



## **The history of now: creating meaning (in the present moment)**

an in-person group relations working conference

International House, Melbourne, Australia

28 November – 2 December 2022





## An invitation

In recent times, interconnected and rapid changes related to the pandemic, climate change, war, and politics, have resulted in complex, global crises. Now, more than ever, we need to learn about the dynamics of leadership and authority as we confront the profound, existential dynamics of today's interlocking problems.

- What have we learned from our experience?
- How is it changing the ways we think about leading, relating, and managing?
- How might we bring this learning into our workplaces?

This conference is for individuals and organisations who would like the opportunity to explore how their experience has changed and is changing their understanding of leading, relating and managing.

## Learning from experience

Our present moment invites two ways to learn from experience: reflection on past experience; and, working with the experience in the here and now.

**Reflection** is a key leadership skill; a practice of learning from past experience to inform future experience. However, looking into the past can sometimes be used as a way of avoiding what is happening in the present moment. Reflection on its own is not enough, we must also develop the capacity to work in the **here and now**. This means to be aware of what is happening, to question our assumptions, to seek new perspectives, to make new meaning.

As well as opportunities for reflection, a group relations conference uses a here and now learning approach to create a container which mirrors the social context and enables individuals to see how their behaviour in the learning environment mirrors their behaviour in organisations.

## Conference purpose and primary task

The purpose of the conference is to provide an opportunity to learn about how we (individually and collectively) make sense of our present experience, and how this informs our understanding of leadership and authority.

Conference staff and members will work on the primary task of the conference, **the opportunity to study how we make sense of our experience, and what this means for leading, relating and managing.**

## Benefits of attending

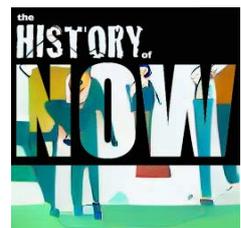
You will work with world-renowned and highly experienced staff and peers who will provide feedback on their experience of you, in real time. You will:

- learn about conscious and unconscious factors that influence your behaviour
- develop a deeper understanding of how, in the moment, acts of leading, relating and managing impact on and are impacted by group dynamics
- be supported to reflect on and make sense of your experience and encouraged to risk new ways of behaving within a safe learning environment
- gain knowledge about how the actions/risks you take in the conference can be transferred to an organisational setting.

The conference will enable you to learn about yourself, how you respond to situations, how this informs the decisions and actions you take. We hope you can join us in this opportunity to explore the history of now, creating meaning (in the present moment).



Nuala Dent, PhD  
Director





## Conference concepts

The conference is underpinned by group relations theory which focuses our attention on leadership, authority, task, and the regulation of organisational boundaries. The list below is a starting point for thinking about and discovering what these concepts mean in practice.

**Task.** While task is a simple term, in group relations it is a primary concept. This is because the task defines the scope of the work to be done.

**System.** A system is two or more people whose interactions create properties/dynamics that are not a property of the people/individuals.

**Role.** A role is the part one plays in the overall task of the group/organisation. A position is a formal definition of task responsibilities; role refers to the meaning and significance of a position in the experience of both those holding the role as well as for those interacting with the role-holder.

**Authority.** Authority is the right to exercise defined influence in the service of the group's/organisation's mission or purpose. Authority is attached to roles, not individuals.

**Leadership.** Leadership is a capacity that each person has, to act in a way that more richly connects self and others to the task.

**Group dynamics.** The ways in which people take up roles in groups and organisations is informed by conscious and unconscious group dynamics related to the task. These can be studied through attention to and reflection on experience.

## Conference structure

The conference will have two streams: one for people who are attending a group relations conference for the first time (Learning group A); and another for people who have previously attended a group relations conference and wish to extend their understanding of group dynamics (Learning group B).

