CHAPTER SIX

Exploring group relations work in China: challenges, risks, and impact

Hüseyin Özdemir

Introduction

This chapter is written from the perspective of a director and organiser of three group relations (GR) conferences in China. The conferences took place in 2010, 2011, and 2012. I try to focus the GR-work from two perspectives. One is what it is like to introduce GR work into a foreign, as well as very complex, country and culture (Özdemir, 2013). The second challenge was to conduct the conference in context with the sponsoring company. These three GR conferences were part of a wider organisational development (OD) process of the sponsoring company. What we tried from the very beginning of the OD process in 2004 was to bring socio-technical system thinking into place.

The GR conferences were designed for members who wanted to improve their understanding of their roles, their personal authority, and their responsibility in roles in order to manage them accordingly. In 2011 and in 2012, we conducted post-conference research. One of our Chinese staff members conducted interviews with twenty-two former members. Some of the original quotations are included in this chapter, with some light editing of the original English for clarity.
Another reason for the amount of original voices in this chapter is that the participants of Belgrafe III in 2012 expressed interest in “hearing” some more voices of the Chinese members. So, these voices give the reader the opportunity of forming his or her personal view on GR work in China. For those who are planning to run GR conferences in China, those comments also might provide some helpful insight.

The chapter first provides a brief overview of the Chinese culture. Then the facts of the three conferences are presented. Thereafter, the results are shown.

**China**

China is interesting not only as a low-wage country for the manufacturing sector. Given its high population, it has developed itself into a potentially vital and thriving market for international companies (Liefner, 2005, p. 1). Systematic organisation development is, in China, still a largely unknown field. Group Relations Conferences do not exist there. Companies focus, alongside technical trainings, on intercultural trainings for their expatriate leaders (Herbolzheimer, 2009, p. 48).

**Cultural influences**

Chinese society is strongly influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism (Mun Chin Kok, 2006). Values based on Confucianism are “respect”, “responsibility”, “group cohesion”, “harmony”, “potential as human beings”, and “humans as part of a network”. Learning is based on “copy and follow”, instead of “study and learning from experience” (Kolb & Tianjian Jiang, 2005). Confucius believes that all human beings are born into a social class (Xiao Juan Ma, 2007, p. 129). “Jun-Zi” means educated person (the “noble character”), who has to be respected. “Xiao-Ren” means “little man”, who has to be controlled. A Chinese proverb says, “All things belong to the little man but education to the noble”.

**Traditional Chinese values erode**

Traditional values begin to change. Therefore, Chinese society is in a dilemma.
Confucianism has been torn apart. Maoism is largely gone. Western values and lifestyles keep creeping into China together with Hollywood movies, MTV, Coca-Cola, and McDonald’s. The first question one needs to ask is: what morals do the Chinese need? Confucian virtues? Not really. Maoism? Almost impossible. Western values and moral standards? Well, they belong to the West.

Or a little bit of the positive from each of the three moral codes? Whatever the case, the Chinese need to create a new moral system to fit with the changed social environment, something with which the Chinese can identify and behave accordingly. (Yanan, 1996, p. 99, translated for this edition)

Yanan Yu and Godwin Chu conducted a study in China which looked at the change in cultural values. There were 2,000 participants asked to select from a list of eighteen traditional Chinese values, those were: “what they are proud of”, “which they wish to unlearn”, and “for what value they have no opinion”. The responses of 2,000 participants showed the following results (Table 6.1).

The authors were shocked that the second strongest negative evaluation was the traditionally very important Chinese value of the “Way of the Golden Mean”. The way of the golden mean should be seen as a Chinese philosophy of life. The Chinese are not looking for extremes in life. Rather, they seek to harmonise relationships and bring peace to the human soul (Yanan, 1996, pp. 127, 177).

Furthermore, it can be stated in terms of the interaction of various levels of hierarchy that Confucianism, as a value system, emphasises hierarchy, authority, compliance with regulations, status differences and the absolute respect for superiors (Selmer, 2002, p. 21).

In China, the elderly are traditionally respected, which the older people naturally demand. The younger people are socialised to obey their elders. This expectation of the young is so subtle that people in the west might not notice it (Selmer, 2006, p. 350).

