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Subgroup Conflicts? Try the Psychodramatic “Double Triad Method”

LENI M. F. VERHOFSTADT-DENÈVE, PH.D.

ABSTRACT

The present article suggests the application of a psychodramatic action method for tackling subgroup conflicts in which the direct dialogue between representatives of two opposing subgroups is prepared step by step through an indirect dialogue strategy within two triads, a strategy known as the Double Triad Method (DTM). In order to achieve integration in the group as a whole, it is important that all the members of both subgroups participate actively during the entire process. The first part of the article briefly explores the theoretical background, with a special emphasis on the Phenomenological-Dialectical Personality Model (Phe-Di PModel). In the second part, the DTM procedure is systematically described through its five action stages, each accompanied with 1) a spatial representation of the consecutive actions, 2) some illustrative statements for each stage, and 3) a theoretical interpretation of the dialectically involved personality dimensions in both protagonists. The article concludes with a discussion and suggestions for more extensive applications of the DTM method, including the question of its relationships to Agazarian's functional subgrouping, psychodrama, and sociodrama.

Subgroup conflicts are not only determined by the individual features of the group members involved, by the group leader's approach or personality, but also by the specific setting, composition, size, norms, goals and contracts, and developmental stages of the group (see Kellermann, 1996; Kormanski, 1982; Levine, 1979; Whitaker & Lieberman, 1964; Yalom, 1975). Several theorists have

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Subgroup Conflicts? Try the Psychodramatic “Double Triad Method,” by Leni M. F. Verhofstadt-Denève, Ph.D.

Estimated Time to Complete this Activity: 90 minutes

Learning Objectives:

The reader will be able to:

1. Analyze and evaluate the underlying theory of the *Double Triad Method* (DTM), more specifically, the Phenomenological-Dialectical Personality Model.
2. Analyze and evaluate the *Double Triad Method* (DTM) along its five successive stages.
3. Utilize (as psychodramatist and/or group-psychotherapist) the DTM method and underlying theory.

Author Disclosure:

Leni M. F. Verhofstadt-Denève, Nothing to Disclose

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suggested that group conflict is inevitable and its resolution necessary for subsequent development, as reflected, for example, in Hegel's dialectical triadic approach (Hegel, 1952/1807) in which the second phase (the conflict phase) is a necessary condition for reaching a qualitatively "higher" synthesis (see also Verhofstadt-Denève, 2007a). In the same vein, Unger (1990) argues that conflict is an inherent part of group life.

But what can a group leader do when running a training or therapy group, or even a team coaching group in an organization, and feeling that the group is being paralyzed by interpersonal tensions or subgroup conflicts? The relevant literature describes various methods for addressing group conflicts, such as jointly revealing of paradoxes (Smith & Berg, 1987); jointly analyzing the group aims and structured feedback (Rohde & Stockton, 1992); and the application of sociometric locograms (Amatruda, 2006). One particularly relevant method for handling subgroup conflicts is the System-Centered Training or Therapy (SCT) developed by Agazarian (2004). This method is based on what is termed functional subgrouping, in contrast to stereotypical subgrouping. According to Agazarian, functional subgroups serve to integrate differences; stereotypical subgroups scapegoat differences. In the discussion, we will look for possible similarities and differences between SCT and our approach, known as the Double Triad Method (DTM).

The psychodrama literature has also offered a number of action techniques for dealing with conflict such as role reversal¹ by two antagonists (Blatner, 2002; Deutsch & Muney, 1968; Kellermann, 1996; Moreno, 1934; Moreno & Elefthery, 1982; Moreno & Moreno, 1969; Verhofstadt-Denève, 2000), sometimes with the use of one or more advocates (helpers or "doubles") for both parties (see Blatner, 2002). Nevertheless, a lot of technical questions remain. Role reversal seems crucial, but when exactly and between whom? How should these persons be selected? What is their task? How can the entire group be activated constructively?

1. This technique (role reversal), borrowed from psychodrama, is based on the assumption that if both antagonists put themselves in the position of the other, they will be forced to take a new view of the situation and hopefully reconcile their differences (Kellermann, 1992).

If protagonists are supported by advocates, what is their concrete task? At what moment should they intervene? And finally, how can this whole procedure be supported theoretically?

The present article endeavors to answer these questions by applying and describing the DTM, a five-stage psychodramatic action method that guarantees optimum freedom of expression, cooperation, and protection for all group members in a safe setting. We will attempt to provide theoretical and process-based support for the procedure through the Phenomenological-Dialectical Personality Model (Verhofstadt-Denève, 1988; 2000).

THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL-DIALECTICAL PERSONALITY MODEL

The Phenomenological-Dialectical Personality Model (Phe-Di PModel) represents the PERSON, in which *phenomenological* refers to the unique subjective content and meanings that individuals construct about themselves and the world. *Dialectical* refers to the underlying processes of tension or opposition that cause these contents to be created and recreated.

Content: Based on Phenomenological (Self)-Reflection

Briefly, the PERSON can be seen as a process between two dependent poles in which the "I" is the reflective *subject* pole, or the person as knower, and the "ME" the reflected *object* pole or the person as known (James, 1961). In our view, more specifically, the ME is constructed by the answers to some fundamental I-questions, resulting in six ME dimensions or personal images of self and others (Verhofstadt-Denève, 1988, 2000):

<i>Who am I?</i>	(Self-Image)
<i>What are the others like?</i>	(Alter-Image)
<i>How do the others perceive me?</i>	(Meta-Self) ²

2. The Meta-Self (my construction of the image others have formed of me and my world) essentially belongs to the Alter-Image. However, therapeutically speaking, the Meta-Self is so important that we differentiate it as a separate dimension in the personality model. The same applies to the Ideal-Meta-Self in its relation to the Ideal-Alter (see Verhofstadt-Denève, 1988, 2000).

and corresponding Ideal-Images:

<i>Who would I like to be and become?</i>	(Ideal-Self)
<i>What should the others be like?</i>	(Ideal-Alter)
<i>How should the others perceive me?</i>	(Ideal-Meta-Self)

These six dimensions constitute the foundation stones of a therapeutically relevant and "living" personality model. The model proceeds on the assumption that all human beings construct their own and unique subjective interpretation of themselves and the surrounding reality at different levels of consciousness and acting.

