Large experiential groups are common at association conferences and are presented as positive experiences with positive outcomes. However, empirical investigation of effects is lacking. Systems-Centered therapy (SCT) methods are designed to improve the process and outcome of groups whatever their size. In this project, large-group members (n = 264) were trained to use SCT’s cardinal method of “functional subgrouping” while discussing professional roles. Pre- to postgroup, members on average reported no change in mood, but members scoring higher on the SCT Functional Subgrouping Questionnaire (FSQ) reported significantly more positive change in mood and greater connection to the association. Also, members with higher FSQ scores reported feeling more heard during the group and greater satisfaction with learning. Suggestions are made for future research that may further substantiate these findings.

KEYWORDS: Systems-Centered; SCT; functional subgrouping; large group.

INTRODUCTION

Large experiential groups are now commonplace at national and international group association conferences (Shields, 2001) and in organizational and community settings (Bunker & Alban, 2006). These groups are conceptualized as contexts for creating...
positive change in systems and among group members (Bunker & Alban, 2006; de Mare, 1991). For example, the brochure for the 2015 International Association of Group Psychotherapy and Group Process Congress describes the large group as

a space at the end of the day that helps to contain the irritating, or frustrating, or disturbing as well as enchanting experiences that we experience throughout the conference. It is a space to be together at one time of the day and to overcome the confusing diversity of a large conference. It is a space to experience the feeling to be a member of an international professional community in all its diversity and with all its despair and desires.

However, empirical evaluation of the process, mechanisms of action, and outcome of these large experiential groups is scarce (O’Neill, Constantino, & Mogle, 2012). This study examines mood, organizational engagement, and learning in a large experiential group using Systems-Centered therapy’s (SCT) functional subgrouping method of joining on similarities rather than separating over differences (see later discussion and the appendix; see also Agazarian, 1997, 2001; O’Neill, Smyth, & MacKenzie, 2011).

**LARGE-GROUP ORIGINS AND THEORY**

In the middle of the twentieth century, the theory and methods of individual psychoanalysis became the foundation for work in group therapy. Foulkes (1975a) augmented the traditional psychoanalytic intrapsychic model by reconceptualizing the mind as mirroring the interpersonal communications of its social context. This change in theory necessitated modifications of individual psychoanalytic technique to create group analysis, transforming free association into “free-floating discussion” (p. 181). Foulkes (1975a) declared social communication as the engine of progress in therapy, not analyst interpretation. The group analyst orchestrates the development of a therapeutic web of supportive relationships through open discussion of human experience.

Foulkes’s (1975a) model is transformative while still largely in line with its roots in psychoanalysis. However, he indicated that traditional analytic theory and training predispose the group analyst to predictable difficulties when trying to integrate his or her theoretical and technical developments. These predispositions skew the analyst to viewing individual psychodynamics as “isolated processes instead of interacting, transpersonal ones,” and this brings about an “underestimation of the group context” (p. 182). Consequently, simultaneous understanding and intervention at the group and individual dynamic levels is hindered.

De Mare (1985, 1991) found comparable conceptual and technical difficulties in his work with large experiential groups. He hypothesized that besides the family transference factors in small groups, sociocultural effects influence larger groups as
well. He succinctly summarized the theoretical and technical challenges: “To apply a psychoanalytic or small-group model . . . to the large group is like trying to play Ludo on a chessboard” (p. 81; i.e., Parcheesi). Foulkes (1975b) and de Mare (1985) also agreed that the large group creates more anxiety in members and thus requires more structuring from the group leader to manage anxiety. But without a theoretical and technical model transcending the traditional psychoanalytic framework, the group leader’s problem remained in linking individual and group dynamics and in overseeing members’ interpersonal communication to aid group and member development, perhaps more so in large groups.

**RECENT GROUP PARADIGMS FOR LARGE GROUP**

In the last 20 years or so, theoreticians have been developing models to understand and promote intervention at the group-as-a-whole and member levels concurrently, whatever the group size. Bryson and Anderson (2000), for example, advanced their “multilevel” model, while Agazarian (1997, 2001) and colleagues (e.g., Agazarian & Carter, 1993) refined her “hierarchic and isomorphic” theory of living human systems (TLHS). These new paradigms strive to integrate theory and practice and thus synergize more powerful, parsimonious group intervention.