“Saving face” in China is an important part of everyday interaction. In the Western world, morality is linked to the aspect of blame. In contrast, morality in China is linked to the issue of shame. Therefore, criticism means much more than the naming of a situational failure, and it is more likely to lead to evading or avoiding criticism (Busch & Sellmann, 2007; Fargel, 2011).

In conclusion, one may conclude that the community, the common good, and the culture occupy a very important role in Chinese society.
Table 6.1. Index of responses to questions about eighteen traditional Chinese values in a study of 2,000 participants (Source: Yanan, 1996).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Index</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Long historical heritage</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Diligence and frugality</td>
<td>86.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Loyalty and devotion to state</td>
<td>67.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Benevolent father, filial son</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Generosity and virtues</td>
<td>39.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Respect for traditions</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Submission to authority</td>
<td>33.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Harmony is precious</td>
<td>29.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Tolerance, propriety, deference</td>
<td>25.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Chastity for women</td>
<td>-13.5</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Glory to ancestors</td>
<td>-23.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>A house full of sons and daughters</td>
<td>-35.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Farmers high, merchants low</td>
<td>-43.3</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Pleasing superiors</td>
<td>-48.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Discretion for self-preservation</td>
<td>-53.9</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Differentiation between men and women</td>
<td>-59.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Way of golden mean</td>
<td>-59.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Three obediences and four virtues</td>
<td>-64.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Index: Percentage of those who are proud of these values minus percentage of those who would like to eradicate these values.

(Xiao Juan Ma, 2007). Chinese education places particular emphasis on the spirit of collectivism and the promotion of community (Pihenakis & Oberhuemer, 2010, p. 277). An important and interesting conclusion of this work is that in both cultures, the eastern and the western world, “education and learning” are regarded as fundamental to the development of society (Kolb & Tianjian Jiang, 2005).

**Chinese history and political system**

In relation to the thousands of years of Chinese history, it is not that long ago that the former president of China, Deng Xiaoping, opened the country to international investors and entrepreneurs in December 1978. Since 1980, the Chinese people have had contact with foreigners. Until then, the country was largely isolated from the outside world and its influences. Since then, the country has changed rapidly from a
planned economy to a prosperous market economy (Kolb & Tianjian Jiang, 2005), but with a still very strong central government that continues to define the basic parameters of the economy. In 1979, the government opened the country, by means of the joint venture law, to foreign capital (Luo, 2000, p. 159). Therefore, the time period in which free market principles have been introduced is relatively short. Besides their enormous economic performance, the Chinese are also proud of their education system, since they have also won awards and gained international recognition (Xiao Juan Ma, 2007, p. 133). Employees value their corporations and identify with them, especially if their company has a good reputation and offers them security (Xiao Juan Ma, 2007, p. 74).

In addition to Shanghai and Suzhou, Wuxi is an industrially and technologically highly developed area in the region, with increased demand for labour (Hebel & Schucher, 1999, p. 123).

Collective and individual perceptions, such as decision-making behaviour, are determined by one’s personal value system (Hofstede, 2001; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Rokeach, 1979; Schwartz, 1996). Values help people to select, to filter, and to evaluate internal and external environments (Staehle, 1999, pp. 171–176). Values can be divided into either individual or collective values. The collective, societal values are dominant preference models in a given society and its culture. The west has different preference models than those of China (Jullien, 1999; Wittkop, 2006).

Confucianism is the basis of China’s great cultural tradition, and the values that it has significantly shape interpersonal relationships today (Shenkar & Ronen, 1987). To understand the values of the Chinese, it is necessary to know the basic ideas of Confucianism and its particular importance in society. The Confucian ideals of “respect”, “responsibility”, and “cohesion in groups” have significant influence on the Far Eastern societies (Chamberlain, 1997). For example, the widespread paternalistic management style in China is attributed to Confucius.

The paternalistic leadership style is rooted in three thousand years of imperial rule. Under Confucianism (551–479 BCE), which became the official orthodoxy for China during the Han Dynasty, the family was the basic building block of society, and the father’s authority over family members was absolute. Although a similar power structure
The city of Wuxi

Wuxi is located 103 km from Shanghai.

