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Intergroup Relations Approach

CONTACT HYPOTHESIS THEORY

Contact hypothesis theory is a central part of theories of intergroup relations. Generally, the contact hypothesis theoretical propositions are used to explain prejudice reduction and discrimination in intergroup situations, which are subcategories of the larger arena of intergroup relations.

Contact hypothesis theory refers to the approach that brings members of different cultures together over a concentrated period of time. By using group techniques, these meetings seek to strengthen interpersonal relations and thereby change participants' attitudes and opinions toward one another. Hewstone and Brown define and criticize the contact hypothesis's main assumption:

Increasing physical intergroup contact inevitably will lead to changes in the mutual attitudes of interacting members and improve their intergroup relations. It focuses on similarity and mechanical solidarity with scant attention to differences and organic solidarity. (Hewstone & Brown, 1986:172)

The classical contact hypothesis theory belongs to the extensive human relations movement that emerged after the Second World War. It attempts to combat all forms of intergroup prejudice: racial, religious, and ethnic. According to Allen (1986), it extended into other intergroup domains, including the industrial relations movement and the international arena from which conflict resolution approaches and theories emerged. The main belief in the 1950s was that intergroup contact would inevitably lead to a change in mutual attitudes of interacting members and improve their relations (Ben-Ari & Amir, 1986).

Several attempts have been made to conceptualize and classify the literature on intergroup relations: Lewin (1947, 1958); Allport (1954);

Sherif (1958); Ashmor (1970); Ehrlich (1973); Tajfel (1982); Peled and Bargal (1983); Amir (1976); Ben-Ari and Amir (1986, 1988b); and Hewstone and Brown (1986). These scholars constitute the main bulk of researchers who have attempted to classify the theoretical literature on intergroup relations, especially the contact hypothesis, which stood for many years as the main approach to solving intergroup conflict.

Although Tajfel (1982) and Amir (1976) argue that despite the substantial amount of literature on the contact hypothesis, theoretically, there is still little understanding of how contact processes operate as change agents.

Peled and Bargal (1983) classified the outcome of these processes of prejudice reduction into three sets of frameworks:

(1) *Cognitive processes*: In this approach, three main cognitive processes to explain intergroup discriminations were identified: (a) the old belief-congruence approach, which argues that forming attitudes between people is the congruence of their belief system; people are attracted more to others with a similar belief system than to their social group members (Rokeach, 1960, 1968); (b) the social identity and social comparison approach, which assumes that people need to protect their social identity and tend to favor ingroup behavior even when there is no explicit or institutionalized conflict between the groups (Tajfel, 1982); (c) the attribution processes approach, which is based on a social-psychological framework, and relies on attribution theory to explain principles and guidelines that people apply in order to understand, comprehend, and explain the behaviors and attitudes of others.¹

(2) *Personality development and sociocultural influences*: This set of explanatory theories includes the psychodynamic and the sociocultural approaches. The psychoanalytical theory includes aggression and frustration hypotheses (Dollard et al., 1939) and the authoritarian personality hypothesis, which is the modern developed approach of psychodynamic theory.

The sociocultural approaches explain prejudice and discrimination behavior on the assumption that these behaviors are learned through the socialization learning processes of the individual interacting with his or her environment (Ashmor & Del Boca, 1976). In the socialization processes there are four major channels or agents: parents, peers, schools, and mass media.

(3) *Intergroup conflicts and competition*: This type of explanation of prejudice and discrimination stands for the societal level of analysis and explanation provided by Ashmor (1970) and Ashmor and Del Boca (1976). In comparison with the previous sets, this type of theory does not rely on individual personality or development but on intergroup relationships as a cause in shaping an individual's attitudes.

In a comprehensive study of prejudice and intergroup relations, Hewstone and Brown (1986) identified the main theoretical propositions of Allport (1954), Cook (1978, 1979), and Pettigrew (1971). They emphasize a very fundamental distinction between the contact hypothesis and the intergroup relations approach, and suggest the adoption of intergroup processes as the basis for a theoretical explanatory framework. Their argument is based on Tajfel's (1982) social categorization and Tajfel and Turner (1986).