As can be seen in Figure 1, the three phenomenological "real" or infra-structural constructions and the three "ideal/wished-for" or

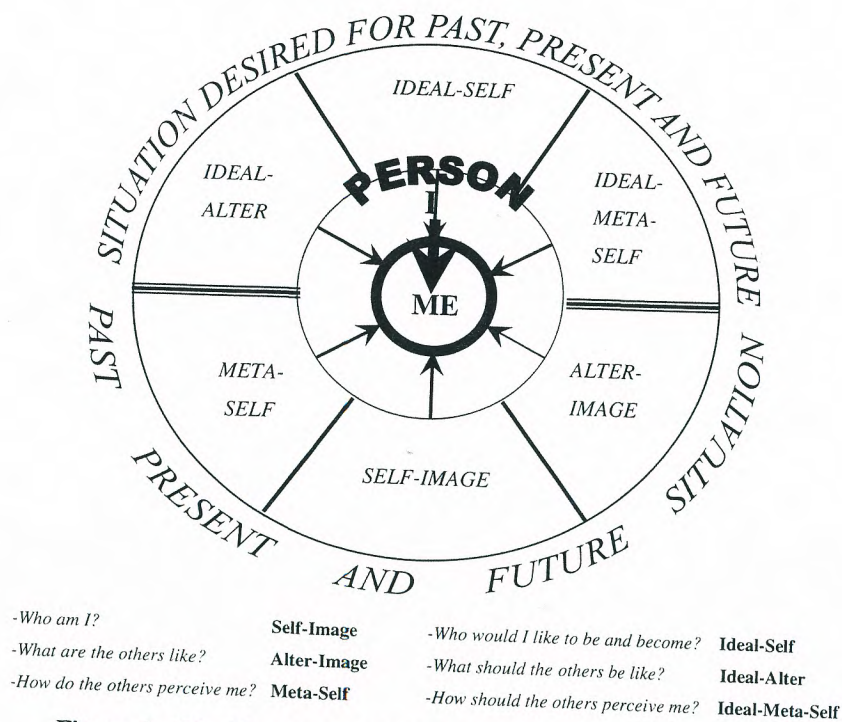


Figure 1. The Phenomenological-Dialectical Personality Model (simplified form; for the original see Verhofstadt-Denève, 1988, 2000)

supra-structural constructions are represented, respectively, in the lower and upper part of the Model. As illustrated in earlier publications, this phenomenological-dialectical personality model can be a workable frame of reference for the psychotherapist (see Dillen, Siongers, Helskens & Verhofstadt-Denève, 2009; Verhofstadt-Denève, 1988, 1995, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2007b).

Process: Dialectical

Within the context of the Phe-Di PModel, the assumption is that the six personality dimensions, notably Self-Image, Alter-Image, Meta-Self and their Ideal counterparts, should be confronted with each other in a dialectical constructive oppositional relationship through active I-ME reflection. That is, personal changes in views of the self and others are brought about by efforts to examine and then reconcile contrasting images derived from these six dimensions.

It is obvious that the I-ME reflection can be activated from within different theoretical frameworks and methods. We prefer action and drama techniques supported by a phenomenological-dialectical framework (Verhofstadt-Denève, 2000). In my own work, I rely on the classical psychodrama method elaborated by Moreno (Moreno, 1934; Moreno & Moreno, 1969) and slightly modified by Dean and Doreen Elefthery (Moreno & Elefthery, 1982), mainly aimed at a more secure application of the method.

Through a triadic dialectical process of Thesis, Antithesis and Synthesis, described below, rigid constructions of oneself and the other(s) can be made more flexible and partially integrated. We illustrate the activation of these powerful dialectical oppositional experiences first through a concise example from a psychodrama-session with an adolescent girl whose father had recently left the family for a new partner, and then from a training group.

In a first stage of the therapeutic process, the protagonist presents herself in the subjective I-form (that is, her current Self-Image): "I am Paula, I feel miserable as I lost a father and with him also myself . . . I hate him!" This stage is termed Thesis.

Then, in a second phase, termed Antithesis, Paula is asked to "become" her father (and thus become her own Alter-Image); while moving effectively in space (through "role taking"), she

formulates in the I-form: "I am Paula's father; I fell in love and could not fight against it . . . I fear Paula no longer wishes to make an attempt at conciliation . . . still I love her" (while saying these words, Paula is very moved). This transition from the first to the second state implies what we call the *first negation*, here the negation of the Self-Image in favor of the Alter-Image (as well as the Meta-Self). Formulated differently, the Self-Image remains historically present but is relegated to the background as the focus shifts to the Alter-Image. In this stage, the opposition between these two images is felt most strongly. This vivid oppositional experience can be accompanied with a cognitive-emotional crisis or (in Moreno's terms) a "catharsis" (Kellermann, 1984). This was indeed the case with Paula; she was deeply affected emotionally when she felt her father's pain and love together with her own feelings toward him.

In the third or Synthesis phase of the process—the moment of the *second negation*, or the negation of the Alter-Image/Meta-Self—the protagonist returns to the start position and identifies herself again with her Self-Image. "Yes, he is right . . . I hate, and love him." Importantly, the experience of conflict in the Antithesis phase contains the condition for potential change and the integration of the two opposite poles (the Self-Image versus Alter-Image) in the Synthesis phase. According to Hegel (1952/1807), both opposite poles are now "aufgehoben" (lifted). This dialectical movement can stimulate new self- and other-interpretations and reconstructions of and reorientation to real-life social relations.

This process is not a rigid or linear triadic movement. It generally is a repeated to-and-fro movement (dialogue) between opposite poles that can generate successive *partial syntheses*. For a more extensive analysis, we refer to Verhofstadt-Denève (2000, 2007a). Similar dialectical processes occur in intra- and interpersonal dialogues (Basseches, 1984), the normal developmental stages of individuals and groups (Riegel, 1979), and also in the psychodramatic application of the Double Triad Method (DTM).

THE DOUBLE TRIAD METHOD IN GROUPS

DTM as a psychodramatic action method can be applied to treat subgroup conflicts. Although it involves a structured protocol, it allows

unlimited freedom of formulation for all group members, while helping to increase the feeling of security among all participants.