Agazarian (1997, 2001) used von Bertalanffy’s (1968) general system theory concepts of hierarchy and isomorphy as the basis of TLHS. In TLHS, the group as a whole, regardless of size, is conceived as a three-level hierarchy of the member nesting in the subgroup nesting in the group as a whole, like three concentric circles. *Hierarchy* stipulates that every living human system “exists in the environment of the system above and is the environment for the system below” (Agazarian, 2001, p. 134); *isomorphy* states that the structure and function of the systems above, that is, the group as a whole or the subgroup, are essentially reflected in the structure and function of the system(s) below. TLHS posits that all systems, up and down the hierarchy, function by discriminating and integrating information from differences. Taken together, hierarchy and isomorphy frame the interconnection of the personal and interpersonal in Agazarian’s model. They join group-as-a-whole and individual members’ dynamics and foster understanding and intervention at the group-as-a-whole and member levels concurrently. This occurs at the subgroup level in her Systems-Centered therapy practice, with its central *functional subgrouping* method for discriminating information in differences that are initially too different for the group as a whole to integrate.

Building on Foulkes (1975a, 1975b, 1964/1984), SCT group leaders engage groups and their members in a free-floating discussion to explore and understand their experience. Agazarian (1997, 2001) hypothesized that group members’ communication determines their emotional experience and the group’s success. SCT groups function by exploring and communicating similarities in members’ here-and-now experience, deepening the emotional experience as the work progresses. Like all
living human systems, groups and their members are posited to survive, develop, and transform through the system process of function. Whenever significant differences in experience arise that could potentiate conflict, the group uses SCT’s method of functional subgrouping to structure supportive, goal-focused communication. Members who are functionally subgrouping on one side of the conflict join on their experience in the common here and now, while the group as a whole holds the potentially conflictual differences aside for later exploration in a different subgroup (O’Neill et al., 2013). When the initial subgroup has explored its side of the conflict sufficiently, the other subgroup does its exploration, until an integration of the issues occurs in the group as a whole. SCT conceptualizes these processes as common (i.e., isomorphic) to all groups, and SCT leaders train members to interact this way from the outset, whether the group is small, medium sized, or large (see Agazarian, 2001, for an annotated verbatim transcript of an SCT group).

Agazarian (1997) hypothesized,

The conditions of functional subgrouping include several group dynamic variables that are directly connected to successful goal achievement. Thus, the probability of positive outcomes for members who join and work within functional subgrouping norms is high. A member’s subjective experience of subgrouping includes, on the one hand, the comfort of attunement and mirroring and, on the other, the intensity of involvement in a self-reinforcing activity. Work in a subgroup is a process that gradually increases the depth of the actual experience members have joined the subgroup to explore. (p. 46)

**RELEVANT GROUP RESEARCH**

Repetti (1987) has shown that a positive group climate may be necessary for a positive emotional experience for group members, whereas Turner, Pratkanis, Probasco, and Leve (1992) demonstrated that emotional distress is related to poor outcome in groups. O’Neill and Constantino (2008) tested related SCT hypotheses in a quasi-experimental comparison of small to medium-sized SCT training groups, using functional subgrouping, to groups led by expert leaders of different theoretical approaches. They found some significant support for SCT ideas. With respect to positive outcomes, SCT group members were less avoidant and highly engaged later in the group compared to members in other types of groups. Compared to members working in groups with other theoretical orientations, SCT group members were more active, were more self-confident, experienced less conflict, and reported better relationship quality. SCT members also reported high global learning, and there was a trend for SCT group members to be less anxious over the course of the workshop. However, SCT members were more avoidant and less engaged at the beginning of the groups and also reported comparatively less learning about self–peer relations and authority or leadership. A limitation of this study was the absence of a measure
assessing functional subgrouping. Thus this study lacks information on the level of engagement in the primary mechanism of SCT, which may differentiate those who benefit from those who do not. As one example, O’Neill and colleagues (2011) found that functional subgrouping is a primary predictor of emotional experience among members of small to medium-sized SCT training groups; functional subgrouping generated a positive intramember experience, and those members who reported more functional subgrouping during training reported significantly less anxious and depressive experience posttraining.

