

# *Mapping the Matrix*

Conjoint papers by:

**Antony Gleeson** – Group Analyst & Clinical Psychologist - Retired  
**Vera Auerbach** - Group Analyst, Child & Adolescent Psychoanalytic  
Psychotherapist & Clinical Psychologist



# *The Matrix Representational Grid*

## *MRG*

*developed by GÖRAN AHLIN*

**presented by Vera Auerbach**



Ancient civilisations had the circle as a symbol for the group – it has been with us for a very long time

Psychoanalytic Psychotherapies have a basic assumption concerning unconscious psychic processes. – how past personal Hx influences the present by way of unconscious processes

These processes surface in present relationships with the outer world (the Other) in dialogues & interactions.



**John Weeronga**  
**Bartoo's**  
 - image here represents

***The first corroboree***  
*U = person*  
*Campfire in the middle*

Concepts of the **Circle**, Ancient civilisations had the circle as a symbol for the group – it has been with us for a very long time

**Group Psychotherapy** deals with at least 2 systemic levels of human relationships – **individual** (intropsychic & interpersonal) and the **collective multipersonal (the group-as-a-whole)**

The **non-conscious, latent group matrix** exerts its influence upon manifest observable levels of group interaction through group determinants.


The **MRG** is a **diagrammatic method** for observing the operation of these determinants related to the group themes emerging in the group dialogue  
 Maturation process – Dyad (mother infant), - Triangle MO-FA-I  
 Family-as-a-whole – peers – school - society

When not gathered together, the group of which a person is a member remains in her inner world representations



 Generate variations

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**Grange stone circle. Lough Gur, Ireland. Neolithic. Aerial showing earth bank around 45m diameter 113 contiguous stones. Entrance is in N.E. quadrant**

by [David Matthew Lyons](#)

[Less](#)



- S.H. Foulkes cites two concepts:
- **The Foundation Matrix** and the **Group Matrix**
- both are concepts from **group analysis**, However, they have distinct meanings within this framework

- **The Foundation Matrix:**

**larger social and cultural network**

represents the **shared unconscious connections**, historical background, and societal influences

- It is **pre-existing** and **not created by the group itself**.
- consists of cultural norms, familial influences, & social conditioning.
- forms the **foundation** upon which group interactions take place.

# Group Matrix vs Foundation Matrix

*The group dynamic or  
group-as-a-whole concept  
is what we are looking at today with  
the MRG*



## The Group Matrix

the **dynamic, evolving web of relationships and communication within the therapy group itself**

It is the **field of interaction** where members exchange emotions, thoughts, and experiences.

- It is **created through group interaction** and evolves over time.
- It consists of **both conscious and unconscious** communication patterns.
- It **facilitates therapeutic change** by fostering connection, mirroring, and insight.

# Group Matrix vs Foundation Matrix

**The group dynamic or group-as-a-whole concept is what we are looking at today with the MRG**



## Key Difference:

- The **Foundation Matrix** is the **larger societal and historical backdrop** influencing group members before they even join the group.

- The **Group Matrix** is the **here-and-now interpersonal web of connections developed within the therapy group** itself.

*Would you like an example?*

# Group Matrix vs Foundation Matrix

## Summary:

- The **Foundation Matrix** explains **why** people enter the group with certain fears, resistances, or expectations (e.g., societal stigma, upbringing, cultural beliefs).
- The **Group Matrix** is **what happens inside the therapy group**, shaping new experiences, insights, and healing through shared interactions.

**The group dynamic or group-as-a-whole concept is what we are looking at today with the MRG**

## What is the Matrix Representation Grid (MRG)?

- A research tool designed to analyze group dynamics at the group-as-a-whole level.
- Focuses on **latent collective unconscious** aspects of group behavior.
- Based on the concept of the "Group Matrix" by Foulkes.
- It is a **diagrammatic approach** to represent the Group Matrix

## Matrix Representational Grid – MRG GÖRAN AHLIN 1986 - Stockholm

### Uses:

- Training
- Recording group process
- Research tool for unconscious group processes
- Group Observation method





# The Purpose of the MRG

- To provide a structured method to:
  - **Observe** and analyze group interactions.
  - Assess **therapeutic** and **dynamic** factors in groups.
  - **Represent** group states **visually** for research and practical application.
  - Conduct **research** into **unconscious** group processes