Although we essentially work with two protagonists representing the principal group opposition or conflict, the entire group is involved intensively throughout all stages of the action.

The duration of the action (from 2 hours to a whole day) depends on specific group features (including group size, task—that is, therapy or training—frequency, and timing of the sessions, etc.) and of course on the nature and severity of the conflict, although the consecutive DTM stages are in principle the same at all times.

In the present example, the group is a psychodrama training group consisting of 16 participants: 9 women and 7 men between 23 and 28 years of age. Of the 16, 9 had a bachelor's degree and 7 a master's degree in psychology or related domains. The aim was to teach them the basic principles of psychodrama in 30 six-hour sessions spread over 18 months, through theory and experiential learning and the consistent use of personal material. The group had started enthusiastically and with great motivation, self-disclosure, active participation, and mutual confidence. However, from about the tenth meeting on tensions started arising; silences grew longer; active involvement became less strong and absenteeism (because of illness) increased; fewer participants arrived punctually, to the great annoyance of the others; and after breaks, it proved more difficult to get the entire group working again. A more or less stable subgroup of seven participants had formed who got together outside the group sessions, causing resentment among the rest of the group. Something needed to happen in order to restore the cohesion and motivation within the group.

We wish to point out that a thorough exploration of complex group dynamics, of the deeper (unconscious) nature of the conflict described, and of the resulting group conversations is impossible within the scope of the present article. Its main aim is to give a concrete description and theoretical analysis of the consecutive stages in a specific method for a constructive approach to group conflicts.

Introduction, Warming Up and Preparatory Action

Something is going wrong! The first explicit signals of an untenable situation can be given either by the director or by the group

members, or both. At the beginning of the twelfth session, George spontaneously says that he is annoyed and unhappy and that something should change.

GEORGE: There are serious tensions; this is no longer fun; these meetings don't help us at all; all they do is give me a stomach ache . . . A cold silence descends in the group . . . Several participants nod affirmatively. An animated and emotion-laden group discussion follows and many participants are quite upset.

The director intervenes essentially in order to ensure that everyone can have a say. After about an hour of intensive discussion, there is total chaos, and everyone agrees: either we quit or something drastic should happen. Most of the participants remain highly skeptical of a possible solution. The director tries to place the tensions in a broader context and within a didactic framework.

DIRECTOR: Such group conflicts are perfectly normal within group development processes. It's painful, but it can be instructive as well. It offers a unique opportunity to learn how intensive group antagonisms arise and how participants can jointly work towards a solution. But I'll be needing your cooperation for this. This is a joint group action in which everyone should make an active contribution. We should view this as a group experiment and we should together discover whether this effort succeeds . . . or fails.

Quite rapidly, the group members appear to be motivated to try something out. *We've got nothing to lose; things can't go on like this anyway.* However, most of them remain skeptical of a positive result. A key condition for starting is the motivation among a majority of participants to tackle the situation concretely, hoping that whoever is not motivated yet will eventually become so.

Delineation of the Conflict Theme and Subgroup Formation

In order to proceed to conflict resolution, the conflict (and especially its main poles) should be identified as clearly as possible. Even during the preliminary discussion it appeared that the existence of a relatively tight subgroup within the full group created a feeling of insecurity *vis-à-vis* the other subgroup. After an extensive group dialogue, in which other oppositions emerged, the director helped the group split into two subgroups:

The director distills a few examples of the formulated subgroup themes from the group discussion: *I understood that some group members feel that everyone should cooperate and should dare to express themselves openly, even if this hurts and . . . this is Group-1; whereas the members of Group-2 are a bit more cautious, wish to have more time to commit themselves in order to avoid hurting the others and themselves and . . . This has nothing to do with being better or worse than the others, but with a different attitude . . . Now close your eyes and think for a couple of minutes about which subgroup you could belong to. If you think you belong mainly to Group-1, move to the left a bit; participants in Group-2 should move to the right. Keep your eyes closed in the process, so as not to influence one another; if you wish, you can modify your choice later . . . everyone will now make their own choice.*

In this group, this procedure resulted in two sufficiently large subgroups (seven and nine participants), each with representatives of both genders (three and four men, and four and five women, respectively) and both levels of education (four and five bachelor's, and three and four master's). Each subgroup is given a triple task: (1) to elaborate on what its group members stand for (attitudes, goals, etc.), (2) to choose a telling group name; and (3) to appoint a person who is to represent the subgroup (protagonists P1 and P2, respectively). In the present group, subgroup 1, the Pearl Fishers were represented by George (designated P1); this group's mottos were: "Learning through honest communication; Hard work (deep diving); and Brave the pain." The second subgroup, the Deer, was represented by Jane as P2; this group's mottos were: "Learning through friendly communication; Good work in a safe setting; Solidarity, no competition."

After the two protagonists have been appointed, they choose their two helpers or advocates. This results in the following triads (in the figures to follow, represented in black and grey, respectively):

- **P1-Triad**, consisting of **George**, the **Protagonist (P1)** for the "**Pearl Fishers**" (**Group-1**), his **Double (D1)**, and his **Antagonist (A1 representing P2)**.
- **P2-Triad**, consisting of **Jane**, the **Protagonist (P2)** for the "**Deer**" (**Group-2**), her **Double (D2)**, and her **Antagonist (A2 representing P1)**.

The two protagonists should (a) preferably choose their double from their own subgroup and their antagonist from the opposing subgroup; and (b) represent their group but also be allowed to voice their own opinion without constantly having to consult the other members of their subgroup. That is why the two protagonists always speak in the subjective I-form.

The role of the double in each triad is to empathize as much as possible with the protagonist's ideas and to support him/her by making statements in the I-form. The role of the antagonist in each triad is to empathize as much as possible with the views from the protagonist from the other triad and to make statements in the I-form which will help their own protagonist (from the same triad) to better empathize with the protagonist from the opposite triad. Moreover, the double and the antagonist enhance the protagonist's intra-personal dialogue through repeating some of the protagonist's statements after his/her first and second role-taking (see example below in Stage 1).

Starting position. The starting position of the DTM consists of eight chairs: two working-chairs as symbols for the two subgroups and six chairs for the two triads in the observation mode. All these chairs remain in place as points of reference throughout the whole action (see Figure 2).