Wuxi is a city richly endowed by nature. Owing to its pleasantly warm and moist climate, it boasts a reputation of the ‘Land of Fish and Rice’. Relying on the nearby Yangtze River and ancient Grand Canal, it had been a port city with the busiest rice and cloth market in China before 19th century. In modern times, with its rapidly developing industry, Wuxi became one of China’s top 50 cities with broad strength and is thus called the ‘Little Shanghai’ for its prosperous economy. With a splendid history of over three thousand years, Wuxi claims to be ‘the Pearl of Tai Lake’. Early in the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BCE–476 BCE), it had been the economic and political centre south of Yangtze River. (www.travelchinaguide.com/cityguides/jiangsu/wuxi, accessed July 4th 2013)

Organisations as socio-technical systems

A socio-technical system (STS) (see Figure 6.1) is an organised number of people and technologies, which is structured in a particular way in order to produce a specific result (Cummings & Srivastva, 1977, p. 55; Sydow, 1985, p. 27). The production of typical outcomes of an organisation (e.g., manufacturing products or installation of production equipment) is the major task of a primary work system (Trist, 1981). Emery (1959) has adapted the terminology of socio-technical systems to apply to organisations. Therefore, organisations fulfil one or several primary tasks (Sydow, 1985). This understanding of organisations is one of the foundations for the implementation of Group Relations Conferences in China.

The conference as a whole also can be understood as an STS. The "technical" elements were the primary task, structures, roles, territories, and resources such as flip-charts, drawings, etc. Elements of the social subsystem are the feelings, the inner images, the unconscious, the relationships, the values, etc.
The sponsoring institutions

All GR conferences were sponsored by an industrial joint venture, based in Wuxi with Headquarters in Germany and in China. Oezpa is the organising institution of the three GR conferences. The co-founder and co-director of Oezpa directed the three conferences and invited Chinese as well as international staff members.

The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, directed by Dr Eliat Aram, supported the GR conferences in China. Dr Marnie Sher, Director of the GR Programmes of the Tavistock Institute, was invited by the director to take over the associate director’s role in 2011 and 2012.

Membership

The participants of these three conferences all had leading and technical functions. In the third conference in 2012, the future general manager of the sponsoring company in Wuxi also participated. Thus, four to five levels of hierarchy were present in the conference.

Primary task

The conferences were designed as temporary learning organisations. The primary task of the conferences, in which staff worked to provide
opportunities, was to experience, explore, and learn from development and management of roles and systems, to experience leadership, authority, self-management in roles, and psychodynamic processes in organisations.

This goal could be reached by allowing oneself and others to experience the conference, to communicate these experiences and to examine their meaning in order to learn from the conference. This primary task was not easy for the Chinese members, as they came mostly from the same company. The traditional Chinese concept of group cohesion, as well as the language challenge, made it difficult for the members to experience and initiate ideas by themselves. Acting autonomously was difficult for them.

First GR conference, 2010, Wuxi

The first GR conference was held in 2010 and lasted for four days. We had developed Chinese staff over the years in the OD Programme (Özdemir, 2010). In this conference, we also introduced the training group. In this first training group, we strengthened the Chinese staff members in their roles as GR staff. To this end, we presented psychodynamic concepts such as unconscious dynamics in organisations, transference, countertransference, the organisation in the mind, and organisational role analysis. In the first conference, we conducted seminars by using video conferencing. Topics of the seminar events were system, group and role thinking, psychodynamic concepts, personality, and learning. The staff comprised: Dr Hüseyin Özdemir (Director, Germany, Switzerland, Turkey), Lucia Shijin (Associate Director, China), Olya Khaleelee (online staff, UK), Michael Pavlovic (online staff, Germany), Qin yu (administration, China), and Rafael Sarim Özdemir (administration, Germany, Switzerland). The schedule for this conference is shown in Figure 6.2.

