

A SYSTEMATIC MODEL OF PSYCHODRAMA

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If one does not have a systematic scheme, a series of problems follow. One does not know which of a myriad of events one should attend. Without system, there are no explicit criteria by which to determine what is relevant and what is irrelevant for one's purpose (Ford and Urban, 1963, p. 27).

The purpose of this manuscript is to describe some aspects of a systematic model of psychodrama that will delineate the psychodramatic process and help the psychodramatist refine his cognitive understanding of psychodrama. Throughout this writing the author's reference to a "systematic model", will refer to a visual representation of the general dynamics in a typical psychodrama session as seen through the eyes of the director. Similar models have been effectively presented by Carl Hollander (1978) and Ann Hale (1974).

Part of the difficulty in presenting such a guide to psychodrama is the complexity of the method, and, according to J. L. Moreno, its "existential" character (Moreno, 1968, p. 3). Each client, or protagonist, is viewed as a person whose life experience is so unique that each psychodrama will be unique; a psychodrama session will not follow the same formula for any given person (Goldman, 1978). The situation is made more difficult in that each psychodramatist may use his understanding of psychodrama in different ways, emphasizing different views of personality dynamics and development.

Terms

A number of terms are defined so as to insure one's understanding of systems-related concepts. Familiarity with the basic psychodramatic terms is assumed.

A *systematic model* refers to a graphic and sequential representation of the communication in a psychodrama session. This is also referred to as a *flowchart*. An example of this is seen in Figure 1.

The *subsystem* is a smaller element of the total system. In the flowchart, the subsystem refers to each of the larger rectangles, such as DIRECT ACTION, which includes a number of functions in smaller rectangles, such as IDENTIFY CONCERNS (see Figure 2). *Function*

refers to a specific behavior or cognitive process. In this model, each function is enclosed by a rectangle, which is titled by capitalized descriptor words.

A *signal path* is the direction of the flow of information on the flow-chart, which is represented by an arrow, as in Figure 1.

The *level of detail* is defined as the degree of specificity of any function. For example in Figure 2, the first level of detail is DIRECT ACTION (4.0), a second level of detail is DESCRIBE SCENE (4.4), a third level of detail is TIME (4.4.1), and a fourth level of detail is the RELATION TO PRESENT (4.4.1.1) choice. The more detailed the number level, (example 4.4.1.1 is more detailed than 4.1), the more specific the function.

Feedback denotes the inner control which helps a system to stabilize itself, similar to the process by which thermostats regulate temperature in a room. Figure 1 is an example of feedback where EVALUATE DIRECTOR PERFORMANCE is fed back to THE DIRECTOR. *Feedforward* is a term applied to a signal path showing an output from a subsystem to a succeeding subsystem, where there are one or more intervening subsystems which are unaffected by the signal path (Stewart et al., 1978, p. 59). In Figure 2, the movement from VERBALIZE (4.1.1), by-passing SELECT CONCERN (4.2), to SELECT SCENE (4.3) is an example of feedforward.

The *circle with a point-numeric code inside* is a short-cut means of showing a relationship between two relatively distant functions, as opposed to connecting them with a signal path (Stewart et al., 1978, p. 57). In Figure 2, the function of TERMINATE ACTION (4.8) is distant from RESTRUCTURE GROUP (6.1), so a circle with a point-numeric code inside is used to represent with movement.

Collection dot is a symbol indicating that all data from the various points of a particular function are to be "collected together" or summed, and then carried as a unit to the next function (Stewart et al., 1978, p. 57-58). In Figure 2, the RELATION TO PRESENT (4.4.1.1), and TIME OF DAY (4.4.1.2) aspects of the TIME (4.4.1) function, are brought together to the next function, PLACE (4.4.2).

Performance criteria refers to the criteria which is used to specifically evaluate communication and behavior in the process of a system in this model, performance criteria will consist of process questions about the behavior of the psychodrama director.

