

# **DISEMBODIED RELATIONS AT WORK**

**A Conference for Exploring the Dynamics of  
Working Online During a Pandemic**

**16 February – 17 March 2021**



**THE  
TAVISTOCK  
INSTITUTE®**

## An Invitation to Learn

Covid-19 has forced many to work remotely. Online technologies have enabled people to remain connected with clients and colleagues, family and friends. Many global connections have been enriched in unexpected ways. At the same time, boundaries between personal, domestic and professional roles have rapidly blurred because of the pandemic and emergency restrictions.

Several months on, we are learning that the reality of working online during a pandemic exposes and amplifies relational dynamics that are already present in organisational and societal cultures. This has been both revelatory and at times shocking. Processing these interactions and dynamics online in real-time is challenging when people are physically distanced in space and time. The loss of physical intimacy disrupts emotional contact, and our relationships with others feel disembodied.

Working online is an experience paradoxically of being both technologically connected but somewhat emotionally disconnected. The disembodied relations of working online have brought into sharp focus the experience of emotional disconnections in organisational life and the significance of emotional connectedness for being present in our roles, with others and ourselves.

It seems timely to examine these experiences, to explore in-depth the psychic reality of a pandemic-led shift to working online. A working conference drawing on the traditions of group relations methodologies offers opportunities to intimately study the experiences of our encounters with self and others in a group, organisational or societal context.

Disembodied Relations at Work is a unique conference program, designed specifically for examining online working relations in real-time in a temporary organisational structure. The conference uses a 'triple task' framework to explore the experience and apply it to one's professional roles. The 'triple task' approach pays attention to group task, group process and dynamics, and technology as a boundary and mediator of all these and of time and territory.

This is an opportunity to explore the multiple levels of engagement when working online and their particular influence upon emotional engagement within groups and organisations.

Please join us in this exploration and learning.

**Jinette de Gooijer, Conference Director**

## Purpose and Primary Task

**The purpose of the conference is educational.** It provides opportunities to learn about the dynamics of working online during a pandemic.

Collectively, participants and conference staff work on the primary task of the conference, which is

**to study the nature of group and interpersonal relations when working online during a pandemic and the impact of all these factors on task performance.**

## Learning Opportunities

Participants have the opportunity to:

- **Examine and explore** the lived experiences, interpersonal and unconscious group dynamics of working online during a pandemic;
- **Identify and analyse** individual and group response patterns in working online, developing new capabilities for managing these experiences; and
- **Develop and experiment** with new approaches for building more effective online working groups and teams where members can encounter each other more fully and productively.

The conference focus is on experiential learning, unlike more traditional conferences. There are no 'conference presentations' for example. You will be engaged in various organisational and learning tasks in groups with different configurations designed to challenge ways of thinking about self, others and group behaviour. Learning happens within programmed events, and in interactions with others in informal gatherings in virtual space. The learning is participative, immediate and continues long beyond the time of the conference. It is an intensive model of learning with a ratio of one staff to every four participants.

## Who is the Conference For?

The conference is for those who wish to grow their understanding and practice of working with others. It will appeal to those who work in organisational and community roles with responsibility for leading, managing or consulting to online work groups.

Participant numbers are limited to a maximum of 40 to enable in-depth study of group and interpersonal dynamics, the culture of an organisational system, and to provide focused individual role consultations.

The working language of the conference is English.

# Conference Program

## Learning from Experience

The conference is an experiential program that builds upon the foundations of group relations conferences originating with the Tavistock Institute and the 'Leicester Conference', later developments by Harold Bridger and the Bayswater Institute with the 'Double Task' working conference, and themed experiential conferences run by Group Relations Australia and our many affiliate associations around the world.

**Disembodied Relations at Work** employs a 'Triple Task' approach, drawing on and extending the idea of a group having a 'double task'.

The **Triple Task** is attentive to:

- **The task** of a group and developing capability for shared work;
- **Unconscious dynamics**, group and interpersonal processes, group formation, role and authority
- **Managing** the effects of blurred boundaries, divided time and territory that is particular to working online with digital technologies.

**Participants will be engaged in an experiential program over an elapsed period of four weeks, followed by a group application event in week five.**

**Participants are encouraged to complete a pre-conference activity of identifying a developmental issue based on a recent experience of working online to be worked on during the program.**

## Experiential and Application Events

The conference is structured as a series of events. Each event aims to build awareness of conscious and unconscious dynamics that emerge when people work together on an agreed task. Participants will experience being a member of small and large groups, each with its own specific task.