Despite the popularity of large-group training experiences in group psychotherapy conferences (Shields, 2001) and organizational contexts (Bunker & Alban, 2006), to our knowledge, there has been no empirical research on any large training groups besides the work of O’Neill and colleagues (2012). Building on O’Neill and Constantino’s (2008) and O’Neill et al.’s (2011) findings, O’Neill and colleagues (2012) used the SCT Functional Subgrouping Questionnaire (FSQ; O’Neill et al., 2011) to study functional subgrouping, mood, learning, and goal achievement in two large SCT training groups at the Annual Systems-Centered Training and Research Institute International Conference. The group members were being trained to use functional subgrouping and the SCT Stages of Defense Modification “boundarying” skills to undo their own negative mood experiences while engaging in the group task. Results showed that pretraining mood did not predict the amount of functional subgrouping during training; that is, members did similar amounts of functional subgrouping regardless of their mood at the start of the training. Also, as predicted, after controlling for pretraining mood, more functional subgrouping predicted better mood and less emotional distress after the training. In addition, results showed that after controlling for posttraining mood, more functional subgrouping was unrelated to posttraining reports of learning about self–peer relations, marginally related to learning about authority and leadership, and significantly related to more overall learning and more goal achievement. This was a partial replication of O’Neill and Constantino’s (2008) findings. Like O’Neill and Constantino (2008), however, O’Neill and colleagues (2012) urged caution in interpreting the results, in this case noting that the SCT FSQ had adequate but limited reliability and validity data (O’Neill et al., 2013).

In the present investigation, we attempted a partial replication and extension of O’Neill and colleagues’ (2012) work in a large experiential training group at the annual conference of a national counselor’s association. The group members were trained to use SCT’s functional subgrouping to structure their otherwise free-floating discussion. Following Agazarian (1997), we hypothesized that the group would be experienced positively overall and that more individual member functional subgrouping would be related to more positive mood over time, with being more

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4 In a pilot study of individual psychotherapy, Ladden, Gantt, Rude, and Agazarian (2007) found that SCT was associated with less anxiety posttreatment in patients diagnosed with generalized anxiety disorder and that this treatment success was maintained over a year.
likely to have felt heard in the group discussion, and with greater satisfaction with learning. We also predicted that the group experience would result in feeling more connected to the association.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

Participants were attendees at the 90-minute morning plenary of a counselor’s association national conference. There were 748 conference registrants, but an exact count of the number of plenary attendees was not possible because this was an open session for which registration was not required, and some members arrived late or left early. Plenary attendance was estimated at 500–600, and 346 participants completed surveys during the experiential group. Not all participants provided complete information on the variables of interest in the current analysis, resulting in a final effective sample size of 264 (41.7% women; $M_{age} = 55.66$ years, $SD = 10.15$).

**Procedures**

*Group Leader and Group Structure*

The first author, a senior, licensed Systems-Centered consultant, was introduced and then led the plenary session. The conference brochure described this plenary session in the following way:

In this session, Dr. O’Neill will present Systems-Centered Training (SCT) theory and research on integrating diverse viewpoints in an organization. He will then lead a group-as-a-whole discussion using the signature SCT method of ‘functional subgrouping’ for moving toward consensus. We will explore the process of our own group discussion to learn how organizational dynamics can be managed effectively.

The group leader began with a 20-minute lecture on TLHS and SCT. The leader introduced the heart of functional subgrouping as “joining on what we have in common rather than separating over differences.” As he began the 60-minute experiential group, he directed the members wishing to speak to use one of four microphones spaced evenly around the room. The content of the discussion was chosen entirely by the group members. The leader trained the group to use the SCT functional subgrouping protocol (Agazarian, 2008; see also the appendix) during the discussion.