The conference comprises a series of events which are designed to enable an exploration of the conference primary task, **the opportunity to study how we make sense of our experience, and what this means for how leading, relating and managing.**

Events include:

**Plenary discussions:** to open and close the conference, and events within the conference

**Small study group:** an opportunity to experience and learn about small group dynamics

**Large study group:** an opportunity to experience and learn about large group dynamics

**Intergroup event:** an opportunity to experience and study the relations between groups

**Institutional event:** an opportunity to experience and study dynamics of leading, relating and managing

**Praxis event:** an unstructured opportunity to experience and study dynamics of leading, relating and managing alongside institutional authority

**Review groups:** for members to reflect on their experience of taking up roles in the conference

**Applications groups:** for members to consider how they might apply the learning in their work



## Conference Director, and Director of learning group A



**Nuala Dent**, PhD has worked in the field of leadership and management for over 15 years, supporting individuals, teams, and organisations to achieve their developmental goals. Her practice is grounded in systems psychodynamics and art-based practice. With a particular interest in hybrid workplaces, her professional experience spans the private sector, government departments and agencies, and the health sector. In addition to consulting services, Nuala holds academic roles across multiple universities, and is an active member of Group Relations Australia (GRA) and the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organisations (ISPSO).

## Associate Director, and Director of learning group B



**James Krantz**, PhD is an organisational consultant and researcher from New York City where he is Managing Principal of Worklab, a consulting firm focusing on strategy implementation and leadership development. His principal interests are with the impact of emerging trends on the exercise of leadership and authority; the social and technical dimensions of new forms of work organisation; and the unconscious background to work and organisational life. Currently Jim serves as Honorary Professor at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow; Chair, Editorial Committee of the Journal of Organisational and Social Dynamics; and Faculty, Dynamics of Consulting at the Wharton Center for Applied Research. He has been on the standing faculties of Yale University and the Wharton School and has also taught at INSEAD, the McKinsey Center for Asian Leadership, Universidad de Chile, and Columbia University.

## Conference Operations Manager



**Anita Tan**, PhD is a clinical and management executive and clinically trained Psychologist with 20+ years of operational and leadership experience in diverse environments in the health, non-profit, corporate, and forensic sectors. She has worked across diverse geographical locations, and has provided advisory services to government organisations, statutory boards, and corporate enterprise. Anita has a deep commitment to working from a social justice perspective and utilises an intersectional lens to invite collaborative and co-created outcomes. Academically, Anita holds a PhD in Social-Forensic Psychology and is currently completing a Masters of Corporate Governance.

## Consultant pool

In addition to the directorate, staff will be drawn from the consultant pool.



**Leslie Brissett**, PhD is the Group Relations Programme Director at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London. He is interested in the lived experience of being an earth-bound entity, and applies spiritual and group relations lenses to make sense of life. He is interested in our collective ascent: waking up, growing up and clearing up our life paths to be more loving and harmonious, particularly toward those who represent what we find distasteful. Australia's cultural and spiritual legacy is foundational for planetary evolution. Leslie is delighted join the 2022 conference staff.



**Greg Cook** is a psychologist and organisational consultant. He has been a director of Centre for Leadership and Management (CLM) for the past twenty-five years – working with the broader public sector, universities, health care providers, professional and faith based organisations across Australia. CLM provides 'process consulting', executive coaching and leadership programs. Greg also holds professional qualifications as a teacher and social worker. He has previously worked in schools, prisons, higher education and in clinical roles in community mental health, acute psychiatry and in private practice. He is a member of Group Relations Australia.



**Caroline Farmer** is a consultant and has worked in private practice for the past 10 years. Caroline consults to clients across a broad range of industries in government, public and private sectors working in the areas of leadership coaching (individuals and teams), action learning, culture and system dynamics. She draws on diverse experiences working across the NGO, government and university sectors. She worked as a senior manager and innovative leader in the creative industries in Australia for 20 years. Alongside of this she has served on the Boards of a number of NGOs and is currently a Non-Executive Director of AAP (Australian Associated Press) and the Chair of Group Relations Australia.



**Andrea Foot** works with organisations, leaders and their teams as a leadership coach. She supports leaders as they work to adapt, survive and thrive in times of economic and global uncertainty. She brings her many years of practical experience of leading technology organisations together with a system psychodynamic-led coaching perspective. She works with Boards, c-Suite leaders, business owners and their teams, especially in supporting individual progression, senior role transition and organisational change. She is an INSEAD alumni and a member of Group Relations Australia.