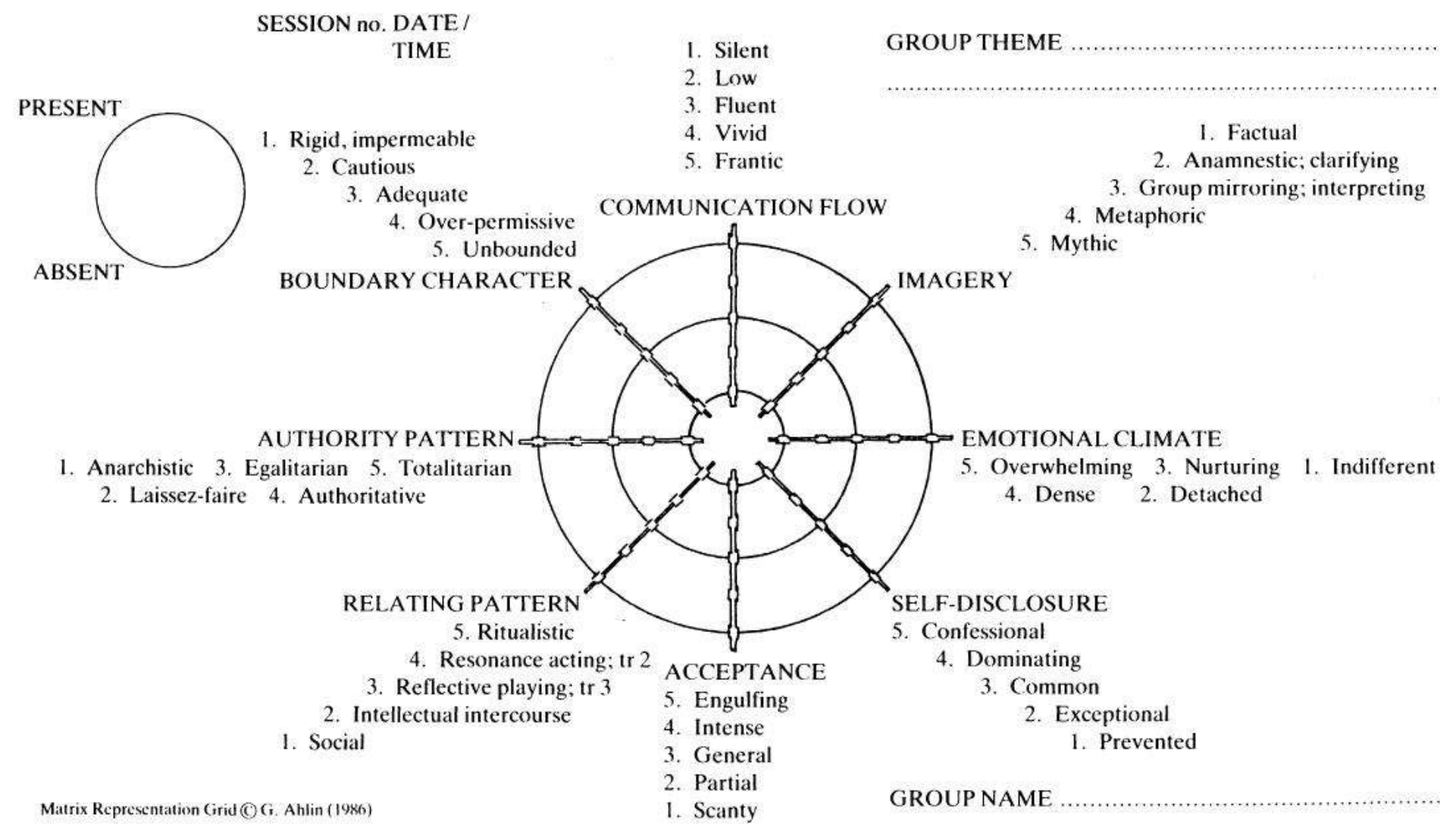


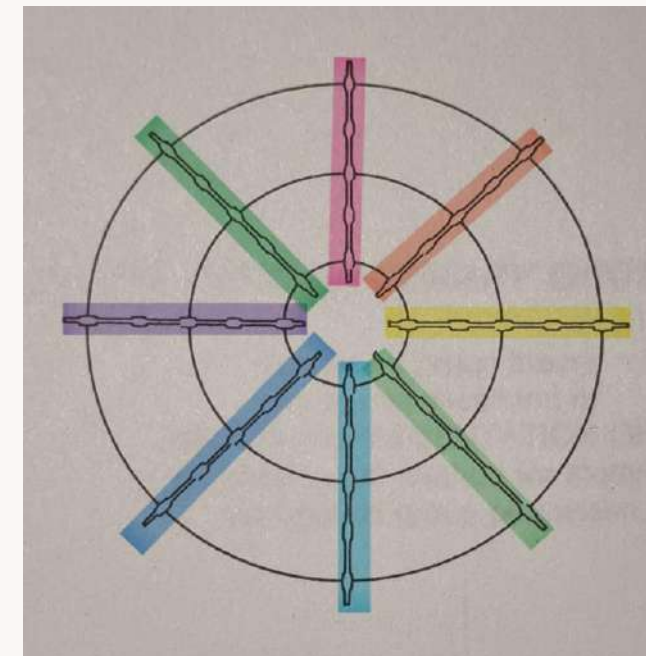
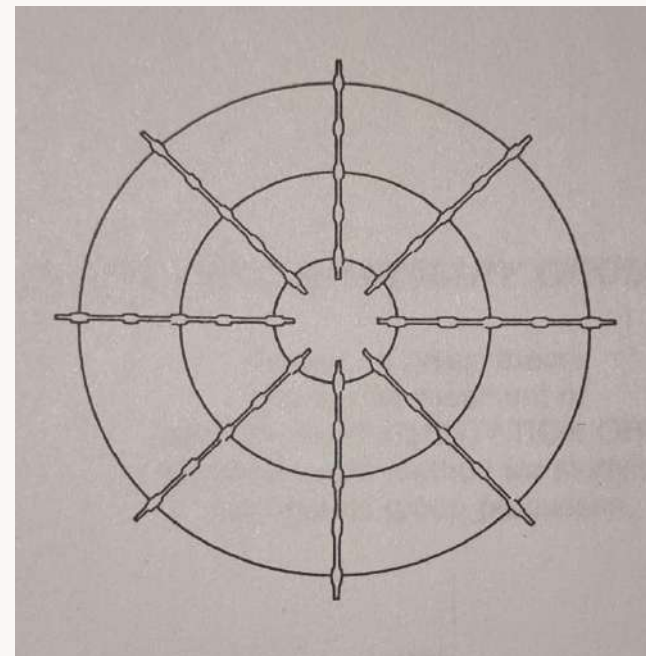
