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Robert F. Allen

Saul Pilnick

Stanley Silverzweig

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION—TEAM BUILDING FOR POLICE AND GHETTO RESIDENTS

Grand Rapids, Michigan, Program

ROBERT F. ALLEN, SAUL PILNICK, AND STANLEY SILVERZWEIG

The authors are all officials of Scientific Resources Inc., Union, New Jersey, and this paper describes a program instituted by their organization for the City of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Their general program was described in a paper presented at The Symposium on Innovations in Police Techniques at the San Francisco Meeting of the American Psychological Association.

Robert F. Allen, Ph.D., is Chairman of the Board and in addition, serves as Professor of Psychology and Associate Director of the Laboratory of Applied Behavioral Science, Newark State College, Union, N.J. He is moreover a staff member of the National Training Laboratories responsible for developing and supervising training programs for judges, administrators, and executive managers in industry.

Saul Pilnick, Ph.D., is President of Scientific Resources and an associate at the Laboratory of Applied Behavioral Science, Newark State College. He serves as a consultant in group techniques and group therapy for various public and private agencies in the New York and New Jersey area.

Stanley Silverzweig, B.A., is concerned with program development at Scientific Resources Inc. and serves as a consultant to various federal, state, and municipal government bodies.—
EDITOR.

In community after community throughout our nation, there is a growing pattern of mutual distrust and hatred, polarization and violence between police officers and ghetto residents. The root causes of these patterns, as well as potential solutions to them, have been well described in the recent report of the President's Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. From this report, it is clear that the highest national priorities must be given to the development of adequate housing, education, and job opportunities for minority group citizens. It is clear, also, that adequate law enforcement programs within the ghetto community will require the joint cooperative effort of both police officers and ghetto residents working together to achieve mutual goals.

These goals cannot be restricted to a narrow conception of conflict resolution, as important as this might be. It must also result in the building of effective team relationships between ghetto residents and the majority community which can be applied to the whole spectrum of shared community problems.

A TYPICAL PROGRAM IN GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

In the fall of 1966, discussions began amongst Grand Rapids, Michigan residents regarding a police/community relations training program.

Through the vigorous support of a minister of a local church, as well as a citizens advisory committee, and through the efforts of the city Human Relations Commission, a proposal was drafted, and funds were provided by the Grand Rapids Foundation. SRI was retained to implement the training design.

The basic purpose of this program was to improve police/community relations through a carefully designed sequence of training. This sequence had as its ultimate goal the establishment of an ongoing capability in Grand Rapids in order to help build better community utilization of its own resources. These training phases were regarded as intact segments of a total integrated system and therefore could have been discontinued after the first phase or any phase thereafter.

Overall Design. Prior to the first phase, a *pre-laboratory analysis* was conducted by SRI. This process of data-gathering was essential in order to deal effectively with the situation in Grand Rapids. In addition, the two days allowed the trainers to see the training site, answer questions, help secure commitments from trainees toward the laboratories, and discuss and explain the design and program with interested citizens and officials. Ultimately, a seven phase program was set up.

The *first phase* of the training design was a three-day laboratory for five policemen and five com-

munity residents. This was meant to be a demonstration of how police/community relations could be improved through laboratory methods.

The *second phase*, a five-day laboratory to prepare the participants to be effective leaders of discussion groups, followed approximately a month later and involved the same participants.

The *third phase* followed immediately and was a repeat of the first phase, with ten new participants. Personnel from the first two phases served as assistant instructors to the SRI training staff.

The *fourth phase* again prepared the new participants in discussion group techniques while the old participants served as assistants to the trainers. As in the second phase, this session lasted five days.

The *fifth phase* was a three-day residential T-Group (or sensitivity training session) in which all twenty trainees participated. It was anticipated that at the end of this session, through a process of individual and group evaluation, twelve to fifteen of the qualified participants were to be selected to conduct a police/community relations training program for a large number of police and community residents in Grand Rapids. The participants who were less qualified as discussion leaders were involved in the remainder of the program as process observers, coordinators, etc. (Experience has shown that in such a limited time, 75 percent of the individuals either through previous positive experience or because of a greater openness to new knowledge, are better able to grasp and apply the fundamentals of intergroup dynamics than others.)