Both protagonists (P1 and P2) initially sit with their double (D1 and D2) and their antagonist (A1 and A2) in front of their

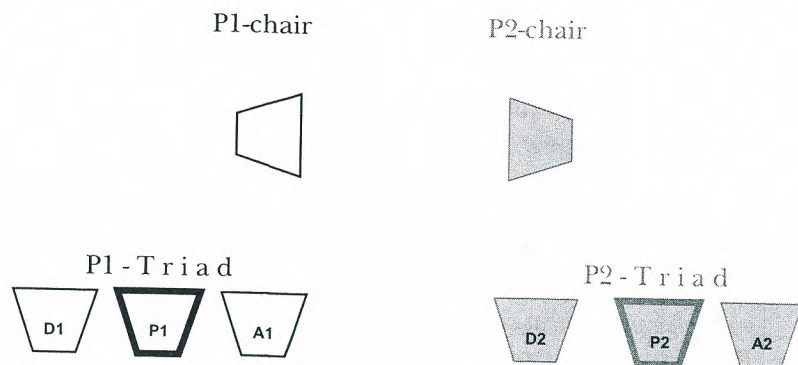


Figure 2. Starting Position DTM

working chair (P1- and P2-chair). The other group members are seated around them in a circle, independent of the subgroup they have chosen.

The Two Triads in Action: Five Stages

The ultimate aim is that both subgroups should learn to explore and understand each other's positions empathically by discovering (first) differences and (later on) similarities. Importantly, cooperation between subgroups should be made possible through a development of understanding and respect for one another's identity, associated with an integration of similar points of view. In this way, they finally should improve cohesion and a cooperative atmosphere in the group as a whole.

The underlying idea of the method is that *indirect* dialogues by one protagonist (through *role takings*) during the first four stages will pave the way for a *direct* dialogue between the two protagonists (through *role reversals*) in stage 5, each stage involving the active participation of *all* group members. In the *role taking*, only the protagonist becomes his/her antagonist, while in the *role reversal*, both the protagonist and antagonist switch roles.

In accordance with the infrastructure or phenomenological "real" constructions, and the supra-structure or "ideal/wished-for" constructions in the Phe-Di PModel, the two protagonists first explore their own "real" positions (differences) sequentially in stages 1 and 2, while in stages 3 and 4 their "ideal" positions (similarities and integration) are worked on. For each triad, this involves two action stages, while the other triad observes the action in silence. But as will appear below, internal oppositions are experienced during this active confrontation, not only by the working protagonist (external/internal action) but also by the observer protagonist (internal action), in whom major internal oppositions towards a differentiation and integration process are activated as well. The same is theoretically the case for all group members.

The two triads should mutually agree on who will act first. If they fail to reach an agreement, the decision is left to chance. Importantly, all group members (including the doubles and antagonists from the triads) are regularly urged to *double* both the

protagonist and the antagonist of *both* working triads; in the technique of doubling, the person who doubles speaks in the I-form as if he/she were the doubled person. This means that everyone should not only empathize actively with their own position but also with the other subgroup position. At the same time, the protagonist will feel more at ease, seeing that his or her position is formulated by members of the opposite subgroup as well. The group member who doubles stands obliquely behind the protagonist or antagonist, lays a hand on their shoulder, and formulates a statement in the I-form, which can be denied, confirmed, or corrected by the protagonist.

STAGE 1: George (P1)'s experience of the current conflict
(cf. infra-structure of Phe-Di PModel): Action with P1-Triad while P2 (Jane) remains a silent observer

Spatial positioning of the triads

P1 (George) starts behind P1-chair; D1 and A1 sit on P1- and P2-chair, respectively (see Figure 3).

Successive actions:

- (1) P1 presents himself (standing behind the P1-chair and his Double D1)
- (2) P1 becomes P2 through an initial role taking (standing behind the P2-chair and his Antagonist A1)
- (3) P1 acts as himself again after a second role taking (standing again behind the P1-chair)

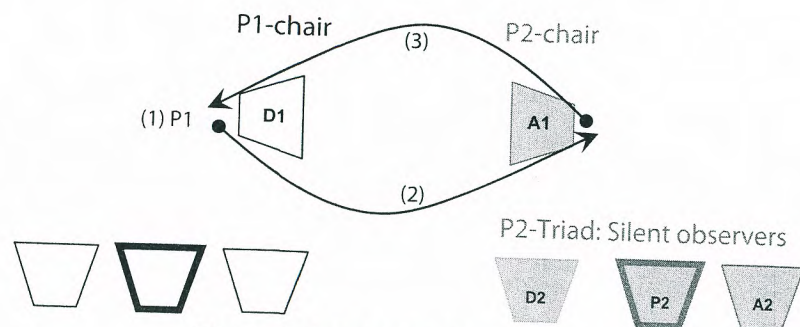


Figure 3. Spatial Positions in Stage 1

Some illustrative statements and action techniques used in each position

DIRECTOR: *We are not going to confront the two protagonists, George and Jane, in an open direct dialogue immediately. This confrontation could be too harsh. This direct dialogue will take place later, but we are going to prepare it by exploring together **how everyone perceives their own and the other's positions.** That is why the two protagonists are now going to meet each other (with the assistance of their Double, their Antagonist, and all the group members) in a safer setting, through an indirect dialogue and empathic doublings from the members of both subgroups.*

DIRECTOR TO P1: *George, who are you? What do you stand for? What do you certainly want to avoid?*

(1) P1: *I am George. I represent the Pearl Fishers, I am honest, straightforward, I prefer outspoken communication, even if this hurts; my greatest fear is that we will be wasting our precious time here; I'm here above all to learn! (Self-Image via Self-Presentation technique).*

D1 (DOUBLES P1): *As a pearl fisher I'm always on time as well! I don't want to waste a single minute! I have to do all the work here in this group . . . I also work for them!*

P1 nods emphatically.