Validity of the Model

The systematic model in Figure 1, will be compared with written descriptions of the basic components of psychodrama as presented by

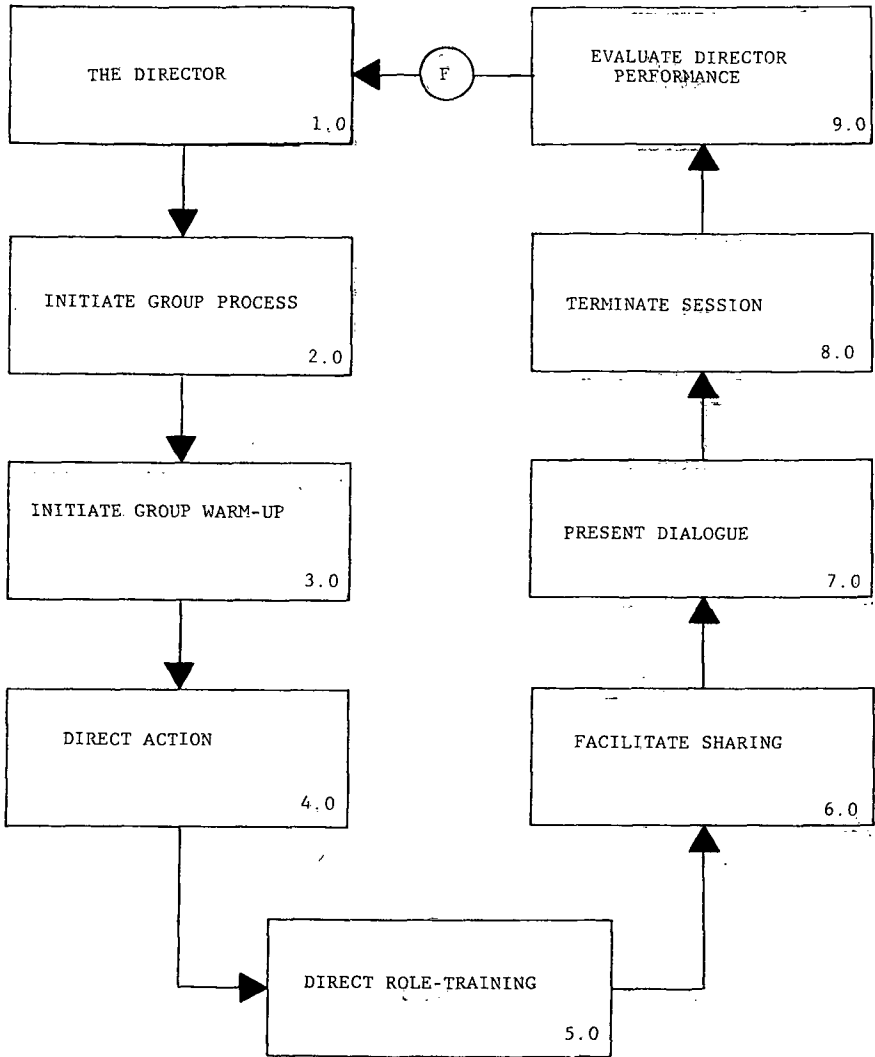


Figure 1: Flowchart of the Systematic Model Psychodrama

several experts in the Field. Among the experts are Elaine Eller Goldman, Director of the Western Institute for Psychodrama, Phoenix, Arizona; Martin Haskell, Director of the California Institute of Socioanalysis, Long Beach, California, and Past President of the American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama (ASGPP); Carl Hollander, Director of the Colorado Psychodrama Center, Denver, Colorado and Current Presi-

dent of the ASGPP; the late J.L. Moreno, the originator of the psychodramatic method; and Lewis Yablonsky, noted author and Director of the California Theatre of Psychodrama, Los Angeles, California. All of these psychodramatists were trained under the auspices of J. L. Moreno at the Moreno Institute in Beacon, New York.

The essential elements of a group psychodrama are the protagonist, the auxiliary egos, the director, the stage and the group (Haskell, 1967, p. 11). This starting place is symbolized by the subsystem of THE DIRECTOR (1.0), which represents the psychodrama director and all the experience he brings to the group session.

The director must in some way begin the group through a process of introduction and, if the group is unfamiliar with psychodrama, explain the principle components of psychodrama (Goldman, 1978; Haskell, 1967, p. 28), which are represented by the INITIATE GROUP PROCESS (2.0) subsystem.

With the initiation of the group the director facilitates the group Warm-Up (Goldman; 1978; Haskell, 1967, pp. 28-45; Yablonsky, 1976, pp. 99-101), or interaction of group members. This same process is identified in the INITIATE GROUP WARM-UP (3.0) subsystem of the systematic model. This Warm-Up, includes the director's awareness of the emerging sociometry of the group and potential areas of exploration.

Following the Warm-Up is the Action portion of a typical psychodrama. The Action is the bulk of the session devoted to helping the protagonist (s) clarify and/or resolve his difficulties (Goldman, 1978; Haskell, 1967, pp. 46-75; Hollander, 1978, pp. 5-9; Yablonsky, 1976, p. 13). The Action segment is identical to the DIRECT ACTION (4.0) subsystem of the model.