The *sixth phase* involved all twenty participants as well as key community residents, public officials, and police personnel. These individuals met with the trainer for two days to develop a viable curriculum and schedule for a comprehensive police/community relations program. The involvement of the police and community was critical at this stage for commitment to the program. The planning and design continued until the best possible program was established, and until it was well publicized in the community.

The *seventh phase* was the implementation of the above police/community relations program. The first series of laboratories involved approximately fifteen police and fifteen community residents. The professional trainers assisted in the first workshop, with the police and community assuming full responsibility for conducting the following laboratories.

Pre-laboratory analysis. Two weeks prior to the

initial training (in February, 1967) two behavioral scientists, one white and one black, conducted a pre-laboratory analysis of police/community relations in Grand Rapids. Interviews were held with key city and community leaders and discussions were taped with patrolmen and ghetto residents. In-basket materials letters setting forth stimulating community problems, were developed and sent to the participants approximately 10 days in advance of the initial training session. The utilization of in-basket material has often been felt to be useful only if it is relevant and directly applicable to the lives of the training participants. The in-basket case was completed prior to the laboratory and became a valuable training device during the session itself.

Step 1. The first step of the total police/community relations program (Phase 7 of the total training) consisted of a three-day training session during which the participants experienced a series of exercises involving their own perceptions of each other and their ability to communicate with each other. In each instance the exercises were sufficiently removed from the real issue of police/community tension so as to allow for some objectivity of involvement. Because the participants were ill at ease, they were initially grouped with members of their own respective groups. However, at the conclusion of the first day they were mixing freely and defending emotional and intellectual positions developed in their own groups against opinions formulated by other police and community sub-groups. It was concluded not only with some very specific concerns resolved, but with a general feeling that something had been learned about communications. There was much anticipation of the next day.

The second and third days were devoted to intergroup activities which provided the participants with an opportunity to experience the differences between competitive and cooperative behavior and between constructive and destructive intergroup behavior. Utilizing the in-basket materials, an intergroup competitive exercise was administered to the participants creating an opportunity for them to work on a serious problem not as police and community sub-groups but rather as mixed group versus mixed group. Increasingly, during the second day the polarities of the police and community groups began to slowly erode so that when the third day of training was completed it was possible to discuss explosive issues in a less threaten-

ing atmosphere. While very few deep-rooted conflicts were resolved during this phase, initial problems were identified by the participants. This was achieved through the use of the "Force Field Analysis" technique. This approach analyzes problems utilizing a weighted score which is given to each of the causes acting upon a conflict situation. This technique makes it possible for all of the participants to contribute to a visual diagram which is constructed on a blackboard and depicts the detailed nature of a community conflict. The problem analyzed by the initial participants was the causes of police/community conflict.

An evaluation was then conducted of this first step. Utilizing a questionnaire the participants were asked to indicate their own responses to the three days of training. They were almost unanimous in indicating that not only they personally benefited from the training session but they improved their understanding of the other group. At the end of this step there was a general feeling of optimism and an expression of personal involvement. However, there was skepticism as to whether the techniques used in the training were applicable to the community's real problems.

Step 2. The second step was conducted in April, 1967. One of the basic causes of problems in relations between the police and the community is both groups' lack of understanding of the others' behavior and attitudes. The second phase of the training program was designed to approach this cause. The setting of this program utilized the benefit of placing people in a relatively controlled laboratory setting and flexibly using planned techniques. The basic goal of training was to enable the participants to be skilled discussion leaders. Two principle approaches were used: first, the project attempted to create understanding among the participants of the different perspectives and problems of the various ethnical composites of the Grand Rapids area and of the police department. Second, the program attempted to familiarize the participants with the process of group behavior in order that they might be qualified to disseminate this understanding throughout the area as group discussion leaders.