A member of the Deer group doubles P1: *As a pearl fisher I dive into the deepest seas; I'm almost suffocating, but I have brought up something valuable.*

P1: *Exactly!*

(2) **DIRECTOR:** *George, you will now become your antagonist (George moves behind the P2 chair).*

DIRECTOR (TO P1, IN THE ROLE OF P2): *Who are you? What do you stand for? What do you certainly want to avoid?*

P1 (AS P2): *I belong to the Deer group; I'm hard-working and honest too, but I'm afraid of hurting others. I don't want to hurt anybody . . . not even myself (Alter-Image through role taking).*

D1 (REPEATING A SENTENCE HE/SHE HEARD PREVIOUSLY FROM P1 ACTING AS HIMSELF): *As a pearl fisher, I am honest, straightforward, I prefer outspoken communication, even if this hurts.*

P1 (TO HIS DOUBLE, IN THE ROLE OF P2): *Yes, good to say that, best friend, but I think you are often too hard to yourself and the other group members.*

Interestingly, this is P1's reaction to his own statement (formulated earlier in his self-presentation) and now repeated by his double D1. These can be very powerful interventions, stimulating the protagonist's intra-personal dialogues.

DIRECTOR (TO P1, IN THE ROLE OF P2): *What do you think of the pearl fisher there?*

P1 (AS P2): *I think he's a bit too hard . . . too much focused on the effect . . . not social enough . . . and sometimes he hurts himself and others badly (Meta-Self).*

(3) DIRECTOR: *George, become yourself again and stand behind the P1-chair (return to the Self-Image via second role taking).*

P1 (AS HIMSELF): *It wasn't easy to get used to the other role! And I was moved to hear that I hurt others (a statement he formulated himself while in the other role!).*

Actions P1 and P2 from the Phe-Di PModel

Since two protagonists are at work here, their actions should be represented by two personality models for P1 and P2, respectively (see Figure 4).

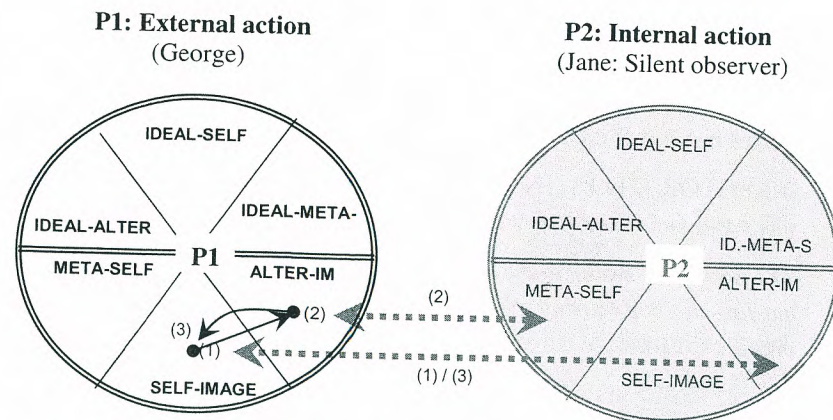


Figure 4. Actions of P1 and P2 within the Phe-Di PModel in Stage 1

The thin solid arrows represent the intra-personal dialogue and oppositions of P1. The bold dotted lines refer to the (interpersonal) oppositions experienced by P2 while observing the action of P1. These oppositions experienced not only occur in P2 but also in the observers of the P2-triad (D2 and A2) and in many group members.

What is happening internally within P1 during his external action?

- (1) In this first stage, P1 presents elements from his Self-Image (this is the Thesis in the dialectical process);
- (2) The transitional move to, and becoming of, P2 symbolizes the first negation, or the negation of his Self-Image to his Alter-Image (and Meta-Self) (what we call the Antithesis);
- (3) The return to the initial situation symbolizes the second negation, or the "negation" of the Alter-Image (and Meta-Self) (that is, the Synthesis).

This triple action translates into a powerful dialectical process that can stimulate new interpretations and reconstructions of the Self- and Alter-Images.

What is happening internally within observer P2 (Jane) during the action of P1 (George)?

- (1) When P1 presents himself, P2 experiences the opposition between her image of P1 (that is, her Alter-Image of P1 or Thesis) and his phenomenological Self-Image (or Antithesis); the two contents may differ profoundly, and this can trigger an internal dialogue which may (through successive partial syntheses) lead to provisional adjustments of her Alter-Image of P1.
- (2) The experience is likely to become even more pregnant for P2 when P1 becomes his antagonist (A1) via role taking. P2 now sees herself as reflected through the eyes of P1. This can create an opposition between the image she thought the others had of her (her Meta-Self or Thesis) on the one hand, and the image that now appears of herself through the words of P1 (the Alter-Image of P1 or Antithesis) on the other hand.

(3) When P1 performs the second negation and becomes himself again, the opposition described in (1) may repeat itself and P2 may begin to perceive the first effects of the dialectical process within P1 (cf. statement by P1: *Yes . . . but perhaps I should be a bit more careful towards the others*), which may already point to an incipient form of integration.

STAGE 2: Jane (P2)'s experience of the current conflict (cf. infrastructure of Phe-Di PModel): Action with P2-Triad while P1 (George) remains a silent observer

Spatial positioning of the triads

P2 (Jane) starts behind P2-chair; D2 and A2 sit on P2- and P1-chairs, respectively.

This is followed by the same successive actions as for P1, described in Stage 1.

Some illustrative statements and action techniques used

(1) P2: *I am Jane. I represent the views of the Deer group, I am honest and straightforward too, I also want to learn, but not at the cost of humiliation, doubts and fear. I am very wary of hurting others and myself, and if this does happen, I veil myself in silence. Yet I am no softy and I'm prepared to make any effort it takes, but I believe that cooperation is more productive for the learning process than competition!* (Self-Image).

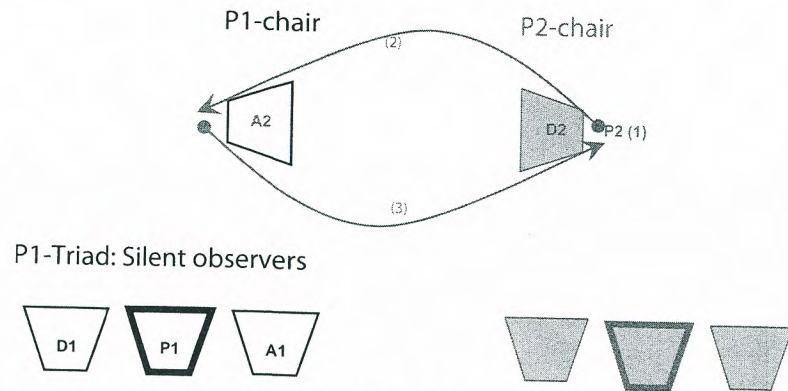


Figure 5. Spatial Positions in Stage 2

Steps (2) and (3) in this second stage are parallel to the two role takings in Stage 1. Here also, the protagonist (this time Jane, P2) is assisted by her advocates, while the director urges all group members to double both points of view as much as possible.