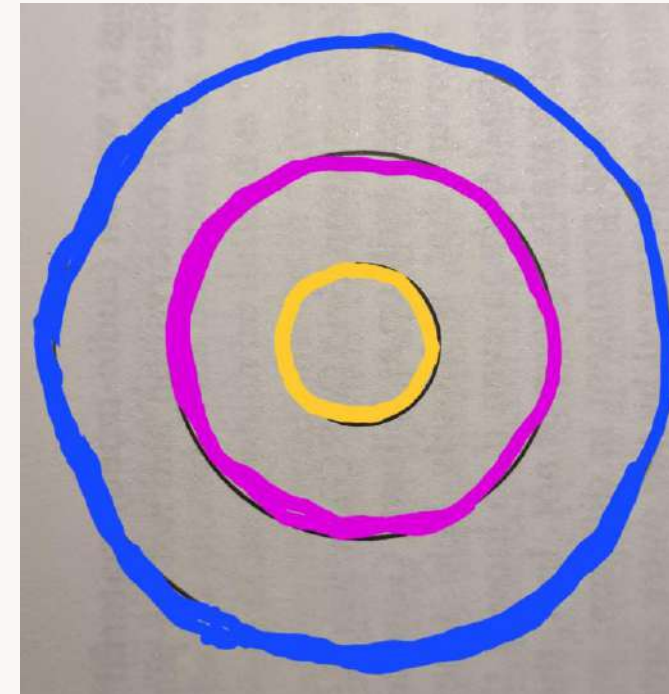
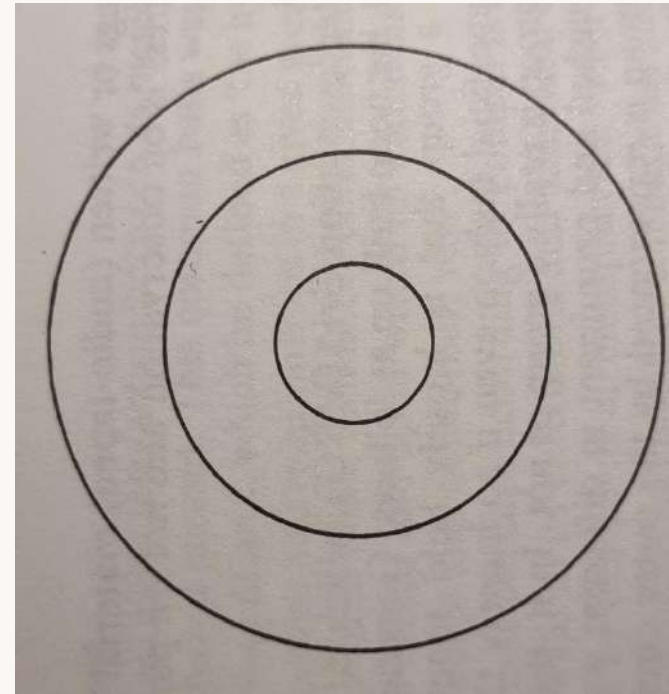
FIGURE 3 Matrix Representation Grid