Events include:

- **Experiential events** for studying small groups in action, in the ‘here and now’;
- **A whole-of-conference system event** to explore the complexity and emergent dynamics of organisations working online;
- **Discussion plenaries** for specific events and the conference as a whole;
- **Review sessions** for participants to reflect on individual experiences of roles taken up in the conference, linking these to their identified developmental issue; and
- **An application event** where participants design a group activity for building emotionally connected online work groups.

## Informal Spaces

In addition to the formal elements of the program, attention is given to spaces for informal interactions between participants, and with staff from time to time. This will be enabled by opening up a number of ‘virtual meeting rooms’ one hour before the start of each day’s session and again for one hour after. One room will be made exclusively available for Participants only, and another will be designated as a Common room where participants and staff can meet informally.

## Authority for Learning

Staff hold authority for collective management of the program, technology-in-use, and consultancy to participants. Individual participants and staff hold authority for their own learning. Authority for group process is something for everyone to take up.

# Program Schedule

The conference will be held over five weeks from **16 February till 17 March 2021**.

Sessions are programmed to run for **two half days each week** until 10 March, and then **one half day** on 17 March. Participants can log in one hour before the day's program and remain logged in for an hour afterwards.

**Log in/Log out times are Australian Eastern Standard time: midday-6 pm.**

Indicative times for other time zones are:

- Southeast Asia: 9 am-3 pm
- India: 6:30 am-12:30 pm
- UK: 1 am -7 am
- East coast USA (NY): 8 pm - 2 am (previous day)
- West coast USA (LA): 5 – 11 pm (previous day)

Time (Australian Eastern Time)	16 Feb	17 Feb	23 Feb	24 Feb	2 Mar	3 Mar	9 Mar	10 Mar	17 Mar
midday-1:00 pm	<i>Informal Gatherings</i>								
1:00-2:00 pm	OP	SG 3	PL	IG 3	PL	SC 3	SC 5	RA 4	GA 1
2:00-2:30 pm	<i>break</i>								
2:30-3:30 pm	SG 1	SG 4	IG 1	RA 2	SC 1	SC 4	SC 6	RA 5	GA 2
3:30-4:00 pm	<i>break</i>								
4:00-5:00 pm	SG 2	RA 1	IG 2	PL	SC 2	RA 3	PL	PL	CP
5:00-6:00pm	<i>Informal Gatherings</i>								

## Event Key

Opening Plenary (OP)

Small Group work (SG)

System Culture event (SC)

Large Group Plenary (PL)

Inter-group event (IG)

Group Application event (GA)

Closing Plenary (CP)

Role Analysis group (RA)

A team of professional staff facilitate participants learning through consultancy and reflective discussions, and overall management of the conference organisation. They hold qualifications and expertise in management education, psychotherapy, group relations, organisational consultancy, leadership coaching and technology administration.

Collectively, staff hold the boundaries of task, program schedule, and technology. They work collaboratively with participants on the purpose and primary task of the program, and of specific events. They are informed by their own experiences and offer hypotheses on what is happening in the 'here and now' experiences of events, alongside assisting group process through facilitative interventions.

Their roles are always open to examination. Online consulting presents a challenge for working with the dynamics of staff-member relations. The staff as a group are less visible than in real-time, in-person events. Accordingly, the program design includes several explicit opportunities for participants to observe the staff at work, engage with staff in other spaces. In large group plenaries, staff will be co-located as a distinct group on-screen.

## Executive Directorate

The Conference Director and Associate Directors (in addition to their consultancy roles), and Director Technology and Administration constitute the Executive Directorate. The Directorate holds responsibilities for overall management of the conference program and its various sub-systems.

### Jinette de Gooijer, PhD **Conference Director**



Jinette is former Director of Innovative Practice Pty Ltd providing role analysis, supervision and organisational consultancy services. She has worked on staff of group relations conferences in Australia and internationally, and published several articles, book chapters and a book in the field of systems psychodynamics. Jinette is also an exhibiting artist who integrates socioanalysis into her studio practice. She is a founding Member and Past President of Group Relations Australia, a Member of Organisation Promoting Understanding of Society, and recognised by the Tavistock Institute as one of its informal representatives in Australia. Jinette holds a Doctorate in systems psychodynamics and further qualifications in business studies and the visual arts.