The process of Role-Training is described in a variety of ways by experienced psychodrama directors. Haskell (1975, p. 283-287) differentiates Role-Training from psychodrama but does not specify when the techniques are to be used, other than after the initial psychodrama exploration. Hollander (1978, pp. 8-9) suggests the use of Role-Training at the conclusion of the Action segment before the initiation of the Sharing. Elaine Goldman (1978) generally considers the Role-Training to be a process that occurs after the Action portion, and likewise the DIRECT ROLE-TRAINING (5.0) subsystem is visualized as occurring after the Action, and prior to the Sharing.

After the completion of the Action or Role-Training, the director requests that the group members discuss the psychodrama session with the protagonist (Haskell, 1967, pp. 76-85; Hollander, 1978, p. 9; Yablonsky, 1976, p. 13). Most directors further differentiate between the Sharing (personal experiences) and the Dialogue (analysis) portions of the discus-

sion with the Sharing preceding the Dialogue (Goldman, 1978; Hollander, 1978, p. 14). This writer's model incorporates these differences in portraying the FACILITATE SHARING (6.0) and PRESENT DIALOGUE (7.0) subsystems.

After the conclusion of the psychodrama, a final aspect of the typical psychodrama session, especially for the student-in-training, is the critique

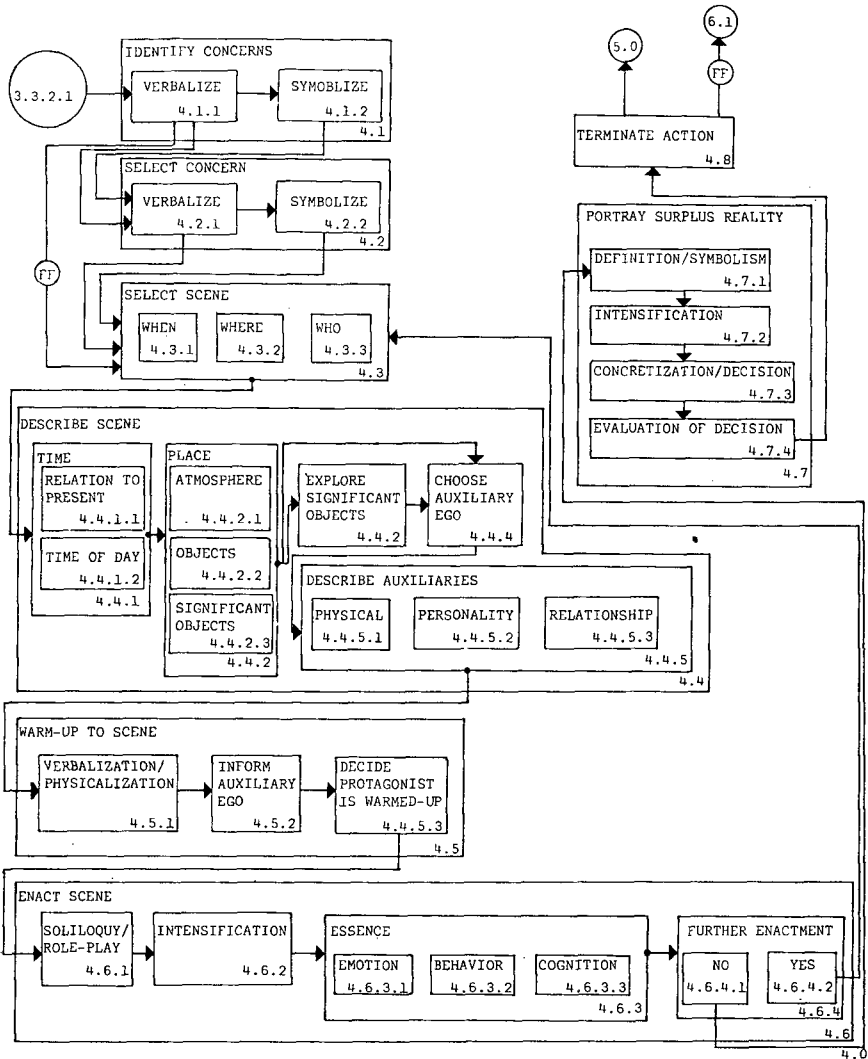


Figure 2: Direct Action

or "processing" (Goldman, 1978). This is represented by the EVALUATE DIRECTOR PERFORMANCE (9.0) subsystem in the systematic model. This model is completed with the process of feedback, in which the director utilizes the suggestions in the critique to improve his performance in future psychodramas.