# Theoretical Foundations

Combines psychoanalytical theories and group-analytic conceptualizations.

Builds on work by key theorists:

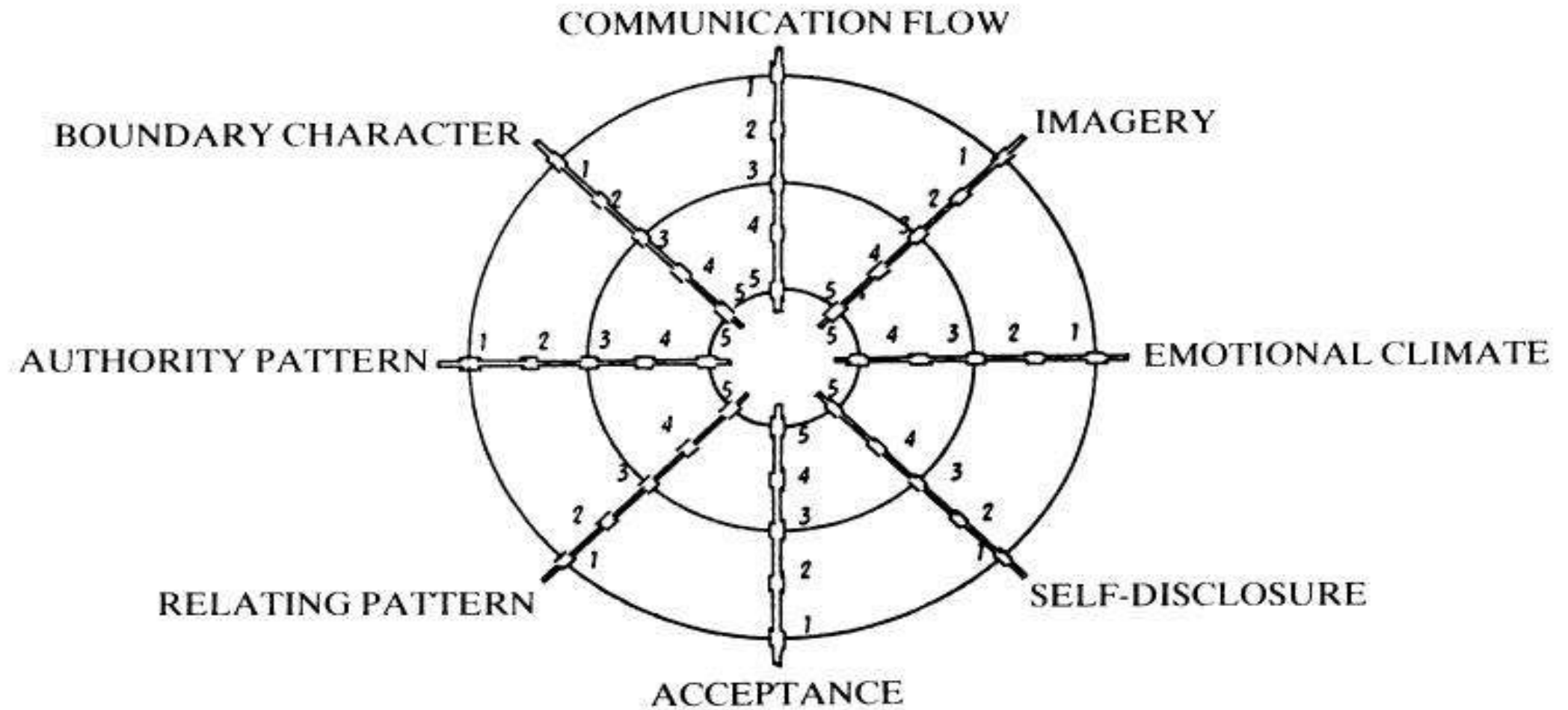
- Bion: Basic assumption concepts for group processes.
- Foulkes: Group-as-a-whole analysis
- Yalom 1970
- Agazarian & Peters 1981
- Bloch & Crouch 1985