**Greg Cook, BSW Associate Director and Director Learning Engagement**



Greg Cook is a psychologist and organisational consultant and a Director of Centre for Leadership and Management since 1997. CLM provides executive coaching, organisational consulting and leadership programs for government, health and tertiary education organisations throughout Australia. Greg also holds professional qualifications as a teacher and social worker and has worked in schools and prisons, in clinical roles in community mental health, acute psychiatry and in private practice; and in higher education. He is a Member of Group Relations Australia, currently Chair of the Directorate and has worked on staff of GRA and NIODA group relations conferences.

**Caroline Farmer, MAppSci(OrgDyn) Associate Director and Director Membership Engagement**



Caroline is an independent consultant and coach working with individuals and groups in a wide range of industries. She has been an Associate Consultant for Melbourne Business School Executive Education since 2014 and is an associate consultant and teacher with National Institute of Organisation Dynamics Australia (NIODA). Prior to life as a consultant, she worked as a senior manager and innovative leader in the arts and cultural sector in Australia for almost 20 years. Caroline has a Master of Applied Science Organisation Dynamics (RMIT University) and other qualifications in business studies and fine arts. She is on the Board of Australian Network for Art and Technology and is a Member of both Group Relations Australia and the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations.

**Sally Mussared, BA Director Technology and Administration**



Sally is the Director of Administration at the National Institute of Organisation Dynamics Australia (NIODA). She enjoys working behind the scenes and has done so at NIODA's 2019 group relations conference, 2020 Symposium, Social Dreaming International Network events and NIODA's classes. With a background in growing small business, Sally has worked in website design, wedding gown creation and not-for-profit organisation development, to name a few. Her loves include restoring native habitat, refurbishing furniture and growing things on her rural property. Fascinated by systems psychodynamic work, Sally recently started studying the Master of Leadership and Management (Organisation Dynamics) at NIODA.

**Thomas Mitchell, MLshp&Mngt(OrgDyn) Assistant Administrator**



Over the last several years Thomas has enhanced his extensive experience working with government by learning from, and working with, leaders across the executive coaching, group dynamics, and systems psychodynamics fields. Recently graduating from the NIODA Master of Leadership and Management – Organisation Dynamics, Thomas combines a deep understanding of working in large organisations with a passion for supporting others as they work toward achieving their goals and gaining deeper awareness of their actions and drivers. Highly skilled in creating a safe environment to support participants explore their roles, Thomas manages the balance between empathy and candour allowing participants to feel secure whilst having their assumptions challenged.

Consultants to the events in the conference will be drawn from the Executive Directorate and a team of consultants that includes the following people.

### **Ganesh Anantharaman, MPhil**



Ganesh is a consultant on leadership development and an executive coach, using a Group Relations framework of task, role, and system. He has been on the staff of several Group Relations Conferences in various roles since 2003, including that of co-director in the 2019 Group Relations India (GRI) conference. He is currently a serious student of Lacanian psychoanalysis. He holds a Master of Philosophy degree in political science, and is also a member of the programmes committee of GRI.

### **Leslie B. Brissett, PhD**



Leslie is the Director of the Group Relations Programme at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. His role involves working across the networks of group relations institutions and practitioners to understand what impact can be achieved and what needs can be met, through application of learning about groups in society. For the last 20 years Leslie has served as a Magistrate and Board member in further education. He was a Member of the British Psychoanalytic Council's Independent Scrutiny and Advisory Committee (ISAAC). Leslie has studied at post-graduate level at the London School of Economics and Cambridge University.

### **Nuala Dent, PhD**



Nuala is a consultant, academic and artist. She has worked in the field of leadership and management for over 15 years, supporting individuals, teams and organisations to achieve their developmental goals. Nuala studied organisational dynamics at post-graduate level, recently completing her PhD. She was awarded the La Trobe University Nancy Millis Medal for the exceptional merit of her thesis. Her research into the experience of a distributed team, working at the intersection of face-to-face and online, places Nuala at the forefront of thinking about the opportunities and challenges of a COVID-normal workplace. Nuala has been on the staff of multiple group relations conferences and is a member of GRA, ISPSO and OPUS.

### **Winnie Fei, PhD**



Winnie is the Chief Executive Officer of Tavistock Institute China and academic leader of Tavistock China. She holds a doctorate in psychology of religion from Peking University and certified Group Supervisor and Therapist by Irvin Yalom College, USA. She was Associate Director of the first and second Tavistock Institute China Group Relations Conference in 2017 and 2019.

