconnectedness and achieving agreement about issues</li> <li>• The experience of such a space is that of connecting with others</li> <li>• Connected knowing and empathy</li> </ul>	<p>within group, Social support, Workload sharing, Task interdependence, Goal interdependence, Interdependent feedback and rewards (Campion et al, 1993)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process activities that facilitate innovative thinking, Coordination and caring (Cohen, 1994)</li> <li>• Information system (Hackman, 1986)</li> <li>• Open communication, variety of member responses, coordination of members, minimal status differences, flexible coordination (Pearce &amp; Ravlin, 1987)</li> </ul>	<p>Emotions management Indicators: Regulation of emotion in oneself and others to promote emotional and intellectual growth</p>	<p>A feeling among members that they belong to a unique and worthwhile group)</p> <p>Competences:</p> <p>Confronting</p> <p>Indicators:</p> <p>Set grand roles and use to put and use them to point out errant behavior. Call members on errant behavior Create playful devices for pointing out such behavior.</p> <p>Caring Indicators: Support members Validate members Protect members for attack Respect individuality and differences in perspective.</p> <p><u>3<sup>rd</sup> Condition: Sense of group efficacy:</u></p>
		Status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emphasizes one's position or ranking in the team, which focuses on hierarchy</li> <li>• Having the need for leadership to help guide, decide and help others learn</li> </ul>		<p>“Intentional affective induction and affective influence”: Leaders may frequently use emotions to influence other's affective states. (Kelly and Barsade, 2001)</p> <p>Realistic Conflict Theory: Suggest that intergroup conflict is caused by competition between groups over scarce resources. (Sherif, 1966) Indicators: Development others, communication,</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase your ability to manage and utilize conflict</li> </ul>	Solidarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manifested as the desire to be equals or peers, where leadership is shared.</li> <li>• Members learn from one another, decide as a team and have strong personal relationships</li> </ul>		<p>Engage in group decision-making , self evaluation and self-correction (Druskat &amp; Kayes, 2000; Hackman, 1986)</p>	

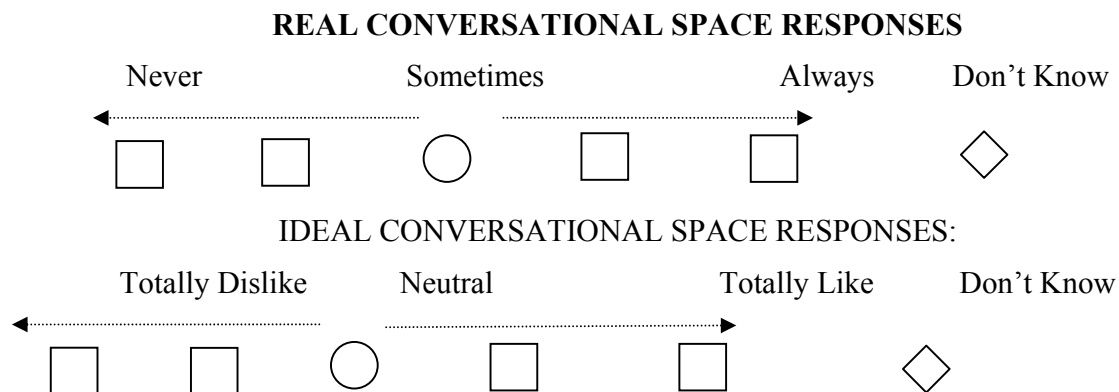


						<p>effectiveness</p> <p>Create measurable task and process objectives. Communicate your sense of what is transpiring in the team. Allow members to call a “process check”.</p> <p>Solving problems proactively</p> <p>Indicators: Anticipate problems Take the initiative to understand Do it yourself if others aren’t responding</p>
Time		Discursive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It is guided by linear time: The epistemological manifestation of individuals’ ideas and experiences that are task driven and made explicit in conversations.</li> <li>AGENDA DRIVEN</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Task variety, task significance and task identity (Campion et al, 1993)</li> <li>Task design has variety, identity and autonomy (Cohen, 1994)</li> <li>Motivating task, motivating reward system (Hackman, 1986)</li> </ul>		
		Recursive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Its process is one that is guided by cyclic time and is an ontological and subjective manifestation of individuals’ desires to return to the previous ideas and experiences generated in the course of a conversation.</li> <li>INTEREST DRIVEN</li> </ul>			