Second GR conference, 2011, Wuxi

A year later, in 2011, the second conference was held. Twenty-six members, consisting of directors, managers, and employees, participated. Three members joined from another international company in
<table>
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**Figure 6.2. Schedule 2010, first GR conference.**

Wuxi. Four international staff members from Germany, Switzerland, the UK, and Australia took part. This open residential conference was directed by Dr Hüseyin Özdemir from Germany/Turkey. Three Chinese also worked within the staff: the assistant to the general manager, an employee of the human resources department, and an external Chinese manager.

We decided to work with the future general manager and his Chinese deputy in one review and application group as a group of two. I took over the consultant's role for this group. The conference started with a welcome speech by the sponsoring general manager.

The staff comprised: Dr Hüseyin Özdemir (Director, Germany, Switzerland, Turkey), Dr Manny Sher (Associate Director, UK, South Africa), Lucia Shijin (China), Barbara Lagler Özdemir (Switzerland, Germany), Dr Brigid Nossal (Australia), Qin Yu (administration, China), and Jingjun Wang (administration, China). The schedule for this conference is shown in Figure 6.3.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>09:00</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:30</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
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<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Session 1, Part 1: Introduction</td>
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<td>12:30</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:00</td>
<td>Session 1, Part 2: Keynote speech</td>
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<tr>
<td>15:30</td>
<td>Coffee break</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:00</td>
<td>Session 1, Part 3: Breakout sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>17:30</td>
<td>Closing remarks</td>
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**Third GR conference, 2012, Wuxi**

The third conference, in 2012, was held, like the two others, in a five-star hotel in Wuxi. The sponsoring company invested in the venue as well the external staff from the west. Alongside these investments, making the leading staff available for the conference for five days was also a huge expenditure for the company. The participants honoured this by showing general interest and full attendance, although they maintained critical opinion towards the conference in all three cases. They feared it could have been an Assessment Centre organised by the General Manager of the major sponsoring company. In this conference, we offered seminars by the staff members. Topics were a case study on OD, action research, and their own OD process from 2004 to 2012.

The staff comprised: Dr Hüseyin Özdemir (Director, Germany, Switzerland, Turkey), Dr Mannie Sher (Associate Director, UK, South Africa), Ménica Velarde Lazarte (Peru, USA), Professor Dr Sandra Schruijer (the Netherlands), Lei Qingbao (China), Si Xiaoqi (China), Qin yu (administration, China), Jingjun Wang (administration, China), and Pearl Stegmann (administration, Germany, China). The schedule for the conference is shown in Figure 6.4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday, 25th June 2012</th>
<th>Tuesday, 26th June 2012</th>
<th>Wednesday, 27th June 2012</th>
<th>Thursday, 28th June 2012</th>
<th>Friday, 29th June 2012</th>
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Figure 5.4. Schedule 2012, third GR conference.

**Training group (TG)**

Within the first and the third conferences there was a special training group. The Chinese staff members had the chance to learn the underlying methods, concepts, and dynamics in the training group. The training group consisted of Chinese and newly appointed international staff members. The selection criteria to become a TG member were openness and interest in learning according to this model, a high level of social skills, counselling skills, and recognition within the organisation.

Conceptual inputs were given by the director of the training group. The first TG in 2010 was directed by the Conference Director. The learning as a TG member was experiential. TG members had to work fully as staff members with all the restrictions that had not been experienced yet. The second TG was directed by an international staff member, Mónica Velarde Lazarte, from Peru. Conceptual topics were around issues like: rule and system thinking, consulting, organisation as a socio-technical system, Bion’s basic assumptions in groups, and other psychodynamic concepts.
Summary and findings: development of GR in China from 2010 to 2012

In our work in China, we focused on issues of economy, management, organisation, and personal development. Questions relating to political and social problems in China were deliberately not mentioned by the international staff. In my role as the director, I tried not to put the participants and my staff at risk. For me, as director of the conferences, I was always aware there might be a chance to come into conflict with local authorities. Therefore, my behaviour was as neutral and cautious as possible.

During the third conference, there was an argument between the hotel management and the directorship of the conference regarding information walls that were put up in the hallway of the hotel.

They would not allow us to display these at first. They probably thought there was a connection to the “wall newspapers” found in communist countries. Later, our Chinese staff members convinced them, and we were allowed to put our walls in the hallway of our floor.