Actions P1 and P2 from the Phe-Di PModel

The figure is the exact mirror image of what has happened in both protagonists in Stage 1 (see Figure 6).

After concluding Stage 2, the director assesses whether it is possible to move on effectively to the integration stages.

Director: *During the previous stages the two protagonists had been able to empathize with the opposite subgroup's position through indirect communication. Some inter-subgroup oppositions appear very difficult to integrate, although our intensive group work also brought subgroup similarities to light. Before the two protagonists can meet in a direct dialogue, there will be two more preparatory stages in which they will be given the opportunity (again through an indirect dialogue, and assisted by their advocates and all group members) to explicitly search for possible integration and acceptance of each other's subgroup identity within the group as a whole.*

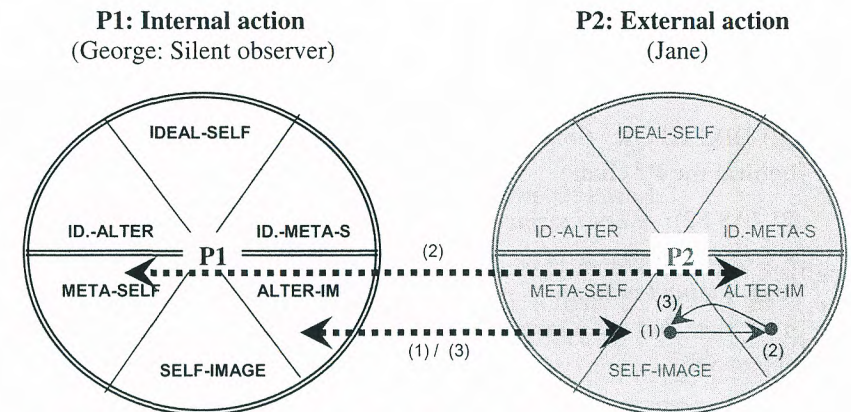


Figure 6. Actions P1 and P2 within the Phe-Di PModel in Stage 2

STAGE 3: George (P1)'s search for inter-subgroup integration possibilities (cf. supra-structure of Phe-Di PModel): Action with P1-Triad while P2 (Jane) remains a silent observer

Spatial positioning of the triads

See Figure 3.

Some illustrative statements, and action techniques used

DIRECTOR TO P1: *George, we listened to your position last time; you were also able to listen to and empathize with Jane's position. Do you already see any roads towards some subgroup integration and cooperation?*

(1) P1: *Yes, definitely, I think that if both the pearl fishers and the deer are prepared to make compromises, they will probably succeed* (Self-Image/Alter-Image)

D1 (DOUBLES P1): *Perhaps I should simply accept that the deer are more skittish . . . this adds some spice to the group.*

P1 nods amused.

Member of the Deer group (doubles P1): *I might be able to teach the deer gradually how deep they can dive and bring valuable pearls to the surface . . .*

P1 and group members laugh relaxed.

Member of the Pearl Fishers group (doubles P1): *Yes, and perhaps I could learn how to flee when a dangerous shark approaches* (the transition to the symbolic language and the humorous notes signals a more relaxed group climate).

(2) DIRECTOR: *George, become your antagonist now* (George moves behind the P2 chair).

P1 (AS P2): *When hearing all this, I think I might want to venture into a deep dive together with the pearl fishers* (Alter-Image via role taking). *I think I will have to reconsider my opinion about him; he may look a bit tough, but he's a rough diamond . . . yes really, I think I like him* (Meta-Self).

(3) DIRECTOR: *George, become yourself again and stand behind your chair* (return to the Self-Image via second role taking).

P1 (AS HIMSELF): *I'm feeling quite fine, and it was even fun standing over there and feeling that I was also accepted in my role as deer. I have the impression that we've made quite some progress* (Self-Image/Alter-Image).

DIRECTOR: *Fine, come on, Jane, it's your turn again.*

Actions P1 and P2 from the Phe-Di PModel

Actions P1 and P2 from the Phe-Di PModel are completely comparable to Stage 1 (see Figure 4), but both protagonists are now active in the supra-structure (the *Ideal-Images*); more particularly, P1 (George, in the *External action* mode) consecutively becomes his Ideal-Self, Ideal-Alter, and Ideal-Self, while P2 (Jane, as *Silent observer*) is confronted with the oppositions and similarities between her Ideal-Alter and Ideal-Meta-Self on the one hand and George's Ideal-Self and Ideal-Alter on the other.

STAGE 4: Jane (P2)'s search for inter-subgroup integration possibilities (cf. supra-structure of Phe-Di PModel): Action with P2(-Triad) while P1 (George) remains a silent observer

Spatial positioning of the triads

See Stage 2, Figure 5.

Some illustrative statements, and action techniques used

Those are similar dialogues as in Stage 3, but now with P2 (Jane) as explicit actor and P1 as observer.

Actions P1 and P2 from the Phe-Di PModel

As in Stage 3, both protagonists are now active in the supra-structure (the *Ideal-Images*). More particularly, P2 (Jane, now in the *External action* mode) consecutively becomes her Ideal-Self, Ideal-Alter and again her Ideal-Self, while P1 (George, as *Silent observer*) is confronted with the oppositions and similarities between his Ideal-Alter and Ideal-Meta-self on the one hand and Jane's

Ideal-Self and Ideal-Alter on the other (completely comparable with the infra-structure of Stage 2, Figure 6).

STAGE 5: Direct dialogue between P1 and P2

The explicit dialogue between P1 (George) and P2 (Jane) was prepared by the four preceding mediated action stages.