The Systematic Model

The following model is an original synthesis of a variety of psychodramatic styles. It is important for the reader to understand that this model represents Morenean psychodrama while including the preferences of this writer. As a general rule, the more detailed the level of function, the more apt that function is to reflect the style of this writer. A narrative and corresponding process questions are offered to facilitate the reader's understanding of the model. They are intended to challenge the director to present his rationale for a specific decision, which could in turn encourage the director to more carefully monitor his behavior.

Only one subsystem is described in detail, that of DIRECT ACTION (4.0), while the remaining subsystems are delineated in this author's original manuscript (Schramski, 1978). Most importantly, the one subsystem portrayed conveys a style for interpreting the psychodramatic process, adaptable to the style of the individual director. The point in the psychodrama at which the subsystem (4.0) is initiated assumes the choice of a protagonist in the sociometric evolution of the group, through the warm-up phase. Adaptation would be necessary in the circumstances of multiple protagonists.

NARRATIVE

(4.0, Figure 2) The Action begins with the director helping the protagonist to verbally identify his general concerns (4.1.1) and symbolizing (4.1.2) the concerns when necessary (i.e., using chairs to identify several problem areas that are confusing), or moving to select one concern (4.2), which involves the same process of verbalization (4.2.1) and symbolism (4.2.2).

PROCESS QUESTIONS

(4.1.1) Were the concerns clearly identified?

(4.2.1) Were the relevant concerns selected? (4.2.2) If symbolism was attempted, what techniques were used? Was the symbolism clear to the protagonist?

NARRATIVE

Once the concern is identified, the psychodrama is "anchored" by choosing a scene in which the concern is evident (4.3), which entails briefly stating the time (4.3.1, i.e., past, present, future), location (4.3.2, i.e., house, business, outdoors, etc.), and people who are present (4.3.3, i.e., mother, father, lover, etc.)

Once this information is acquired, the scene is described in detail (4.4). The time of the scene (4.4.1, i.e., past, present, or future), is established as is the time of day (4.4.1.2). If necessary the atmosphere is determined (4.4.2.1, example "give me one word for the way you feel in this room"). Important objects such as furniture represented through the use of props (4.4.2.2), and significant objects, if any, such as a special photograph, are identified in the scene (4.4.2.3).

If there are significant objects, the director may choose to further describe these objects (4.4.3), to obtain a better idea of the protagonist's feeling and/or to intensify the experience.

The protagonist is then directed to choose significant others in the scene, if anyone else is present (4.4.4). These auxiliary egos are then introduced, (4.4.5) in physical terms, (4.4.5.1, i.e., age, height, attire, etc.), in terms of personality characteristics (4.4.5.2, i.e., caring,

PROCESS QUESTIONS

(4.3) What was the scene? Why was it chosen? (4.3.1) Were the when, where (4.3.2), and who (4.3.3) components identified?

(4.4.1) Was the scene clearly "anchored" in time?

(4.4.2) Was the location established? (4.4.2.1) Was the overall atmosphere of the location identified?

(4.4.2.2) Were relevant objects, such as furniture, used in the scene? If not, why not?

(4.4.2.3) Were significant objects identified in the scene? If not, why not?

(4.4.3) If significant objects were identified, how were they explored by the director? Is the director encouraging the spontaneity of the protagonist in describing the scene?

(4.4.4) How were auxiliary egos chosen? (4.4.5) Were auxiliary egos adequately described? Respond to this question in terms of physical appearance (4.4.5.1), personality characteristics (4.4.5.2) and relationship to the protagonist (4.4.5.3).

NARRATIVE

angry, humorous, etc.), and in terms of the relationship between the protagonist and the auxiliary (4.4.5.3, i.e., honest, closed, enjoyable, etc.).

With this descriptive information the director helps the protagonist warm-up to the scene, to enhance the emotional experience (4.5). The director can use any variety of non-verbal/verbal techniques to help the protagonist ready himself for the scene (4.5.1). This process is important in obtaining information for the benefit of the director and auxiliary egos for the eventual intensification of the psychodrama (4.5.2).

When the director senses that the protagonist is ready (4.5.3), the scene is enacted (4.6). The enactment usually begins with a role-playing situation (4.6.1) involving the protagonist and the auxiliary egos. (However the scene may only be concerned with the soliloquy of the protagonist, and other people might not be present in the scene). During this process the director may need to encourage the auxiliary egos to verbalize a specific message, and can use techniques such as role-reversal.