In conclusion, the different theoretical bases of the contact hypothesis are divided into two sets of theoretical explanations. On the one hand, there are those scholars who rely on personality and individual development as causes and methods of changing an individual's attitudes. This group of scholars tends to rely on psychosociological or psychodynamic theories. On the other hand, there are scholars who stress intergroup relations as the focal cause of changing and shaping an individual's attitudes. This group mainly relies on social-psychological and sociological theories.

Based on these different theoretical explanations of the contact hypothesis, practitioners and scholars have developed various types of intervention models.

INTERVENTION MODELS BASED ON THE CONTACT HYPOTHESIS AND INTERGROUP RELATIONS THEORIES

The literature on the practical approaches to reducing prejudice and changing stereotypes is more developed and conceptualized than the theories and philosophy that attempt to explain the processes. Thus, there have been many attempts to classify the various intervention actions and principles applied in intergroup relations. This part presents three types of classifications of intervention models: (1) Hewstone and Brown (1986); (2) Peled and Bargal (1983); and (3) Ben-Ari and Amir (1986, 1988a, b).

In a comprehensive study, Amir (1969, 1976), based on the work of Allport (1954) and Cook (1962), identifies and lists favorable and unfavorable conditions that can promote or prevent change in attitudes and prejudice reduction processes. Amir also develops several theoretical propositions in relation to the input, process, and output of the intergroup relations. Those conditions are basic requirements in any intervention program that aims to achieve change in intergroup relations.

The favorable conditions are:

- (a) Equal status contact (i.e., symmetry).
- (b) Positive perception of the other group as a result of the interaction.

- (c) Contact between majority members and higher-status minority members.
- (d) Contact situation includes cooperation, not competition.
- (e) Contact situation involves interdependence activities, subordinate goals, or separate goals that can be achieved only by cooperation.
- (f) Intimate, not casual, contact.
- (g) An "authority" or social climate in supporting intergroup contact.
- (h) A pleasant or rewarding contact.

The unfavorable conditions are:

- (a) Intergroup competitive contact.
- (b) Unpleasant, involuntary, tension-laden contact.
- (c) Lowering prestige or status of one group as a result of the contact.
- (d) Frustrated group or individuals through the contact.
- (e) Moral or ethical standards in contact group that are objectionable to each other.
- (f) Majority members are higher in status or other characteristics than minority members.

(1) *Hewstone and Brown's (1986) intergroup model*: Hewstone and Brown's comprehensive review suggests a new and expanded approach based on their fundamental distinction between interpersonal/intergroup interaction and similarities/differences as well as the components and processes of contacts. Their review establishes the case that interpersonal processes and contact are less effective and produce the problem of generalization of effects beyond the individual participants. Their review of "outputs' generalization" is that:

As long as the individuals are interacting as individuals, rather than as group members, there is no basis either for expecting any attitudes change to be generalized through the group or for one person to extrapolate the positive attitudes towards one individual to other outgroup members. (Hewstone & Brown, 1986:20)

Based on these distinctions, Hewstone and Brown (1986) suggest a model that, unlike Ben-Ari and Amir (1986, 1988b) and others, focuses on the contextual conditions of the contacts. They suggest an intergroup focus of contact, based on these four conditions:

1. Superordinate goals: goals that one group cannot attain without the other group; they are interdependent.

2. Cooperation, not competition, between the groups.
3. Multigroup membership and cross-cutting social categories.
4. Achieving equal status by the manipulation of "expectation state." ("expectations training" to overcome the negative feature and expectation as a result of each group's self-image.)

The consideration of these conditions and the favorable conditions suggested by Amir (1976) and Ben-Ari and Amir (1988a) is crucial to the application of the intergroup contact model.