## Method

### *Sample and Procedure*

The Conversational Spaces were measured on a 5-point scale indicating frequency of the experience of each item. The choices range from “Not at All” to “Very Frequent.” There were 5 boxes provided with no numbers in them and an option of “I Don’t Know” provided to help identify problematic items. The neutral point was marked as a circle. Conversational Spaces for the Real and Ideal used the same 50-item questionnaire but different response wording to allow respondents to rate the Real and Ideal Spaces on a 5-point scale<sup>7</sup>. Figure 3 below shows the measurement scheme for both the Real and Ideal Conversational Spaces with the “Don’t Know” option indicated.



**Figure 3. Scale Responses for Real and Ideal Conversational Spaces.**

The CoSI (Lingham, 2004) was administered to 25 students enrolled in the Masters of Science in Organizational Development and Analysis (MSODA) Program students who attended a T-group session the first week of January 2004. The demographics for the entire sample are shown in Table 2. As can be seen in Table 2, 95.8% of participants took the CoSI, of which 12 were males, 14 were females. The average group size was 8.67 (with an average of 4 males and 4.67 females).

<sup>7</sup> Peterson (1994) found no significant difference between having 5-point and 7-point responses. As respondents had 50 items to respond to, it was decided that a 5-point scale would be appropriate.

The MSODA students who filled out the CoSI completed it in two time periods: The first was completed at the end of the first day as a T-Group and the second was completed at the end of the T-Group retreat. Participation was voluntary and students who filled out the CoSI were given the consent form. The participants did not receive any feedback from the findings from time T1 before responding to the same process at time T2. The findings from both T1 and T2 were presented to the students the following month when they came for their next residency.

**Table 2**  
**Sample Demographics**

Time 1: After the end of the first day of the T-Group Session					
Self Development	9	4	5	9	100.0
Self Development	8	3	5	8	100.0
Self Development	9	5	4	9	100.0
Time 2: After the end of the five-day program					
Self Development	9	4	5	9	100.0
Self Development	8	3	5	6	75.0
Self Development	9	5	4	9	100.0
	8.67	4	4.67	8.3	95.8

## Results

### *Real and Ideal Spaces of T-Groups*

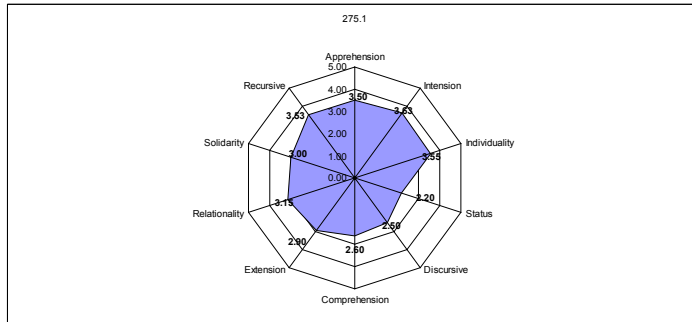
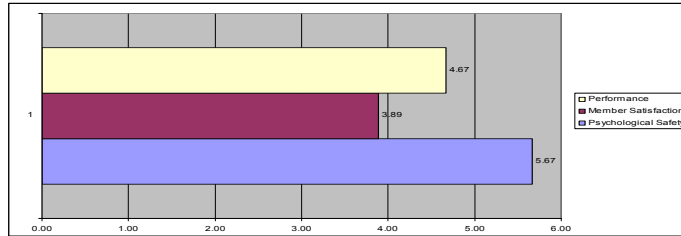
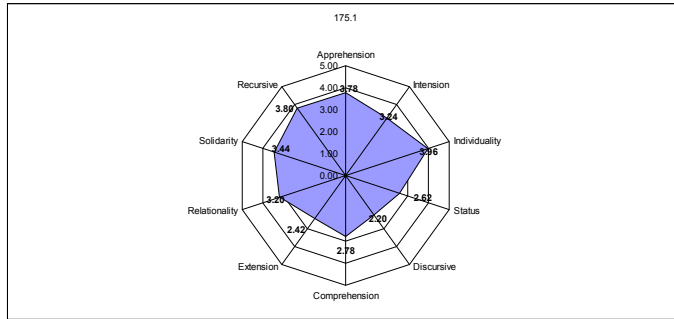
As expected, the Real Spaces for each group were very different (suggesting the uniqueness of the initial space of any group). The mapping of the Real Space from the outset (T1) and after five days (T2) for each of the groups is shown in Figure 3. As can be seen in Figure 4, the Real Spaces for all three groups evolved, expanding toward the northerly direction (i.e. Solidarity, Recursiveness, Apprehension, Intension, and Individuality). Looking at the members' ratings on performance, satisfaction and psychological safety, all three groups rated these variables lower at time T1 and these ratings improved significantly at time T2. Improvement of ratings for outcomes ranged from 0.24 to 1.66 for performance; from 0.58 to 1.54 for satisfaction; and from 0.23 to 1.39 for psychological safety. This finding indicates that the T-group sessions were very well received and that members felt they were