DIRECTOR (TO THE GROUP): *If all goes well, we have now reached the final stage of our intensive group work, namely a direct dialogue between George (the representative of the Pearl Fishers) and Jane (the representative of the Deer). (1) In a first phase, they will present their own views, including the search for possible points of cooperation. (2) Next, they will do a real role reversal and become the other person. (3) In the third phase, they will become themselves again. As in our previous sessions, anyone can double the two protagonists throughout the three phases. Here again, it is very important that all group members should empathize actively with both positions. Afterwards, we will together evaluate our group work in an extensive group discussion.*

Spatial positioning and theoretical interpretation

P1 and P2 take their places in their chairs (see Figure 7).

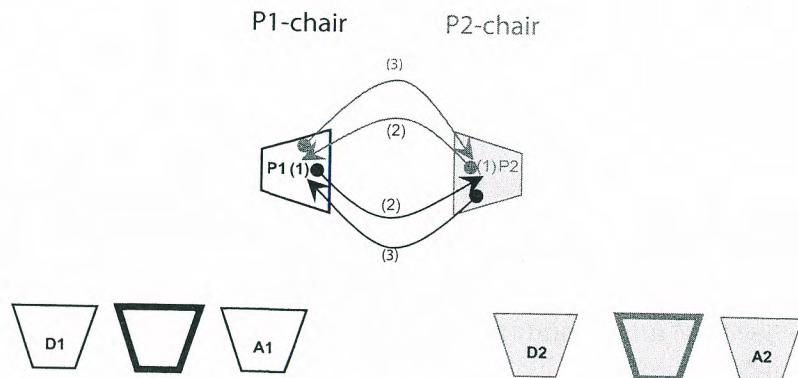


Figure 7. Spatial Positions in Stage 5 during a Direct Dialogue between P1 and P2

(1) Dialogue of the two protagonists as themselves (Thesis phase).

DIRECTOR: *George and Jane, sit down in your chairs here.*

JANE: *George, I'm glad that I can finally have a direct conversation with you . . . As the representative of the deer, I stick to my position that we can work well only if the setting is safe . . . if there's no competition but cooperation, even if one makes the odd "stupid mistake" (Self-Image).*

MEMBER OF THE PEARL FISHERS GROUP (DOUBLES JANE): *Yes, since it's from our mistakes that we can learn most . . . so "stupid mistakes" are in fact a blessing for the learning process.*

JANE: *Yes, you're quite right, and . . . I feel much safer now (Self-Image).*

DIRECTOR: *And you, George, how do you feel about this?*

GEORGE: *Well, I do agree with you, Jane, although I think that a degree of fear and competition may be exciting too and can be an incentive for working . . . also for working together (Self-Image).*

MEMBER OF THE DEER GROUP (DOUBLES GEORGE): *. . . and also as a pearl fisher I sometimes feel an intensive fear which can be paralyzing and can weaken my performance . . . fear, all right . . . but not too much!*

GEORGE: *Exactly!*

JANE: *It's nice to hear this from you, George! (Alter-Image).*

While one of the two protagonists is presenting his or her position, the other is in a situation that is comparable to the "observer mode" in the previous stages, and he or she strongly experiences the divergence between the opposite subgroup's Self-Image and their own Alter-Image. This in itself may trigger dialectical processes. These dialectical oppositions will become even stronger in the next phase, when both protagonists become each other's direct opposite through *role-reversal*.

(2) Dialogue after role reversal (Antithesis phase)

George (P1) and Jane (P2) change places and become their Antagonist.

DIRECTOR TO GEORGE (P1 AS P2): *Well, how does it feel to be a deer?*

GEORGE: *Yes, I feel as if I am a frightened deer now but not as frightened as at the beginning of our group work . . . I will not flee as rapidly as before when the pearl fishers start shouting (Alter-Image, P1). Everyone laughs heartily!*

A MEMBER OF THE PEARL FISHERS GROUP DOUBLES

GEORGE: *And most importantly, I feel closer to that pearl fisher and at the same time I feel that now he accepts me better just as I am!*

GEORGE: *Right!*

DIRECTOR TO JANE (P2, AS P1): *And how do you feel as a pearl fisher?*

JANE: *I feel strong . . . probably even stronger than I used to, because I feel the support of the deer.*

DIRECTOR: *What do you think of the deer?*

JANE: *From what I've gathered, I have the impression that they've finally become a bit wiser: they seem to dare more . . . for instance, doing some real deep-sea diving together with us . . . these flippers may perhaps not fit straight onto their little hooves, but they'll manage . . . I suspect.*

GROUP: Loud, relaxed laughing.

The role reversal is comparable with the second phase (role taking) in the first four stages, but the process is greatly reinforced through the role reversal, since he or she now experiences a direct confrontation between the Meta-Self and the actual image that the opposite party has formed of him or her. In the previous phases, each protagonist to a large extent played both roles and in this way had greater control over the statements.

(3) Final phase: Dialogue as oneself again (Synthesis phase)

George (P1) and Jane (P2) each take their place in their own chairs again.

JANE: *I feel a lot better now, George, as we have discovered some common features and . . . we accept each other more as we are. (Self-Image/Alter-Image/Meta-Self).*

GEORGE: *Well, Jane, like Pope John Paul II, I might say: "Don't be afraid," deer, have faith in your own capabilities and we'll make the best of it together.*

This is followed by several supportive doublings of Jane and George from both subgroups, in a relaxed atmosphere.

In principle, the three phases of this direct dialogue between the two protagonists in Stage 5 constitute an integration of all preceding stages. Throughout the three phases, both protagonists are at the same time actors and observers. As actors, they conduct an intra-psychic dialectical process via a triadic move (from Self-Image to Alter-Image and back to Self-Image); as observers, they simultaneously conduct an interpersonal dialogue between their own Self-Image and Alter-Image on the one hand and the opposite party's Alter-Image and Meta-Self on the other hand. For an interpretation of these intra- and interpersonal dialectical movements, we refer to the theoretical explanation following Stage 1 and Verhofstadt-Denève (2000, 2007a).

