Fear of the Positive Star Position
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 Practitioner Question:
  What are some ways you can work with someone in the whole group who has a fear of the positive star position?

Introduction

   The positive star is a member of the group who has the largest number of positive choices for him or her. The person is chosen above chance. Often this is a person perceived by others as a potential leader. The true positive star is a reciprocating star, chosen by others and choosing others in return. The criterion on which the choices are based is important. Over time a group, exploring their choices for roles of high value, will discover that the position of positive star will be focused on several or more group members based on the specific criterion being investigated.   There are stars of work-related, more social roles (sociotelic stars) and stars of more private criteria (psychetelic stars).

  Possible reasons to reject the star position

 (1) Discomfort or dislike of group focus -
       Each person has their own specific number of persons with whom they are able to sustain relations at a given point in time. Helen Hall Jennings (1960) one of the pioneer writers and researchers in sociometry with J. L. Moreno, referred to this number as the â€œemotional repertoireâ€•, a number related to the personâ€™s â€œemotional expansiveness,â€• their sociometric set.1 Once the number has been met, the person is less able, or willing, to stretch to include additional persons without feeling regret, inadequacy, embarrassment, or fear.

  (2) Being overwhelmed by real or imagined expectations -
       The star position is associated with status and power. As recipients of a larger number of choices, the person is accorded responsibility for actions on behalf of others, for example, being a spokesperson for a group. Persons in close association with the star (aristotele) may be asked to fill some of those responsibilities.

  (3) Fear of retaliation by others -
       Group dynamics and the groupâ€™s history in terms of the treatment of stars over time and through a variety of criteria, may lead a person to fear overt and subversive treatment rooted in resentment by a person or subgroup. Having something others want, such as having the position of being highly chosen, may result in envy in the less highly chosen.

  (4) The position of star challenges the personâ€™s self concept -
       A personâ€™s interpersonal identity is formed based on their personal history and self esteem. If a person imagines him or herself as unattractive and fairly weak, receiving a large number of positive choices rocks that idea about him/herself and is experienced as a challenge. The person will

experience "not being seen" by others as they really know him/herself to be. Also, there are persons who are carriers of an archetype, and experience being chosen based on this factor, rather than specific attributes of their personality. The person will frequently state they don't know why they so highly chosen for these types of roles (archetypical).

Exploring the Positive Star Position in Action

   When first working with this issue, my choice will be to dilute the focus on the star who has difficulty with the position, working with the phenomenon in ways which involve the whole group. Also, my actions will not be aimed at getting the person to be accepting of the position; rather, I want to assist the whole group in awareness and clarity of the dynamics related to this position as well as other sociometric positions. Each person will have moments to experience the position, before it moves on to someone else. This increases the warm-up to the issue and gives each person a brief experience and helps the person with the issue experience the position for a brief moment.

 (1) The Action Triangle
       Masking tape is used to create a three-sided triangle on the floor of the action space. One side represents "Yes." one side represents "no way", and one side represents "neutral". The group disperses itself evenly to the three sides. The facilitator reads a criterion. The people on the + side, talk excitedly about how great it would be to be the star on this criterion; the people on the minus side, play out the negatives of being a star on that criterion; and the neutral side play out not having a strong feeling one way or the other. Another criterion is read and people change to another side of the triangle, and once again speak from the new position. The last criterion is read and the sides play out the position.   Then, the first criterion is read again, and each person goes to the position which most closely reflects their true position. The middle of the triangle can be reserved for "conflicted"...strong feelings of plus and minus.
     This is followed by a discussion of the dynamics which surfaced related to being a star.
     If time allows this may be followed with a series of playback story enactments related to being a star, not being chosen to be a star, or being chosen and not wanting it.

 (2) Paired exercise: Convincing the other they deserve to be star
     Group members are in pairs. A criterion is called out and the two people begin a role play to convince the other person that he/she deserves to be the groups' choice for star. Next, the task changes, and they now attempt to convince their partner that there is no way they will be the star since he or she in fact deserves it more. This is followed by small group discussion of what sorts of arguments were made and what dynamics this brings to the surface.

 (3) Creating a fairy tale -
     The group generates a fairy tale about being a Star. A scene is set, and each person volunteers for a role in the story. Once the story is going well in action, there is a role switch, and each person moves to a different

role. This happens a few more times and the story comes to an end. An empty chair is placed for the star position, or any other role the group wants to explore. People engage the role in action, with facilitation for role reversals and soliloquy.

  (4) Exploring the star position and the group's roles of high value.2
     A group exploration of roles of high value will alert the group of persons who want, don't want or are neutral to being chosen for these roles. Each person creates a criterion on which they would like to be the most highly chosen. This gives practice in the wording of criteria and the recognition of criteria on which group members are making choices. Following the generation of the criterion, one by one group members read their criterion and the group members move to the person in the group who is their highest choice for this criterion. If the person is not highly chosen on their criterion the group can give information about what needs to occur in order for this person to be visible and highly chosen for the role they most want.

  Once the issue has been thoroughly explored in the group, the person having difficulty being highly chosen is given an opportunity to discuss their situation or explore it further in an enactment. It is sufficient as a beginning to be more comfortable with the issue to have told his/her story, revealed their discomfort and to have sharing from group members.

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  1. Helen Hall Jennings (1960) "Sociometric Choice Process in Personality and Group Formation" in The Sociometry Reader, Edited by J. L. Moreno, et. al, Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, p. 88. "As the individual invests his affection in others, the extent and quality of these individuals appear by early childhood to be stabilized into what can be called his emotional repertoire. The term is also used by Edgar Borgatta" It is characteristic of persons that they constantly assess each other as desirable or undesirable according to some frame of reference (or set), p. 272.
  2. Ann E. Hale (1985) "Group Exploration of Act Hunger for Roles of High Value" in Conducting Clinical Sociometric Explorations. Roanoke, VA, Royal Publishing., p. 153. (Now available from Toronto Centre for Psychodrama and Sociometry, www.tcps.on.ca/ under books and publications; or from the author, by contacting her at annehale@cox.net .)

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