(2) *Peled and Bargal (1983)*: Based on Lewin's research, Peled and Bargal track the source of interventions that aim to change stereotypes and attitudes to three types originated from different disciplines:

1. Attitude change derived from social psychology (interpersonal influence). In order to change the attitudes and behavior of people, either a meaningful reference group (Sherif, 1958; Kelly, 1968) or an alternative culture (Lewin, 1958) needs to be created. Peled and Bargal focus on Lewin's approach, which assumes that the changes in a person who is undergoing processes of prejudice reduction can change one of the three main sectors of his or her personality: *the cognitive structure (perceptions), the values (preferences, attractions), or behavior*. To cause a change in the three sectors of the personality, different components in the intervention process need to be integrated. These components should address the different sectors. According to the Lewinian approach, there are three processes to change the individual's beliefs and values: (a) "unfreeze" the existing beliefs and values in a "cultural island" setting that secures the individual's environment for openness and cathartic processes; (b) "moving," in which the group of people adopts the new values, beliefs, and perceptions of the other group; and (c) "refreezing," which reinforces the newly adopted values and perceptions by supporting the person, thus ensuring retention of these values.

2. Behavioral change and psychotherapy that is derived from clinical psychology. In this approach, which is represented by Rogers (1957), Allport (1954), and Egan (1970, 1976), certain conditions and mechanisms should be provided in order to achieve a change in the behavior of the individual's trusting atmosphere, an empathetic understanding of the facilitator of change, openness in both groups, and public examination of feelings and biases by confronting them in a feedback-based process.

3. Social influence (socialization) and educational impacts that are derived from organizational behavior. The conditions in this process of prejudice reduction are similar to those conditions required in socializing a person through an institution or organization. According to Brim and Wheeler (1966) as well as Mortimer and Simons (1978), there are three

stages of socialization: (a) anticipatory socialization, which relates to preparatory conditions and readiness as listed by Amir (1969) and Cook (1962); (b) socialization processes, which are applied by the agents and include all types of educational programs and exercises; (c) disengagement stage, which is determined by the organizations and institutions that conduct the socialization process.

(3) *Ben-Ari and Amir (1988a)*: A third attempt to classify the intervention models applied in intergroup relations was made by Ben-Ari and Amir, who identify three intervention approaches: *contact model*, *information model*, and *psychodynamic model*.

1. In describing the contact model, based on Allport (1954) and Cook (1962), Ben-Ari and Amir state:

It is based on the belief that intergroup contact will lead to a change in mutual attitudes and relations of interacting members. Underlying this belief is the assumption that contact among individuals from diverse groups creates an opportunity for mutual acquaintance, enhances understanding and acceptance among the interacting group members, and consequently reduces intergroup conflicts, prejudice, and tension. (1988a:87).

2. Based on Brislin (1986) and Triandis (1975), the information model's main assumption is that ignorance and lack of information comprise the bases for the development of prejudice, stereotypes, and consequent tension between groups. To reduce prejudice, members of each group should understand the cultural characteristics of the other group. This enables people to understand and evaluate positively the other group's members. Such results can be achieved by recruiting the means of mass communication and/or the educational system for the dissemination of new information about the target culture (Ben Ari & Amir, 1988a, b).

Within this model there are two approaches. One focuses on the similarities in teaching the history and providing new information (Stephan, 1985; 1987; and Stephan & Stephan, 1984) to both groups. The second approach stresses differences and misperceptions as the basis of the conflict between the two groups. By legitimizing the differences, and not by ignoring them, the group can reach a better understanding and tolerance level (Triandis, 1975).

3. Based on Gudykunst, Hammer, and Wiserman (1977), the psychodynamic model is described as the implementation of T-groups and a "new culture group." According to Amir and Ben-Ari, this model assumes that treating the individual problems and conflicts produces positive reactions to the opponent group because the origins of negative reactions are in the individual's psychodynamic processes and not in the target group.

In 1986, Ben-Ari and Amir suggested an alternative approach, or intervention model, which relies heavily on the cognitive or informational approach, but they also stress the need for integration and interaction of components:

An integrative program including, in addition to cognitive contents, some intergroup contact that will emphasize the social and emotional aspects of interpersonal and intergroup relations might be more effective. (1986:57)

Having reviewed the theoretical and practical aspects of the contact hypothesis approach, it is also important to address its critiques and limitations.