The director encourages the protagonist to intensify his feelings (4.6.2) in the encounter or soliloquy by focusing on "what isn't being said." An example might include an encounter between father and

PROCESS QUESTIONS

(4.5) Was the protagonist properly warmed-up to the scene? Estimate the protagonist's level of spontaneity at this point.

(4.5.1) What techniques were used to warm-up the protagonist?

(4.5.2) Were the auxiliary egos sufficiently instructed in order to enact the scene?

(4.5.3) On what basis did the director decide to proceed to enacting the scene? (4.6) How did the director initiate the scene? (4.6.1) What techniques were used to initiate the role play or soliloquy?

(4.6.2) How was the activity of the scene intensified by the director? How effective were the techniques used by the director?

NARRATIVE

son where the protagonist (son) is verbally bantering with his father, *but* never really saying how much he needs his father's love.

In this intensification, the director helps the protagonist understand the essence of the encounter (4.6.3) by extracting the primary emotion (4.6.3.1), as well as accompanying behavior (4.6.3.2) and cognition (4.6.3.3).

Once the essence of the scene is derived, the director decides whether further enactment is necessary (4.6.4). A NO or YES (4.6.4.2) answer is determined by the previously mentioned "clinical judgment" as well as by direct statements by the protagonist that further exploration is necessary.

If further enactment is deemed necessary (4.6.4.2), the director and protagonist recycle to selecting a scene (4.3). If further enactment is not necessary (4.6.4.1) the Action moves to the concretization/summarization segment (4.7).

The decision to recycle (4.3) to another scene is usually justified by the director's judgment that a more complete sociometric view is needed and/or that past relationships are influencing the protagonist's perception of his concerns.

In surplus reality (4.7) the director helps the protagonist to symbolize and define (4.7.1) the decision to be made.

PROCESS QUESTIONS

(4.6.3) What was the essence of the scene? Include emotional (4.6.3.1), behavioral (4.6.3.2), and cognitive (4.6.3.3). Evaluate the director's facilitation of catharsis of abreaction.

(4.6.4) On what basis did the director decide to enact further scenes? (4.6.4.2) How was the transition made from one scene to another? (4.6.4.1). If NO, what was the transition to a concretization? How appropriate was this transition?

(4.7.1) How was the concretization defined and symbolized for the protagonist? Was this symbolism verified with the protagonist?

Once the symbolism is established as accurate, the director facilitates an intensification of the experience for the protagonist (4.7.2). (An example might include a protagonist who feels he is "covering" himself with self-pity. The director could have several group members hold a blanket over the protagonist to emphasize the experience of "covering"). Often the symbolism is not this obvious and the director may explore possible abstractions that are both organic to the session and clearly representative of the issues involved.

The protagonist is then asked to decide (4.7.3) what he is going to do in the symbolic circumstance. (In the previous example, this entails whether or not to shed the symbolic blanket). Based on the protagonist's decision, the director helps the protagonist to evaluate his decision (4.7.4) in terms of appropriateness and previous enactment in the psychodrama.

Concluding this evaluation, the Action is terminated (4.8) and the director decides to proceed to the Role-Training (5.0) or move forward to the Sharing (6.1)

From the conclusion of the DIRECT ACTION (4.0) subsystem to the EVALUATE DIRECTOR PERFORMANCE (9.0) the progression can be described in similar detail. The feedback loop of knowledge gained from the evaluation into THE DIRECTOR (1.0) subsystems completes the general system, which theoretically improves in quality as the director continues in training.

(4.7.2) How was the symbolism intensified for the protagonist?

(4.7.3) What decision did the protagonist make? Was the decision coerced in any way by the director? What evidence does the protagonist offer, if any, of a catharsis of integration?

(4.7.4) On what basis did the director decide to conclude the symbolic action and move to another activity?

(4.8) How did the director terminate the Action? On what basis did the director decide to proceed to Role-Training (5.0) or the Sharing (6.1)?

Conclusion

A model of psychodrama is presented which enables the student observer to more clearly understand the psychodramatic process without diminishing the creativity of the model. Spontaneity necessitates some purposeful organization. The flowchart model appears particularly well-suited to the needs of the neophyte who is developing his or her own frame of reference. Like the young musician, our first psychodramatic actions often seem mechanistic as we try to replicate the artistry of a master. In the same sense this model is a general metaphor which can be used to facilitate our own creativity and spontaneity.

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The full text from which this article was abstracted, is available from the author.

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