To develop understanding, the trainers helped the trainees to recognize that each person has a different social perspective because of personal experience and cultural environment and therefore needs to develop a process by which the participants can begin to see beyond these limited

perspectives to grasp the meaning of other groups' social environments. To facilitate an understanding among the group itself, several vehicles were used. First, problems which exist in Grand Rapids were analyzed in a growing atmosphere of objectivity. These problems were discussed and evaluated from all group perspectives, and many misunderstandings and misinterpretations were recognized. These discussions included some issues which to some seem insignificant, e.g., hair and mustache styles, food and eating habits, use of slang, etc., but, in fact, have the potential, when seen through the eyes of certain groups, for serious misunderstandings—to make intergroup communication almost impossible.

Another method used to achieve understanding was the discussion and evaluation of what is considered by the police and community groups as norms (expected behavior) of the groups. It was agreed that these norms are not universally held among the different groups, but that they did exist at least to some extent. Among those said to be held by the people of the Negro "ghetto" are: Don't talk to police; the police is your enemy; and don't be a policeman. Some of the police-held norms about the "ghetto" area are: There is a lack of cooperation from the people of this area; the people have a misunderstanding of the police function; and there is a general low standard of morality among the people of the "ghetto." Through analysis of the bases of these norms held by the groups toward each other, it was realized that there was a mutual lack of objectivity in viewing the people of the community and the Police Department. The implications of this conclusion were stated as difficulties in police/community relations caused by preconceived opinions of the behavior which will be encountered in such relations.

Small group discussions allowed the participants to come to know each other on a person-to-person basis and to develop trust in each other. Through these discussions, the participants talked and listened to each other as human beings rather than as representatives of respective groups, and shared personal experiences and viewpoints. An example is the realization by a white policeman of what it is to see through black eyes a blue uniform in a police cruiser.

Field trips by police and community pairs were made to restaurants, bars, and homes in various parts of Grand Rapids. Field trips to observe the

Police Department were made by the same pairs. Community members joined their police partner in riding in squad cars. The sensitivity and perception shown in the reactions of the participants on these trips demonstrated that significant on-the-spot understandings were being learned. These trips also made a positive impression on many of the people who were encountered in the community, emphasizing that a relatively small group can reach portions of the community not directly involved in the training experience.

Throughout the entire second step it was both explicitly and implicitly recognized that communication and understanding were and had to be based on trust among the group members. During the first day it was obvious that the trust which was achieved in the first phase was being re-established, and as the phase progressed the trust grew.

The second approach used in the SRI program during the second step was the study of group dynamics and process. This involved the mechanics of group interaction; the routes of communication between group members; the structure of the group; the influence of the physical arrangement of the group, etc. One of the most important techniques in this regard was the self-examination of the groups' own interaction. By analyzing what happens within the group it is possible to gain an understanding of some of the fundamental principles of practical group process. The role of leader, positive contributor, follower, and comedian were recognized as some of the components of groups. The presence of "hidden agendas"—opinions or feelings which group members bring with them into the group and which they implicitly if not explicitly express—was seen as a hinderance to groups in effectively dealing with the problems at hand. Opportunities were provided for the group to objectively observe another group's interaction and recognize as outsiders the dynamics involved. Role-playing (assuming an assigned role such as leader or constructive contributor in group discussions) also helped the participants become acquainted with the group process by making them consciously aware of the interaction taking place. The process of receiving and giving feedback (information which is specific, descriptive, timely, and appropriate) was also presented. Finally, the group was presented with a problem to solve in which they were to demonstrate the approaches acquired in the training. This exercise re-enforced

the sum of the skills which were learned and demonstrated that the group had been quite successful in this regard.

Steps 3 and 4. Steps 3 and 4 were repeats of Steps 1 and 2 with 10 new participants. The original participants assumed some of the responsibilities for the training. It was noted that the new participants seemed more eager to deal with the police/community issues on a "gut" level. It was apparent that the original group which had experienced steps 1 and 2 had transmitted their enthusiasm to the new participants. As a consequence the environment was more conducive for training during steps 3 and 4. However, this readiness to deal with issues too often resulted with attack and defense during the first few days of step 3. The design helped to objectify experiences, but feelings of frustration were evident at the end of step 3. Commitments to continue, however, were also high.