Sharing/Processing

"Sharing" has a totally different content here than in classic psychodrama, where the participants reflect on their own lives in relation to the protagonist's psychodrama theme. We will come back to this in the discussion section, when addressing the relationship of DTM to psychodrama and sociodrama. In contrast to classic psychodrama, we are working with *two* protagonists here, while all group members are very personally and actively involved in the entire process from the very start. This turns *Sharing* into an intensive personal and process-based group dialogue during which the participants can reflect on how they evaluate the subgroup climate and the group climate before, during, and after this active group exploration.

This group discussion revealed a relatively high degree of satisfaction about the group event as a whole. There were statements such as: *It was tough for everyone, but it pays; Group cohesion has clearly improved; We are more like one group again; Both subgroups still exist, but we accept the differences, and individuals can switch from time to time, if they like; We can now make relaxed fun again; I didn't like it initially, but I gradually started believing in the process and I couldn't stop doubling; Rather complicated, but interesting as a method; Requires a lot of the participants and the director . . . You don't have the time to doze off; I*

think I'll sleep better tonight. But there were some skeptical remarks as well: *It's wait and see whether it will stay like this . . . and then perhaps we can play DTM again*; and humorous reflections: *It's obvious that not everything has been resolved in the group: there's still a lot to be done about my personal conflict with Mary* (his best friend in the group). Everyone laughs.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this article was to give a systematic description of how the dialectical Double Triad Method (DTM) can be applied to handling subgroup conflicts, as well as to provide theoretical support for this method on the basis of the Phenomenological-Dialectical Personality Model. The question can be asked about a possible correspondence between the DTM and Agazarian's well-known *Systems-Centered Therapy for Groups* (SCT). An in-depth comparison is of course impossible within the scope of this article, so we will confine ourselves to some basic comments.

The ultimate objective of both methods appears to be comparable to a certain extent: a mutual exploration first of subgroup differences and then of similarities aimed at the integration of all participants within the entire group; or as Agazarian has it: Functional subgrouping makes it possible to work toward an integration in the group as a whole through differentiation and then the discovery of similarities. This implies a development toward "us and us," in contrast to the "them and us" attitude developed via stereotypical subgrouping (Agazarian, 2004). In the same way, both approaches emphasize *exploration* (a better understanding of self and others) instead of *explanation* (postulating what self and others are like).

There are obvious differences as well. DTM is applied in one or two consecutive sessions for treating *acute* subgroup conflicts that may emerge during the entire group development process. In contrast, SCT is a method applied in each session systematically. In both methodologies, group dialogues are crucial, but as DTM is based on a psychodramatical tradition, there is also ample use of action and drama techniques, which is not the case in SCT. On the other hand, grounded on a systems-centered theory, the group-dialogues in SCT seem more structured than in DTM.

There is no doubt that practitioners of DTM can greatly profit from SCT group-discussion strategies.

The question can also be raised whether, in terms of content, DTM relates more to psychodrama (which focuses mainly on the treatment of the socio-psychological content of one individual) or to sociodrama (which focuses mainly on the expression and integration of oppositions between groups). Psychodrama is more person-related than sociodrama since, as Haworth (1998, p. 24) writes, "In sociodrama, the group is the protagonist. In psychodrama, the individual is the protagonist." DTM could be seen as a synthesis of sociodrama and psychodrama, since in the course of the action, and within a safe setting, it stimulates a shift of the collective meaning (typical of sociodrama) to a more intense personal involvement of all participants. For an analysis of the differences between psychodrama and sociodrama, we refer the reader to the general article by Haworth (1984) and to Wiener, Adderley, & Kirk (2011).

The schematic representation of the concrete positioning and the illustrative statements are designed for practitioners who intend to apply DTM in practice. The theoretical interpretation may be somewhat difficult, but it is useful to practitioners who wish to have an understanding of what they are doing: what (dialectical) oppositions are thought to be triggered by interventions *vis-à-vis* the protagonists and the group participants, not only within the "externally" active Protagonist, but also within the Silent observers? The director is certainly not expected to constantly consider this theoretical basis during the action, since this would have an inhibiting effect. But he or she now at least knows that a lot of things are going on during the action, and subsequent reflective awareness and theoretical analysis may be useful in better understanding certain crucial actions or some participants' reactions.

In the text, the theoretical analysis and the related schematic representations are confined to the two protagonists. In our experience, similar processes come into play in the two other members of each triad (doubles and antagonists) as well as in the members of both subgroups. Such a detailed elaboration was too comprehensive for the scope of the present article but can constitute a challenging exercise for the interested reader.

Practical methodological variants are perfectly possible. For instance, the two protagonists' final action can be prepared more

thoroughly by means of direct dialogues and role reversals between the two doubles.

The method can also be applied in a simpler form, without any advocates. In this case, the protagonist will move from one chair to the other, while the second protagonist watches until it is his or her turn to act and be observed by the first protagonist. But as Blatner (2002) rightly argues, the protagonists will be supported less strongly in this case, even if the group members do a lot of doubling. Moreover, the protagonists will be missing the direct dialogue with the antagonist they have selected.

In my experience this method, whether in its complex or simple form, is also suitable for addressing dyadic conflicts between group members. In this case, no group representative is appointed, since both protagonists are representing themselves. The choice of a double and an antagonist (in the complex method), alternating action while the other person is observing (the direct confrontation being prepared by indirect dialogues), and the exploration of possible reconciliation strategies can also be applied perfectly in this case. However, the director should monitor the doubling and sharing of the group members very closely in order to prevent group preferences for either one of the protagonists in the dyad from being expressed.

Alternating between partners as actor and observer (using chairs) can also be applied with good effect outside groups in relational therapy, in view of preparing a direct dialogue between two partners in a dyad (i.e., a couple, father/daughter, mother/son, etc.), and here again the Phe-Di PModel can serve as the theoretical basis for the exercise.

Finally, the question can be raised whether DTM is also suitable for therapy groups. Extensive research has shown that psychodrama therapy is effective for the therapeutic treatment of various problems (Kellermann, 1987; Wieser, 2007). Since DTM essentially is an application of the classic psychodrama techniques (role taking, role reversal, doubling, etc.), the results in terms of the effectiveness of psychodrama hypothetically apply to DTM as well. As in psychodrama, the participants should be intellectually and emotionally capable of self-reflection and empathy. However, this problem definition should be fine-tuned by means of further scientific research. High demands are placed on the director as

well, and we hope that this article can help them in their difficult task.

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