CONTACT HYPOTHESIS INTERVENTION: SHORTCOMINGS AND ALTERNATIVES

Since the 1950s and 1960s, when the human relations approach, especially contact theory, was developed, a great deal of criticism has been made. The main critiques and limitations are described by different scholars in Hewstone and Brown (1986). In the ninth chapter, Reicher certainly makes the case against the traditional interpersonal contact model and even against limited intergroup contacts. She states:

Racism will not be overcome by individual acts, which leaves the racist structure of British society intact, but only through action to change the nature of that society. It will not change by contact but by collective action. (1986:23).

The "collective action act" can have several effects that basically produce a common "enemy" for the encounter groups or for the graduate of the encounter. It can help reduce prejudice for a longer period, as in Reicher's example of the white and black riots in 1981 in London.

Another critique of the intergroup relations contact approach is presented by Pettigrew (1986), who argues that the traditional, and even the improved version of contact theory, does not consider the situation in-depth or at the macro level of analysis. It looks at the individual as cognition and avoids and neglects the affective side. Also, theoretically, the contact hypothesis is a relatively static middle-range theory of modest scope like any other social-psychological formulation. Pettigrew lists three main assumptions underlying the contact hypothesis:

- (a) The fundamental problem of intergroup conflict is individual prejudice.
- (b) In turn, prejudice is an educational and psychological problem. Most prejudice simply reflects gross ignorance

about outgroups. (c) The effective remedy is education. Attitudes must be changed first, followed by altered behavior. Group stereotypes must be combated with "Brotherhood Dinners," pamphlets and other information means which are used to correct intergroup misconceptions. (1986:172)

An alternative and parallel analysis is drawn by Pettigrew (1986:172):

(a) Prejudice is an important but not the fundamental component in intergroup relation. Institutionalized discrimination is the core of the problem. (b) Prejudice is not simply a "psychological problem." Stereotypes and prejudice are part of the social adjustment which are adopted by individuals. (c) Education by itself is a woefully insufficient remedy. On the opposite the focus on contact (encounters) efforts away from the real task—the systematic structural alteration necessary to eliminate intergroup separation and institutional discrimination.

Another critique of the three previous hypotheses was drawn by Taylor (1981) and described by Pettigrew (1986:177): "Much of this apparently frequent and friendly intergroup contact is subtly biased so that it is more "illusory than real." Pettigrew recommends emphasizing in the future: (a) balance between interpersonal and intergroup relations; (b) structural and context effect; (c) balance between the affective and motivational aspects using a strong focus on the cognition of social psychology; and (d) a careful exchange between the contact similarities and differences.

Another combined model is designed by Lemish, Mula, and Rubin (1989) to deal specifically with Arab-Jewish relations in Israel. They identify five models in intergroup relations, and criticize the first three models: (a) Commitment-aversion; (b) contact; (c) information; (d) critical education; and (e) critical-structural education.

In criticizing the contact model, Lemish et al. argue that it is a borderline case of domination, and even if all the conditions deemed necessary were met, this approach might at best accomplish modifications in attitudes of participants from the dominant group. Further, it is not likely that the contact approach would enable the participants to attain a substantive understanding of the conflict and their society. Thus, it contributes very little to achieving a structural resolution. More fundamentally, the deceptions of the contact approach suggest that it is an approach that works to ensure continued control by the dominant group (Lemish et al., 1989:23).

In conclusion, contact hypothesis models remain vulnerable to criticism regarding their effectiveness at the macro or structural level. Particularly, because the contact hypothesis is based on individual and

interpersonal encounter, it lacks the ability and potential to address inter-ethnic conflict and asymmetric power relations.

The numerous limitations of the contact hypothesis motivated researchers and practitioners to constantly modify and construct new models to address these limitations. Therefore, the following chapter proposes a set of principles of conflict resolution in a new attempt to contribute to the building of effective models of intervention that will assist in dealing with interethnic conflicts in an educational setting.