# Key Determinants in the MRG

The MRG assesses group dynamics using **eight determinants** each with **5 Stations**:

1. Communication Flow
2. Imagery
3. Emotional Climate
4. Self-Disclosure
5. Acceptance
6. Relating Pattern
7. Authority Pattern
8. Boundary Character



**FIGURE 2**  
**The Five Stations of the Determinants**

# Communication Flow

Measures the level of verbal and non-verbal interaction. Stations range from:

## Silent (1)

No verbal, small non-verbal exchange

## Low (2)

Few scattered verbal comments, varied non-verbal

## Fluent (3)

Freely floating interchange. Few & short silences

## Vivid (4)

Continuous rich exchange. No silences. Members talk one at a time

## Frantic (5)

Excited, frequent interruptions. Members talk at the same time & fight for their say

TABLE 1 Operational Definitions of the Matrix Representation Grid Stations

COMMUNICATION FLOW Level of verbal and non-verbal interaction Semi-quantitative	IMAGERY Expressed, (mainly) verbal, therapeutically significant content of group dialogue Qualitative	EMOTIONAL CLIMATE Observer's assessment of expressed feelings in group-as-a-whole Semi-quantitative	SELF-DISCLOSURE Amount in group of (mainly) verbal sharing of individual inner-worlds Semi-quantitative
1. <i>Silent</i> No verbal and small non-verbal exchange.	1. <i>Factual</i> Concrete facts exchanged. Also concrete advice.	1. <i>Indifferent</i> Hardly any or no expressions of feelings.	1. <i>Prevented</i> Inner worlds concealed in all the group. No revelation pressure shown.
2. <i>Low</i> Few, scattered verbal comments varied non-verbal.	2. <i>Anamnestic/clarifying</i> There-and-then outside group. Also clarifying, confronting.	2. <i>Detached</i> Restricted amounts of low-intensity feelings shown.	2. <i>Exceptional</i> Single members sometimes open up. Some group pressure for (others) to share intimate matters with the group.
3. <i>Fluent</i> Freely floating interchange. Few and short silences.	3. <i>Group mirroring/interpreting</i> Recalls shared group experiences. Interpretative work.	3. <i>Nurturing</i> Realistically varied fullness and level of feelings shown.	3. <i>Common</i> Self-revelation asked for and done selectively in all the group frequently.
4. <i>Vivid</i> Continuous rich exchange. No silences. Members talk one at a time.	4. <i>Metaphoric</i> Signifying object relations and not conscious conflict.	4. <i>Dense</i> High level of intense emotions of longer duration. Heightened anxiety.	4. <i>Dominating</i> High pressure for unrestricted openness. Attempts for privacy attacked by principle. Scapegoating may occur.
5. <i>Frantic</i> Excited, frequent interruptions. Members talk at the same time and fight for their say.	5. <i>Mythic</i> Dealing with archetypal, ethnic or basic cultural images.	5. <i>Overwhelming</i> Oppressive and exhaustive emotional climate. High anxiety. Psychosomatic reactions.	5. <i>Confessional</i> Uniform, excited even competitive level of revelations of pathology.

Matrix Representation Grid © G. Ahlin (1986)

216



## Imagery

- Evaluates the **qualitative content of group dialogue**.
- Ranges from factual (1) to mythic (5).