### **Ayin Jambulingam, MA**



Ayin is a leadership and organisational development consultant who works internationally with senior leaders in the private sector. In his previous roles, he was a venture capital consultant and chartered accountant. Ayin holds an MA in Systems-Psychodynamic Consulting from the Tavistock Clinic and is certified in several coaching and psychometric tools. He also holds an MBA from Switzerland and is a Fellow of the Irish Chartered Accounting Institute. He was a founding Member of the Society for Organisational Learning (Singapore) and an Associate member of the Organisation Promoting Understanding of Society. He has staffed group relations conferences in UK, Australia and Singapore (where he was also the Conference Director).

### **Kristina Karlsson, MLshp&Mngt(OrgDyn)**



Kristina was born and lives on the land of the Wurundjeri of the Kulin Nations in Australia, where she works as a systems psychodynamically trained organisational development practitioner for the Victorian State Government. She has nearly twenty years' experience in organisational development, public policy, legal practice and dispute resolution in the native title, emergency management, legal and banking sectors. Among other achievements, she has led government department processes to negotiate and implement native title settlements with Victorian Traditional Owners, and organisation-wide processes to develop inclusion and diversity strategies. She is a Member of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations and Group Relations Australia. She was awarded ISPSO's Harold Bridger Award in 2019.

### **Uma Ravikumar, MBA**



Uma is an independent consultant and coach working with institutions and individuals. She is an Associate member of Group Relations India and has been associated with group relations conferences and workshops based on systems psychodynamics as member and staff since 2013. She directed 'Listening to the Unconscious' 4-day workshop sponsored by GR India in 2019. As a facilitator and consultant to leadership and organisation change initiatives, she has worked with corporates across varied industries. Prior to consulting, Uma worked in the IT industry for 15 years in roles including Member of Management Board, Head of Leadership Development and Culture Building, Head of Project Delivery for Australia, SEA and USA. She is an Associate Certified Coach (International Coaching Federation) and certified Project Management Professional (Project Management Institute, USA).

## Conference Details

### Technologies

Parallel technologies will be in use to enable collaboration, documentation, formal correspondence and messages. Details will be provided to successful applicants before the conference.

### Fee

#### Early Bird Pay in full by 15 January 2021

\$1,050 Group Relations Australia Members / Associates\*

\$1,200 Non-members

#### After 15 January 2021

\$1,200 Group Relations Australia Members / Associates\*

\$1,350 Non-members

### Discounts and Bursaries

\$100 each for two or more applicants from the same organisation

Partial bursaries are available for those in need. Please contact Caroline Farmer, Associate Director and Director Membership Engagement to discuss.

### Closing date for applications

Monday, 8 February 2021

### Enquiries and Applications

Caroline Farmer, Associate Director and Director Membership Engagement  
e: [conference@grouprelations.org.au](mailto:conference@grouprelations.org.au)

### Applications

The Application Form is available online at:  
<https://www.grouprelations.org.au/conferences/>

*\* Applications to apply for membership of GRA are welcomed.*



### Group Relations Australia

Group Relations Australia (GRA) is a not-for-profit professional association established in 2005 whose members seek to develop the field of group relations and systems psychodynamics.

We apply its methods to working with groups, organisations and communities, in the belief that there has to be a better way of living and working in groups, organisations and society — a way that promotes learning from experience, engaging the whole system, and developing our capacity for thoughtful, effective action.

Our members work as organisation consultants and managers, academic researchers and teachers, psychoanalysts and socioanalysts amongst other roles. Through GRA, they enjoy the benefits of mutual links with international associations in the field of group relations.

We conduct a stimulating range of activities and events for members that include: professional practice meetings, working conferences, workshops, seminars and lectures. The Association also publishes the peer-reviewed journal *Socioanalysis*.

[www.grouprelations.org.au](http://www.grouprelations.org.au)

## Sponsoring Organisation

### The Tavistock Institute

The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (London) (TIHR) applies social science to contemporary issues and problems. It was established as a not-for-profit organisation with charitable purpose in 1947.

The TIHR is dedicated to the study of human relations for the purpose of bettering working life and conditions for all humans within their organisations, communities and broader societies.

[www.tavinstitute.org](http://www.tavinstitute.org)



Cover image: 'Network', Nuala Dent, 2020