The fourth step allowed for problems to be approached in an atmosphere more conducive to resolution. The second group of participants concluded step 4 at approximately the same level of growth as did the original participants.

Step 5. Step 5 consisted of a three-day T-Group of sensitivity training sessions conducted at a retreat center on Lake Michigan about 60 miles from Grand Rapids. The objective was to allow the original and the new participants to merge as one group and to develop as much trust as possible before moving into the planning of a larger program. Much of the more significant learnings took place during the free time and during the late evening spontaneous meetings. Participants were allowed ample opportunity to pair with other group members whom they thought they would like to know better or whom they felt they wanted to confront with personal feelings. The high point was reached on the second evening and the third morning. In the evening the two groups identified many unresolved issues, including the difficulty in relationships which existed between specific members of the police and community group. They spent the evening as one group forming sub-groups and pairs in order to develop more meaningful relations with each other. This process carried over into the groups on day three where open and honest feedback was exchanged. Insight was gained by more individuals concerning the effect their actions had on others. The groups devoted the last afternoon to selecting a steering committee

to coordinate plans for step 6 (planning conference) and outline objectives and individual assignments. The steering committee has continued to meet regularly. As designed and anticipated, the movement from trainer to consultant or resource became a reality during the weeks since the T-Group. The break was sharp the last day of step 5 as the trainers worked through the planning of step 6. The group responded slowly until they suggested that they needed to do it by themselves. The trainers agreed and left the room. Some participants reacted by withdrawing, but the majority of the trainees assumed leadership of the program. This group of individuals have continued to help their community in its police/community relations and indeed, during the Grand Rapids mini-riot, in the summer of 1967, many of the participants contributed to the peaceful *rapprochement* of that potentially very destructive riot situation (see *Look*, February 6, 1968, "The White Cop and the Black Rebel").

EVALUATION AND PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS

As a component part of the program, an on-going evaluation is designed to provide immediate feedback as to the effectiveness of the training process, as such process relates to stated objectives.

Design for Evaluation. The design for evaluation asks two basic questions:

What has been the impact of the police/community relations training program upon the trainee-participants?

What has been the impact of the trainee-participants and of the training program itself on team building between ghetto residents, police officers, and the wider community, and upon the solution of community problems?

Subsumed under that general heading are the following questions which research should answer:

1. To what extent have the training programs been able to sensitize participants to the effects of intercultural similarities and differences upon attitudes and behaviors?
2. To what extent have "hidden agendas" been made *visible* and "worked through" within the framework of group process?

3. To what extent have participants been made aware of the impact of their behaviors upon others?
4. To what extent have the stereotyped attitudes and expectations of participants been modified?
5. To what extent have participants achieved role definition and working relationships?
6. To what extent has an effective team problem-solving process been developed and to what extent has this process been applied to the solution of community problems?

Preliminary Observations. To date, as a result of several experiences in implementing the SRI design or variations of it, there is considerable evidence that it is entirely possible to effectively create viable team approaches to the reduction of police/community tension. Trust *does* occur in these training groups, as does the acquisition of many important skills which are needed to resolve community tensions. Perhaps the greatest need is to insure that this process somehow becomes institutionalized and therefore becomes an integral part of the manner in which communities solve their problems. To this end there has been some indication that success is possible. In Grand Rapids those individuals trained played a significant role in staving off an incipient riot during the summer of 1967. In another city, the joint efforts of police and community groups resulted in the creation of an extremely popular recreation center which served not only to provide a valuable community service, but also to increase the good feeling developed between the two groups. The movement toward institutionalization of the team effectiveness approach resulted in the creation of a human relations department in one police force which had as its board of advisors both police and ghetto residents. In all instances where this training approach was utilized, there was considerable evidence of changing attitudes on the part of both police and ghetto members. There has not yet been sufficient time to observe this process in order to determine its long-range effectiveness. However, it is our judgment that there is every reason to be hopeful.