learning and developing throughout the process. It is important to note that the members did not get to see their ratings at time T1 before filling out the CoSI and outcome variables at time T2. This evolution is aligned with the Ideal Spaces for each Group (see Figure 4). In Figure 4, we show the Ideal Spaces for each group for both time periods (T1 and T2). Although the group just began their T-Group sessions in T1, their Ideal Spaces at both T1 and T2 remain somewhat similar. Figure 5 indicates that a T-Group has an Ideal Space that is focused more toward Apprehension, Intension, Individuality, Solidarity, and Recursiveness than Extension, Status, Comprehension, Relationality, and Discursiveness.

When the students received their feedback packets a month later during their next residency, they were amazed at how all three groups had a good sense of how their Ideal spaces should be only after the first day of the T-group session. They all indicated unanimously that they could have had better sessions if they had the results from time T1 while going through the T-group sessions as they could have had a much better approach to developing sensitivity at the individual and group level, and that as a group they could learn to create the right context and that perhaps it could have resulted in a much more fruitful and effective T-group retreat.

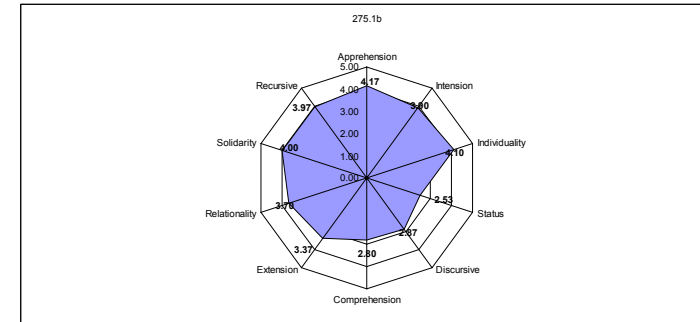
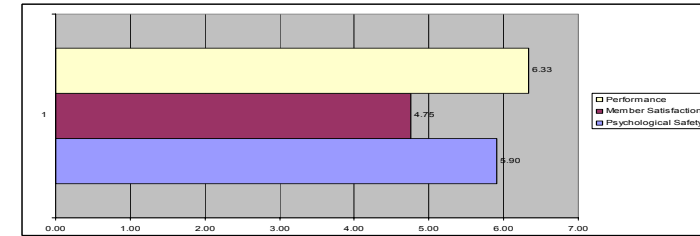
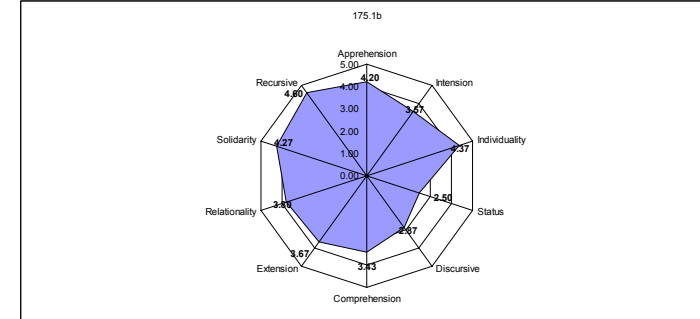
# TIME 1