My aim as the director was to introduce the GR work as basically as possible. This meant I had to convey basic concepts, such as “here-and-now-events”, small systems sitting in a circle face to face, large system sitting in a spiral, opening and closing plenaries set up like chairs in a lecture hall, with staff sitting in the front. Step by step, we increased the complexity of the GR work by, for instance, introducing “here and now events” in the second conference (Table 6.2). The table shows the key elements of the three conferences. The results of the interviews are listed below. Statements have been edited for clarity.

The foundation was set for the GR conferences by the long term OD process in one of the involved companies. The strong relationship between the sponsoring general manager, his managers, who were mostly the members of the conferences, and the director of the conferences created the basis for the conferences.

**Chinese staff involved**

Complexity also increased by getting Chinese staff involved. At the same time, the Chinese staff helped us international staff understand the cultural background of Chinese behaviour. This was the reason
Summary and findings: development of GR in China from 2010 to 2012

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case study involved

Complexity also increased by getting Chinese staff involved. At the time, the Chinese staff helped us international staff understand cultural background of Chinese behaviour. This was the reason...
why the Chinese staff, although less experienced in GR work, became an important part of our work. The involvement of Chinese people on the staff was appreciated and seen by the members as a positive development.

"Generally, the way of orglab is very special; it's different from ordinary training. The first time it's an experiment, the second time is an improvement, it tried to involve Chinese colleagues in the management team (HÖ: staff)." (Chinese member, 2012)

"The third time orglab is better, and we felt better seeing our colleague join in the consultant's team." (Chinese member, 2012)

**Working language**

The working language of the conferences was English. In the systems event, members' subsystems, where members worked without a consultant, the Chinese spoke their own language. In the RAGs (Özdemir & Özdemir Lagler, 2013), we asked them from time to time to talk in Chinese and then to translate their summary to the consultant. Translations were offered by members and organised for seminar events (SE). The staff asked members to translate during the seminar event. External translators were not used. The struggle with the different languages was part of the learning.

"No [HÖ: I didn't try out]. Because of the language problem, so I just followed one of my colleagues." (Chinese member, 2012)

"The [HÖ: Chinese] consultant made a conclusion at the beginning, and then we discussed and drew pictures. We found that different people may have different opinions on the same issue." (Chinese member, 2012)

English as a language and the accent of the staff members, besides the "GR language", was difficult to follow and to accept. Beside the fact that the language issue is a defence against reflecting one's role and learning, etc., it seemed to be a fact that the understanding of each other was difficult. "Language, it's better to have Chinese consultants" (Chinese member, 2012).

"Suggest using Chinese, because using the mother tongue is more freely [understood]." (Chinese member, 2012)
“Our English is not so good, and some of the consultants have strong accents, so we don’t understand well. Maybe this type of learning is a good way in the western countries, but could be adjusted a bit when applied in China according to the real situation of our company. Because most of the Chinese are not so open, and dare not speak.” (Chinese member, 2012)

**Chinese members with their technical background**

Chinese members, with their technical background, showed reactions similar to those of members in the west. At the same time, the Chinese cultural background had an impact on the learning. Besides being challenged as a member with a technical professional background, the Chinese cultural aspects were challenging, too.

“Do not know what exactly I learnt from it. Maybe I used something unconsciously, but couldn’t tell exactly. I think the orglab is different from others; it’s about ‘understand by yourself’. We could improve relevant abilities by observation and communication.” (Chinese member, 2012)

“At the beginning, the consultants sometimes act like the management, sometimes act like the consultants, we didn’t know what their real roles are. Due to the influence of my education background (engineer), I thought the consultants should tell us how to do things; we expected consultants to tell us the goal and the process. But later I understood what they do is to let us to feel, to experience, but not tell us the result.” (Chinese member, 2012)

“Not so much influence, maybe I could use something unconsciously. We Chinese prefer a detailed topic, then discuss it or study it together or separately.” (Chinese member, 2012).

**Wish for cognitive and “fast” learning**

Members were interested in having presentations by staff members and learning on a cognitive level. Written texts helped them to understand the English sentences and the meaning behind them. Discussions among the Chinese, in their own language, helped in taking in the theory. There was a wish for fast learning and to be given “how to do” instructions.
"I feel better when the consultants give us a presentation about the case study." (Chinese member, 2012)

[ Hö: "We got most out of Seminar Event; when there's a consultant to show a presentation, and others listen to it ..." (Chinese member and staff in 2012)].