After the leader’s lecture on TLHS and SCT, all attendees were invited to participate voluntarily, confidentially, anonymously, and without compensation in program evaluation research being conducted to assess the relationship of SCT methods to
the organization’s desired training outcomes. If they agreed to participate, subjects read and signed the Institutional Review Board–approved informed consent form and were asked to complete the demographic information and pregroup assessment. Subjects completed the SCT FSQ and the outcome assessment at the end of the session.

Measures

**Experiential Group Engagement**

Following the discussion, participants indicated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal) their satisfaction with what they learned and the extent to which they “felt heard” as part of the discussion. These items were used as a general measure of engagement in the experiential group.

**Mood**

To assess individuals’ change in mood during the experiential group, they completed the same item at baseline prior to the training and again following training: “I feel satisfied in general right now.” This item was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal).

**Organization Engagement**

To assess individuals’ engagement with the organization prior to training, participants completed the following item: “I feel connected to [the association] as an organization.” Following training, they were asked to rate the following: “I feel more connected to [the association] as a result of this plenary discussion.” Both items were rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal). The item completed at the posttraining assessment was rescaled (−2 to 2) with negative values indicating feeling less connected following the experiential group, 0 indicating no change in feelings of connection, and positive values indicating feeling more connected following the experiential group.

**Functional Subgrouping**

Functional subgrouping was assessed using the FSQ developed by O’Neill, Agazarian, Ladden, and Carter (1997). The FSQ states, “SCT Functional Subgrouping means joining others with a similarity instead of responding with a difference (no ‘yes-buts!’).” The five FSQ items assessed the degree to which participants felt they and the group used functional subgrouping (i.e., “How often did you feel subgrouping occurred in today’s group?”; “How often did you feel others were on the same wavelength
as you?”; “How often did you feel others joined you?”; “How often did you feel the impulse to join others?”; “How often did you join a subgroup?”) rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal). The responses to the five items were added to create a summary score (referred to as FSQ scores hereinafter) used in the analyses. Scores could range from 5 to 25, with higher scores indicating greater degrees of functional subgrouping. Reliability was acceptable (Cronbach’s α = .82).

**Analytic Strategy**

Data were analyzed in a series of steps. First, means and standard deviations were calculated for all variables, as were correlations among the predictors of interest. Correlations allowed us to assess the extent to which two variables were related prior to the primary analyses. Next, we used a series of linear regressions for the primary analyses. Linear regression allowed us to examine the relationship between FSQ scores and outcomes after accounting for the influence of possible confounding variables. The first analysis examined whether FSQ scores predicted reported satisfaction with learning and feeling heard during the experiential group. We then examined difference scores as a measure of training-related change in mood. Finally, we tested whether the FSQ scores predicted postgroup organization engagement and mood ratings after controlling for ratings of these variables from before the functional subgrouping training and group discussion; that is, we examined whether FSQ scores predicted mood and engagement after accounting for how individuals felt when the group began. Age and gender were included as covariates to control for these possible confounding influences in all models.

**RESULTS**

Means, standard deviations, and correlations appear in Table 1. Correlations indicated strong positive associations among the FSQ measure, the measures of engagement, and mood. This indicated that, before controlling for confounding variables, higher FSQ scores were related to better mood and greater engagement.

Table 2 includes the regressions examining experiential group engagement. Higher scores on the FSQ were related to greater satisfaction with learning ($b = .14$, $SE = .017$) and higher levels of feeling heard ($b = .226$, $SE = .016$). FSQ scores accounted for ~21% and ~43% of the differences between individuals in these measures after accounting for the influences of age and gender.

Next, difference scores were calculated by subtracting baseline mood scores from posttraining mood scores. The mean difference score for mood was negative ($M_{\text{diff}} = -.08$, $SD = 1.02$) but was not significantly different from 0 (95% CI $-.203$–$.044$).