IMAGERY Expressed, (mainly) verbal, therapeutically significant content of group dialogue Qualitative
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## Emotional Climate

- Assesses the **expressed** and **observed emotional** states in the group.

Stations vary from indifferent (1) to overwhelming (5).

### EMOTIONAL CLIMATE

Observer's assessment of expressed feelings in group-as-a-whole

Semi-quantitative

---

1. *Indifferent*

Hardly any or no expressions of feelings.

2. *Detached*

Restricted amounts of low-intensity feelings shown.

3. *Nurturing*

Realistically varied fullness and level of feelings shown.

4. *Dense*

High level of intense emotions of longer duration. Heightened anxiety.

5. *Overwhelming*

Oppressive and exhaustive emotional climate. High anxiety. Psychosomatic reactions.



## Self-Disclosure

- Examines the amount of **personal sharing** within the group.
- **Verbal inner world disclosure**
- Ranges from prevented (1) to confessional (5).
- Semi quantitative station

SELF-DISCLOSURE Amount in group of (mainly) verbal sharing of individual inner-worlds Semi-quantitative
1. <i>Prevented</i> Inner worlds concealed in all the group. No revelation pressure shown.
2. <i>Exceptional</i> Single members sometimes open up. Some group pressure for (others) to share intimate matters with the group.
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## Acceptance

- Looks at group **cohesiveness** and **supporting** climate in the group
  - Semi-qualitative
- From scanty (1) to engulfing (5).

### **Scanty – 1**

*Group loosely held together.  
Acceptance/support only from conductor*

### **Partial – 2**

*Cohesiveness & acceptance in subgroups mainly*

### **General – 3**

*We-feeling expressed in group generally  
Caring for deviants shown*

### **Intense – 4**

*Strong attachment & we-feelings  
Some overprotection of deviants*

### **Engulfing – 5**

*Overprotective uniformity  
Symbiotic, merger climate  
Deviants may be expelled*



## Relating Pattern

- Focuses on the **dominating interpersonal and group-wide modes of relating.**

Stations range from social (1) to ritualistic (5).

### **Table 2 Operational Definitions of the Modes of Relating**

**RELATING PATTERN**  
 Dominating interpersonal  
 modes of relating  
 Semi-qualitative

1. *Social*  
 Superficial and non-committal.
2. *Intellectual intercourse*  
 Contact searching channeled to intellectual interaction.
3. *Reflective playing*  
 Relating on fantasy and reality levels. Transferential on triangular level. (Tr 3)
4. *Resonance acting*  
 Obviously transferential interacting on dyadic levels. (Tr 2)
5. *Ritualistic*  
 Deep transferential acting on part-object and magic levels.

## Authority Pattern

- Analyzes the symbolic **distribution of power, autonomy and dependency** in the group.
- Qualitative measure

Ranges from anarchistic (1) to totalitarian (5).

### **Anarchistic – 1**

*NO Authority accepted*

*Aggressive counter phobic dependency*

### **Laissez-faire – 2**

*Vague, contradictory acceptance passively of unclear authority*

### **Egalitarian – 3**

*Manifest Striving for collectively shared responsibility & authority*

### **Authoritative – 4**

*‘Reasonable’ authority accepted – may alternate though*

*Hierarchic*

### **Totalitarian – 5**

*Constant omnipotent leader & enslaved followers*

*Dictatorial*



## Boundary Character

- Examines **interpersonal** and **groupal boundaries**.
- Semi-qualitative: amounts & qualities of groupal boundaries

Ranges from rigid/impermeable (1) to unbounded (5).

### **Rigid-impermeable – 1**

*Too many & too impermeable - - -Mainly low anxiety  
Possibly paranoid climate ----Closed*

### **Cautious – 2**

*Exaggerated number or impermeability. Climate probably  
obsessional, semi-closed*

### **Adequate – 3**

*Reasonable amount, selectively flexible & permeable.  
Constructive open system. Moderate anxiety*

### **Over-permissive – 4**

*Too few & too open. Identity diffusion & intrusive-exploitive  
atmosphere. Heightened anxiety*

### **Unbounded – 5**

*Seemingly no functioning. Frequent transgressions of identities.  
Blurring. Group seems to dissolve in other systems*



# The MRG

- **Observe and analyze** group interactions.
- Assess **therapeutic** and dynamic factors in groups.
- Represent group states **visually** for research and practical application.
- Conduct research into **unconscious group processes**