"Two group relations psychology theories are introduced into the group relations workshop, when participants are able to link the theory to their daily life, they are more interested. Chinese people who are currently under great pressure lack patience. They want to see very quickly the application of the theory or what the use of the theory is. Participants think Chinese people are born to understand relationships, only western people write it as a theory. Participants lack self-reflection." (Chinese staff member, 2010)

"It helped [us] to understand faster if there was a PPT [HÖ: Microsoft PowerPoint] presentation." (Chinese member, 2012)

"They [HÖ: staff] made some changes, e.g., sharing some cases, and helped us to analyse them; this way is closer to the traditional Chinese one." (Chinese member, 2012)

More guided learning and curiosity

Members wished for more guided learning. They were curious and interested in exploring the theme.

"I like the seminar event. But it would be better if the SE could be changed to: give a topic or suggestion at the beginning, and talk about it in the groups, then put the results together, discuss again, then draw a conclusion." (Chinese member, 2012)

"I think this kind of workshop is accepted more or less by us, but we still need guidance from consultants. I wonder if the consultant could recommend some books or materials for us to read." (Chinese member, 2012)

Wish for personal feedback, explanation and "results"

The members asked in all three Conferences for personal feedback. The staff role was appealing to them. Competition with Chinese staff members by higher ranked members was expressed.
"... if it needs to continue, could we make some changes for the Orglab? Could the consultants give the participants an instant feedback after every event? Could give everyone a chance to recommend themselves to be a consultant, before we start the Orglab." (Chinese member, 2012)

"Hope the Orglab could have an exact goal or purpose, and let us know what we could get after taking that." (Chinese member, 2012)

"It's better to give us a clear explanation after the large system and system events." (Chinese member, 2012)

"These types [HÖ: Here and now events] are all good, but I prefer the one which has a consultant, and [if we] could get feedbacks from consultants." (Chinese member, 2012)

"Orglab is designed to be a dynamic system, and to let participants to develop in it, but there are no comments on the results. But, as Chinese, we always want to know if our results are right or not, and we wanted to get some judgements." (Chinese member, 2012)

"It's better to add some one-to-one communication." (Chinese member, 2012)

**Personal learning and transfer**

The personal learning and the transfer of CR learning was seen. Some were still struggling and trying to find out what all those conferences were about.

"All of those areas, especially in daily work. When all the people are waiting, we should discover by ourselves, and break the silence, then [with regard] to [the] effect on [the] environment, we should not always wait for others' orders and changes. And it's good for personal development. When we [then] face a strange environment, or environment changes, we might know how to react." (Chinese member, 2012)

**Different levels of learning**

The members found that there are different levels of learning. Members could realise that not only the spoken word is important. They learnt that there are different levels of communication and understanding.
“I learnt when someone says something to you, you do not only listen to the words, but also need to listen to his/her feelings. In that way, you could communicate better and gain more understanding.” (Chinese member, 2012)

“I could use one word to describe what I experienced: ‘understanding’. We usually take everything for granted, thinking others would understand us, but the workshop helped us to know [that what others think may be different from what we think]. What I got from the workshop are: 1. Understand each other; 2. diversity may be managed.” (Chinese member, 2012)

“It’s not a technical training, it won’t teach you exact things, but will allow you to feel, to experience. From that you could know the position of the organisation, how to communicate with others, and how to locate your position in the organisation, then to develop yourself. I think the workshop is good for leadership skills.” (Chinese member, 2012)

Still not clear and accepted

Learning—after taking part in three conferences—is still not clear, and neither is it accepted. To transfer the learning to the organisation back home seems to be possible.