Table 3 includes the regression testing of the role of reported functional subgrouping experience in change in organization engagement and mood. After accounting for the influences of age, gender, and pretraining organization engagement and mood,
### Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Overall satisfaction</th>
<th>Felt heard</th>
<th>Connected Baseline</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Mood Baseline</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>FSQ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall satisfaction</td>
<td>0.033</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt heard</td>
<td>0.109</td>
<td>0.508</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>0.116</td>
<td>0.265</td>
<td>0.192</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>0.030</td>
<td>0.535</td>
<td>0.657</td>
<td>0.270</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>0.283</td>
<td>0.129</td>
<td>0.636</td>
<td>0.231</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.712</td>
<td>0.582</td>
<td>0.297</td>
<td>0.628</td>
<td>0.469</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSQ</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.458</td>
<td>0.661</td>
<td>0.205</td>
<td>0.622</td>
<td>0.167</td>
<td>0.506</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Values in boldface are significant at $p < .05$. FSQ = Functional Subgrouping Questionnaire.
FSQ scores were significantly related to both organization engagement and mood. Individuals who scored higher on the FSQ felt greater satisfaction in general ($b = .137, SE = .015$) and felt more connected to the organization ($b = .202, SE = .017$). Figures 1 and 2 display the estimated means for individuals who scored high (1 standard deviation above the mean) and low (1 standard deviation below the mean) on the FSQ.

**DISCUSSION**

Our results suggest that functional subgrouping is a useful communication structure for members of a large conference experiential group. Specifically, members who scored higher on the FSQ were more likely to feel heard in the group, to feel satisfied with their learning, and to feel connected to the conference-sponsoring association. Because our design was correlational, however, we cannot infer causality, and these findings must be viewed as preliminary to more rigorous experimental testing to rule out alternative explanations. For example, although our group members were new to SCT, some group members may work “within functional subgrouping norms,” that is, joining on what they have in common with what other members communicate, rather than separating over differences, and to report doing so, and have better outcome without formal training in functional subgrouping discussion structure. All the same, these results add to the growing body of research in small, medium-sized, and large groups providing some support for Agazarian’s (1997) hypothesis that “the probability of positive outcomes for members who join and work within functional subgrouping norms is high” (p. 46; for a review, see O’Neill, 2015).

Foulkes (1975b) and de Mare (1985) believed that the individual psychoanalysis-based group method of “free-floating discussion” led to unproductive levels of anxiety in the large group. Foulkes (1975b) called for understanding and intervening at the individual and group dynamic levels at the same time and for more leadership.

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**Table 2: Using Functional Subgrouping Questionnaire Scores to Predict Experiential Group Engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Satisfaction with learning, $b$ ($SE$)</th>
<th>Feeling heard during group, $b$ ($SE$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1, $b$ ($SE$)</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.966 (0.083)*</td>
<td>3.919 (0.074)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.003 (0.006)</td>
<td>0.002 (0.006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.034 (0.129)</td>
<td>0.125 (0.115)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSQ</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.14 (0.017)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.001</td>
<td>0.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$\Delta R^2$</td>
<td>0.213</td>
<td>0.434</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. FSQ = Functional Subgrouping Questionnaire. *

*p < .05.*
structure with “interacting, transpersonal” large-group process to reduce anxiety. Agazarian’s (1997, 2001) hierarchic and isomorphic model is designed to integrate individual and group dynamic understanding (whatever the group size), and functional subgrouping is her theoretically consistent group-as-a-whole normative structure for group process. Consistent with those of O’Neill and colleagues (2012), our results show that members who reported more experience of functional subgrouping in the group as a whole had more positive change in mood. As mentioned, because we did not experimentally manipulate the level of member functional subgrouping, we cannot conclude that it improved mood, only that members who reported more functional subgrouping also reported more positive change in mood by group’s end. Unknown variables, including member characteristics or leader–member–process interactions, may have accounted for these results.

Also, because we had no small to medium-sized comparison groups, we cannot comment on the hypothesis that large group size induces greater distress (de Mare, 1985; Foulkes, 1975b). Descriptively, we can say that in this large group as a whole, there was a subgroup of members who reported more experience of functional subgrouping and who had more positive mood over time; there was also a subgroup of members who did not report as much experience of functional subgrouping in the group, even though this was the central focus of the leader’s interventions, and whose mood was either unchanged or more negative over time. It may be that these members were responding to the large group size with distress, as Foulkes and de Mare suggested. However, further research with appropriate comparison groups is necessary before we can determine if there is anything inherently more disturbing about the large group and whether functional subgrouping can positively affect it.