Group 1



Group 2

# TIME 2



Group 3

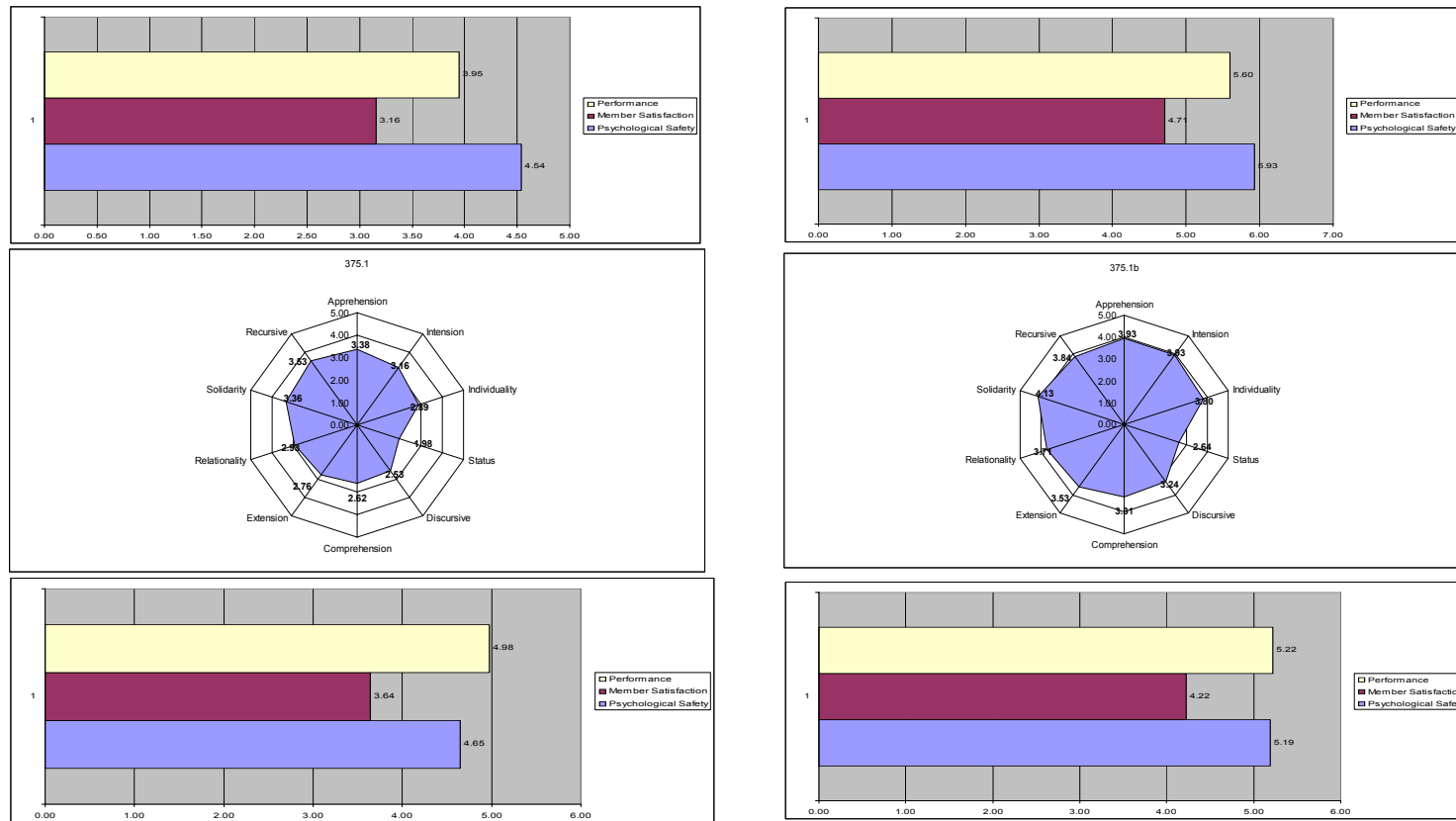
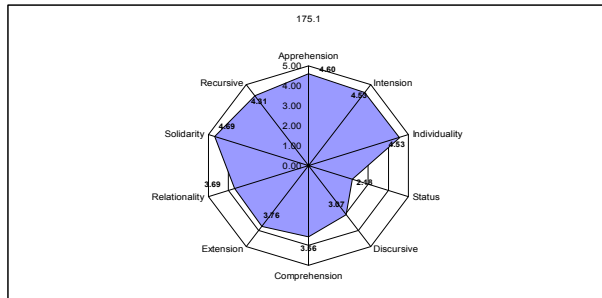