“I am not so clear about what I learnt from the Orglab, because the training doesn’t have a very clear purpose. Different people may have different strengths in different areas, e.g., maybe one person is not so good in the punching position, but he could do well in injection, so I think we could find out different people’s talents.” (Chinese member, 2012)

“If [we were to] divide the level into 3, I think I’m on the lowest level. . . . so what I need is to get some information, so that I won’t fall behind in my current working area.” (Chinese member, 2012)

“Do not know what exactly I learnt from it. Maybe I used something unconsciously, but couldn’t tell exactly.” (Chinese member, 2012)

“Cannot remember something special; maybe the seat position was interesting (every time is different). Everyone has some blind points. There’s something we didn’t know, or didn’t realise, or didn’t want to admit, but we could challenge and change ourselves by role-play.” (Chinese member, 2012).
Differentiation between experienced and new staff was made. Chinese staff members were not only accepted, but were also seen as an opportunity for better understanding.

"Maybe experienced consultants know what they want to share, but new consultants don’t know exactly. So it’s better if the consultant could detail the topic they should discuss, or guide them back when they are far away from the topic.” (Chinese member, 2012)

**Large systems diversity**

The large system (large study group) was experienced as both diverse and depressing. The difficulty of being in a large system was also seen as a chance to listen to different voices. Members saw the possibility of staying in an observing role.

"I found it was interesting in large system, because we were not limited by a certain topic; it was different from those trainings I took before.” (Chinese member, 2012)

"Large system is a bit depressed; maybe it’s [intended to] simulate a real scenario. (Chinese member, 2012)

"Large system, because we could hear more different voices and ideas in it.” (Chinese member, 2012)

**Freedom of being in the system event**

The freedom that was experienced in the systems event (institutional event) encouraged members to try things out.

"Systems event. Because we could discuss by ourselves, and went to other groups to observe, or asked consultants for consultancy.” (Chinese member, 2012)

"One picture is worth a thousand words”

Drawings in the review and application group, as a mode of expression and understanding, were seen as helpful.

"Use drawings to express ourselves. It did explain some problems we had met.” (Chinese member, 2012)
Boundary management

Members were interested in the strict boundary management by the staff and questioned the meaning of it.

“I’m a conservative person; this conflicts with my profession. I am impressed with one sentence I heard in the workshop that is “we think there’re boundaries, and we are unable to break them, but the truth is [that it is] not like that.” (Chinese member, 2012)

Fear of losing face

The fear of losing face by making mistakes (see Chinese cultural influences, p. 104) silenced Chinese members. There was a wish to adapt the orglab more to the Chinese culture.

“But in the large systems, there are more people; pressure is greater, people are afraid to speak because they are scared to be wrong.” (Chinese member, 2012)

“Could [we] adjust the type of workshop a bit according to Chinese culture and customs?” (Chinese member, 2012)

“I prefer small groups. We could speak about everything we want in seminar events, but in the review and application groups, we will think more before speaking when consultants are there.” (Chinese member, 2012)

Language challenge

Speaking up publicly in English was seen as a challenge. At the same time, some saw it as a chance to find their voice in this unfamiliar setting.

“Speak[ing] English in public was a challenge.” (Chinese member, 2012)

“As a Chinese, I am always shy, so I tried to learn ‘How to be open to express myself in public?’ in this workshop.” (Chinese member, 2012)

“A bit high, especially the challenge for myself. We need to overcome the fear of speaking, and the fear of having different ideas from consultants.” (Chinese member, 2012)
"The last day, a lot of people spoke out how they felt at the last meeting, while I dared not speak, but the person sitting next to me encouraged me, so I tried to speak. I think it's a good start for me." (Chinese member, 2012)

Most beneficial sessions

Besides seminar events and review and application groups, Chinese appreciated the systems event (institutional event) most.

"I prefer [the] systems event; it makes us feel free and comfortable. The issue we talked [about] in our group was the influence when the new boss comes, and our expectation of him." (Chinese member, 2012)

Four days of experiential learning: too long

Four days of experiential learning seemed to be too intense for a learning process. The new learning format was too exhausting.

"We think this time is better than the last one, ideas are more plentiful, and [there is] more activity, but I feel is it too much to spend four days doing this?" (Chinese member, 2012)

"I think four days are too long. We felt confused on the first day, and then understood a bit on the second day, more on the third day, but [on the] fourth day we didn't get any more. So I think maybe 2.5-3 days are enough." (Chinese member, 2012)

References