Finally, our data linking more functional subgrouping to more satisfaction with learning in this large group are consistent with Agazarian’s (1997) hypotheses

### TABLE 3: Regression Models Examining Outcomes Controlling for Baseline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Connected, $b$ (SE)</th>
<th>Mood, $b$ (SE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>0.462 (0.09)*</td>
<td>0.405 (0.072)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>0.291 (0.065)*</td>
<td>0.166 (0.053)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>−0.0001 (0.007)</td>
<td>−0.001 (0.005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>0.048 (0.14)</td>
<td>0.153 (0.112)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FSQ</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>0.202 (0.017)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ$R^2$</td>
<td>0.339</td>
<td>0.195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. FSQ = Functional Subgrouping Questionnaire.

*p < .05.
Figure 1. Predicted levels of feeling satisfied at the end of the session for those 1 standard deviation above and below the mean on the Functional Subgrouping Questionnaire.

Figure 2. Predicted levels of feeling connected to the group at the end of the session for those 1 standard deviation above and below the mean on the Functional Subgrouping Questionnaire.
regarding functional subgrouping and goal achievement and with O’Neill and colleagues’ (2012) finding that greater self-reported functional subgrouping is connected to more learning and goal achievement in large groups. Too much anxiety disrupts learning as well as group effectiveness (Turner et al., 1992). Speculatively, if members who subgroup more feel less anxious, as our results suggest, they would be able to learn more as a result.

Our study has significant limitations. The lack of experimental manipulation prevents definitive cause-and-effect conclusions. The outcome measures, although similar to those used in previous research, are self-report, single item, and not empirically validated. Although group participants were not explicitly informed of our hypotheses in advance, it seems likely that they could have intuited them from the introductory lecture on SCT and responded in a socially desirable manner. Despite these limitations, there appears to be some relationship between engagement in functional subgrouping and positive person-level outcomes. More information on the directionality and time course of this process is needed.

Future research might manipulate the amount of functional subgrouping and predict different outcomes accordingly in groups of different sizes with members blind to hypotheses. The recently developed FSQ–2 (O’Neill et al., 2013) evaluates the degree to which group members and leaders use the functional subgrouping technique. It has been shown to reliably distinguish SCT and non-SCT groups as well as SCT groups of different experience levels and could be used in a functional subgrouping manipulation check.

In the meantime, taken together with the findings of O’Neill and Constantino (2008), O’Neill and colleagues (2011), and O’Neill and colleagues (2012), our findings provide preliminary support for Agazarian’s (1997) hypotheses that functional subgrouping can structure free-floating group discussion to generate a positive group climate and positive member experience, with more learning and goal achievement, regardless of group size.

**APPENDIX: FUNCTIONAL SUBGROUPING**

Goal: The goal of functional subgrouping is to enable people to join on similarities rather than separate around differences.

SCT assumes that when one recognizes and integrates similarities (in information that is apparently different) and differences (in information that is apparently similar), one’s whole system will survive, develop, and transform from simpler to more complex. Functional Subgrouping is the method that helps that to happen. It often helps to use this method when you are solving problems with others. People like to feel the join before you bring in whatever differences are important to you.

1. Talk, and when you have finished what you are saying, say “Anyone else?”
2. Look around!
3. Expect someone to join you with a similarity.
4. When you don’t feel joined, say so!

When you join a subgroup already working . . .

5. Join on a similarity.
6. Look at the person you are joining.
7. Build on others’ ideas.
8. If you lose your subgroup, ask the people still in your subgroup to put their hands up.
9. As different people join and build, the subgroup gets bigger.
10. When you are no longer in the subgroup, say so!
11. If you want to start a different subgroup, ask the group if it is ready for a new subgroup. (Wait for the answer!)
12. When the group is ready to support you, start your new subgroup around your difference.

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REFERENCES