Figure 3. Rating of Real Conversational Spaces, with their corresponding ratings of performance, satisfaction and psychological safety.<sup>8</sup>

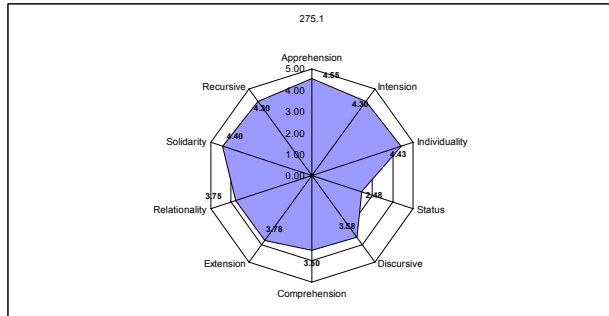
<sup>8</sup> Note that performance and psychological safety are rated on a 7-point scale, whereas satisfaction (the middle bar) is rated on a 5-point scale.

TIME 1

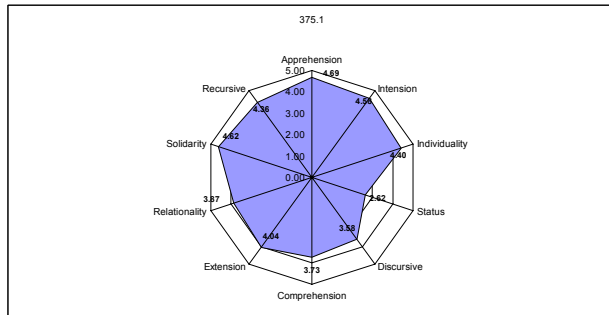
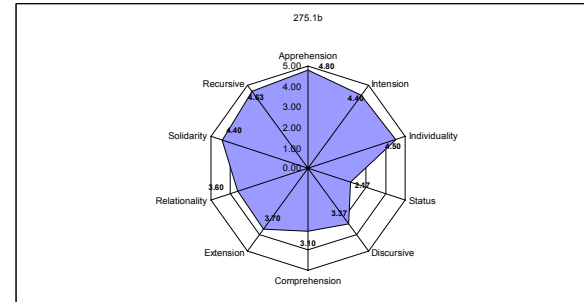
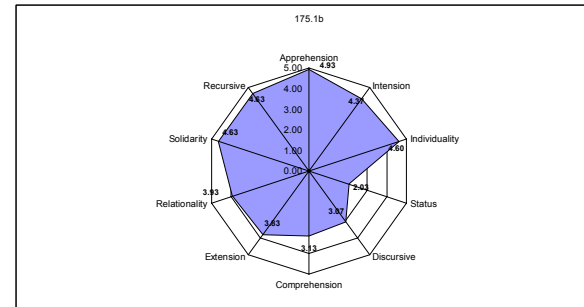
Group 1