**Cath McKinney**, PhD is the Professional Supervision Program Director at the University of Divinity. She has extensive experience as a group relations consultant where she specialises in helping people to flourish as they take up their roles. Cath graduated with her Doctor of Philosophy from the University of Divinity (through Pilgrim Theological College) in 2020. Her thesis, entitled *Leading Saturday Lives* is centred around the experience of disappointment as central to an authentic understanding of a Christian theology – from Mary as bereaved mother to the presence of the absence of God in the disappointment of Holy Saturday. Her research was stirred by her work as a prison chaplain and as a minister in an inner-city community church for many years.



**Thomas Mitchell** is a researcher, coach, and consultant. His interests include unconscious dynamics in organisations and the myriad ways they play-out. Currently, this includes undertaking research with those making career transitions, whether into new paid ventures or into retirement. Lately he has also been pondering on a question about how to incorporate a greater understanding of our social and organisational histories into our systems psychodynamic thinking as a way of reclaiming responsibility for past actions. Thomas is currently on the Faculty at the National Institute of Organisation Dynamics teaching into the Master of Leadership and Management (Organisation Dynamics) programme.

## Conference Dates

Monday 28 November to Friday 2 December 2022

9.00am – 5.00pm on Monday 28, Wednesday 30 November and Friday 2 December

9.00am – 9.00pm on Tuesday 29 November and Thursday 1 December

## Catering

The conference fee includes morning tea, lunch and afternoon tea each day, and dinner on Tuesday 29 November and Thursday 1 December.

## Accommodation

While the conference is non-residential, we strongly encourage you to stay on site and immerse yourself in the conference experience. The rate is AUD\$120 per night and includes a continental breakfast.

## Conference Venue

**International House**, 241 Royal Parade, Parkville, Victoria, 3052. Australia

International House is a residential college owned by the University of Melbourne. It is located only a few minutes from the centre of Melbourne and has public transport options within easy walking distance.

The University of Melbourne campuses are operating under COVIDSafe regulations, and will continue to offer University support services online to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all.

## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that this conference will take place on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nation and pay our respects to their elders, past present and emerging. We acknowledge the sovereignty of this land was never ceded - always was, always will be Aboriginal land. We celebrate the richness, diversity, and sophistication of the cultures of first nations people.

## Fees

Full fee for 5-day non-residential conference AUD\$3400

Early bird discount, if paid by 31 July AUD\$500

### Further discounts include:

GRA Member discount AUD\$400

Non-GRA Member discount, per person when 2 or more people  
from the same organisation register together AUD\$400

## Bursaries

Partial bursaries available on request. Please contact Anita Tan for more information.

[conference@grouprelations.org.au](mailto:conference@grouprelations.org.au)

## Scholarships

Partial scholarships are granted from the Group Relations Australia scholarship fund and are available to all individuals excluding members who are being partly or fully subsidised by an organisation. Please contact Anita Tan for more information. [conference@grouprelations.org.au](mailto:conference@grouprelations.org.au)

## Cancellations

Cancellations before 4 September receive 100% refund less AUD\$100 booking fee.

Cancellations between 6 September – 2 October receive 50% refund less AUD\$100 booking fee.

There is no refund available after 2 October 2022

## Closing date for applications

14 November 2022

## Registration

Apply and register online at: [grc.grouprelations.org.au](http://grc.grouprelations.org.au)

## Enquiries

Please contact Anita Tan, Conference Operations Manager [conference@grouprelations.org.au](mailto:conference@grouprelations.org.au)

## **Working Together**

We shape our self  
to fit this world

and by the world  
are shaped again.

The visible  
and the invisible  
working together  
in common cause,  
to produce  
the miraculous.

I am thinking of the way  
the intangible air  
passed at speed  
round a shaped wing  
easily  
holds our weight.

So may we, in this life  
trust  
to those elements  
we have yet to see  
or imagine,  
and look for the true  
shape of our own self,  
by forming it well  
to the great  
intangibles about us.

— David Whyte



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