TIME 2



Group 2



Group 3

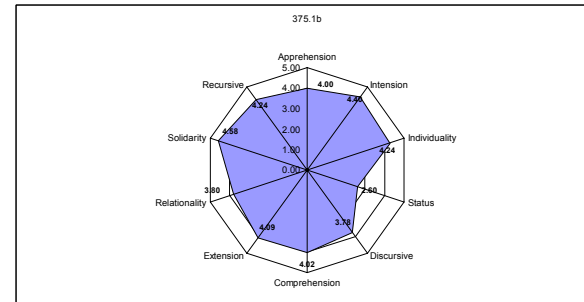


Figure 4. Rating of Ideal Conversational Spaces at times T1 and T2.

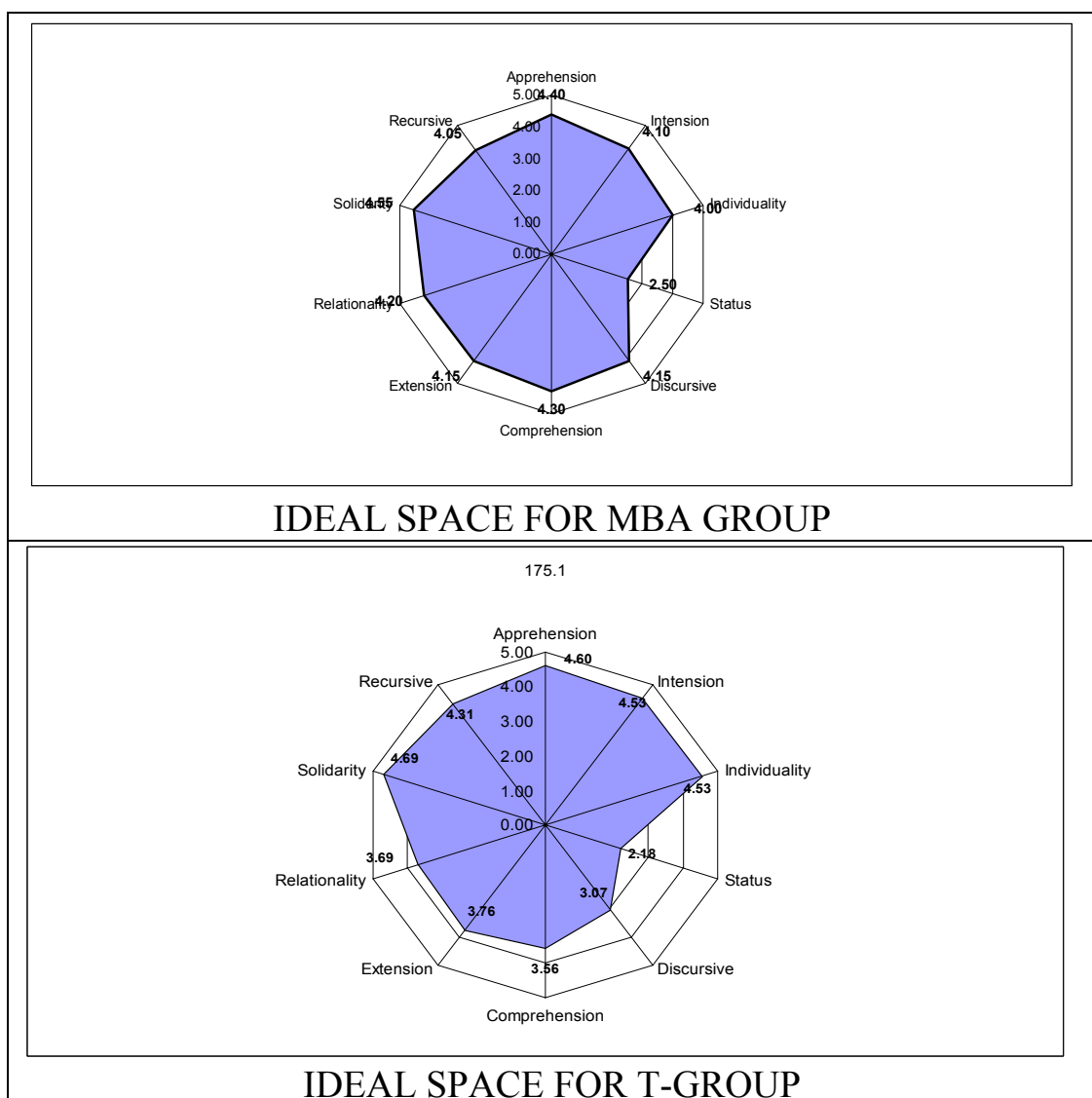
## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Based on the findings in this study, T-groups do indeed have added value in today's work environment. In the past, T-groups have been used to study teaching ability, leadership, inner-other directiveness, self actualization, interpersonal skills, and self-concept (Faith, Wong, & Carpenter, 1995). In this paper we show that when used with a T-group, the CoSI would help members expand to embrace and learn more than just to increase one's self awareness but to understand the integrative context of a team across the three broad dimensions of learning, group dynamics and time perception. Table 1 also demonstrates the lack in other models that cover aspects of T-groups. Although T-group trainers claim that they do not believe in providing any structure or leadership in the sessions, ensuring a minimal structure is already creating a structure for the group. Interestingly, members themselves do not rate highly on discursive, status, and comprehension dimensions. Although there are similarities across the groups in the shapes of the Ideal spaces, there is more consistency within group ratings of Ideal spaces between times T1 and T2. This finding indicates that in a T-group setting, although the groups are allowed to develop in their own specific way, they tend to follow a similar trend. This trend focuses more on learning and developing self awareness, other awareness, acknowledging one's uniqueness and one's membership in the group, being involved and being a group. Such a design would certainly help managers develop more understanding of emotional intelligence in individuals and in groups (refer to Table 1), while also providing the skills and knowledge to create, lead, develop, and support teams in their organizations.

It is important to note that T-groups do indeed differ from regular task groups as its focus is centered on developing sensitivity training. Hence, such sessions would highlight the recent attention on moods and emotions at the group level (Barsade, 2002, Kelly & Barsade, 2001). Regular task groups may undergo emotional rollercoaster experiences but may not have to forum to deal with them. A comparison of the Ideal Conversational Space mapping for a T-group and an MBA group is shown in Figure 5. As can be seen, their Ideal spaces are indeed different in that the MBA group's mapping is quite balanced across nine dimensions except for Status. This shows the need for a regular task group to try things out, be more task-focused and also to develop



better understanding and analytic skills. T-groups, on the other hand, is a very unique setting that clearly focuses on involvement, relating, self-awareness and reflection – all of which are important in sensitivity training – that can surely help in managerial learning and development. We therefore suggest that T-groups be kept alive and provided with nutrients that are important in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: focusing on aspects to develop emotional intelligence at the individual and group levels and the skills to create the right contexts for teams to succeed.



**Figure 5. A Comparison of Ideal Conversational Spaces for an MBA Group and a T-Group.**

This new form of T-groups (incorporating such instruments like the Conversational Space Inventory) to help members understand their Real and Ideal states and to allow members to practice developing the skill to create the right context to nurture the group towards its Ideal state would certainly take T-groups to new heights as a method for developing managers.

As discussed in the introduction section of this paper, T-groups may have wilted and died based on the focus of getting in touch with one's feelings and being. Presently, although the same ontological focus is valid, the increasingly complex organizational environment has greater demands on managers. This need has broadened to incorporate increasing self-awareness; developing others internal and external to the organizations; and creating the right contexts for teams to succeed. Management theories, research and application that demonstrate these foci permeate managerial learning and development programs globally. With the Conversational Space Inventory (CoSI) we now have a way to both measure and very accessible visual mapping system that can show the impact of T-group experiences and its value to help members develop the skill to lead (as individuals), function effectively as team members, and also to create the right context for their teams to succeed.

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