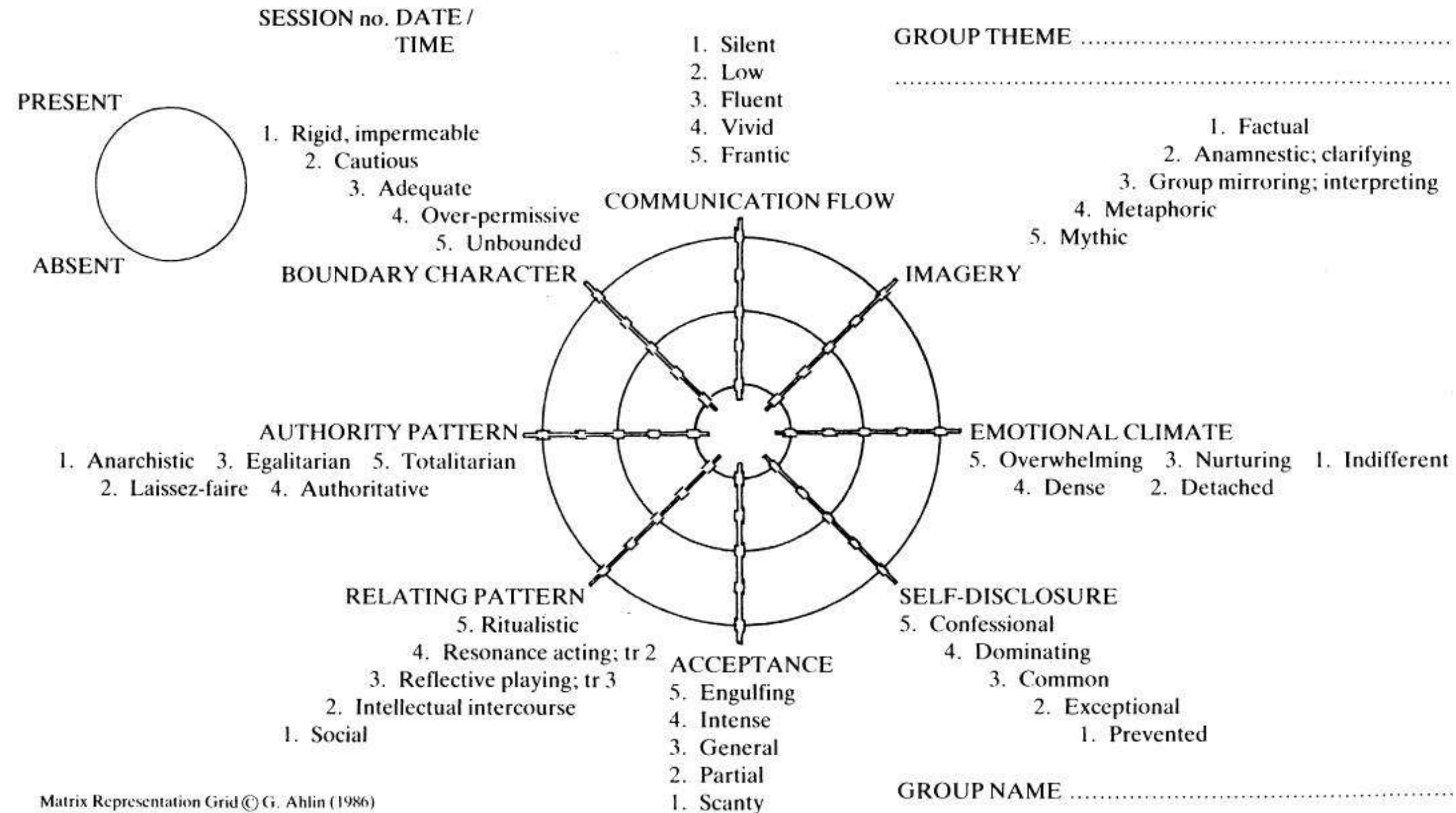


FIGURE 3 Matrix Representation Grid

Example of the MRG in Operation:

2 separate time frames/sessions, where in the group process the **same theme is activated again**

octagonal graphic figure represents the **actual Matrix-in-operation**

offers possibilities to evaluate the change that is taking place unconsciously

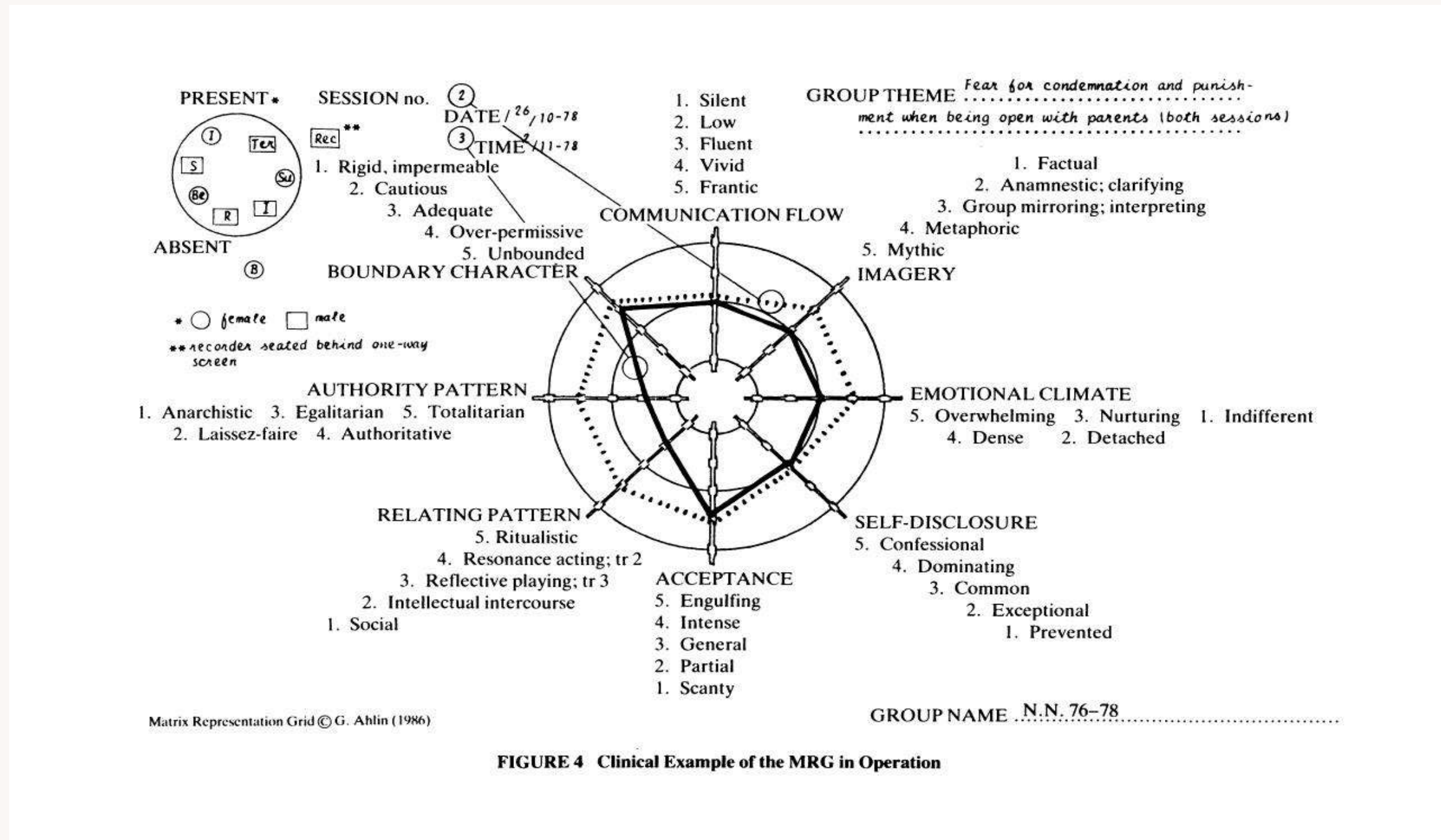


FIGURE 4 Clinical Example of the MRG in Operation

# Practical Application of the MRG

Steps to use the MRG:

1. Observe group interactions over a set period.
2. Identify the group theme.
3. Select relevant stations for each determinant.

Map the stations to create an octagonal representation.

## Evaluating Group Dynamics

- The octagonal figure represents the group's matrix-in-operation.

Changes in figures over time show group progress or regression.

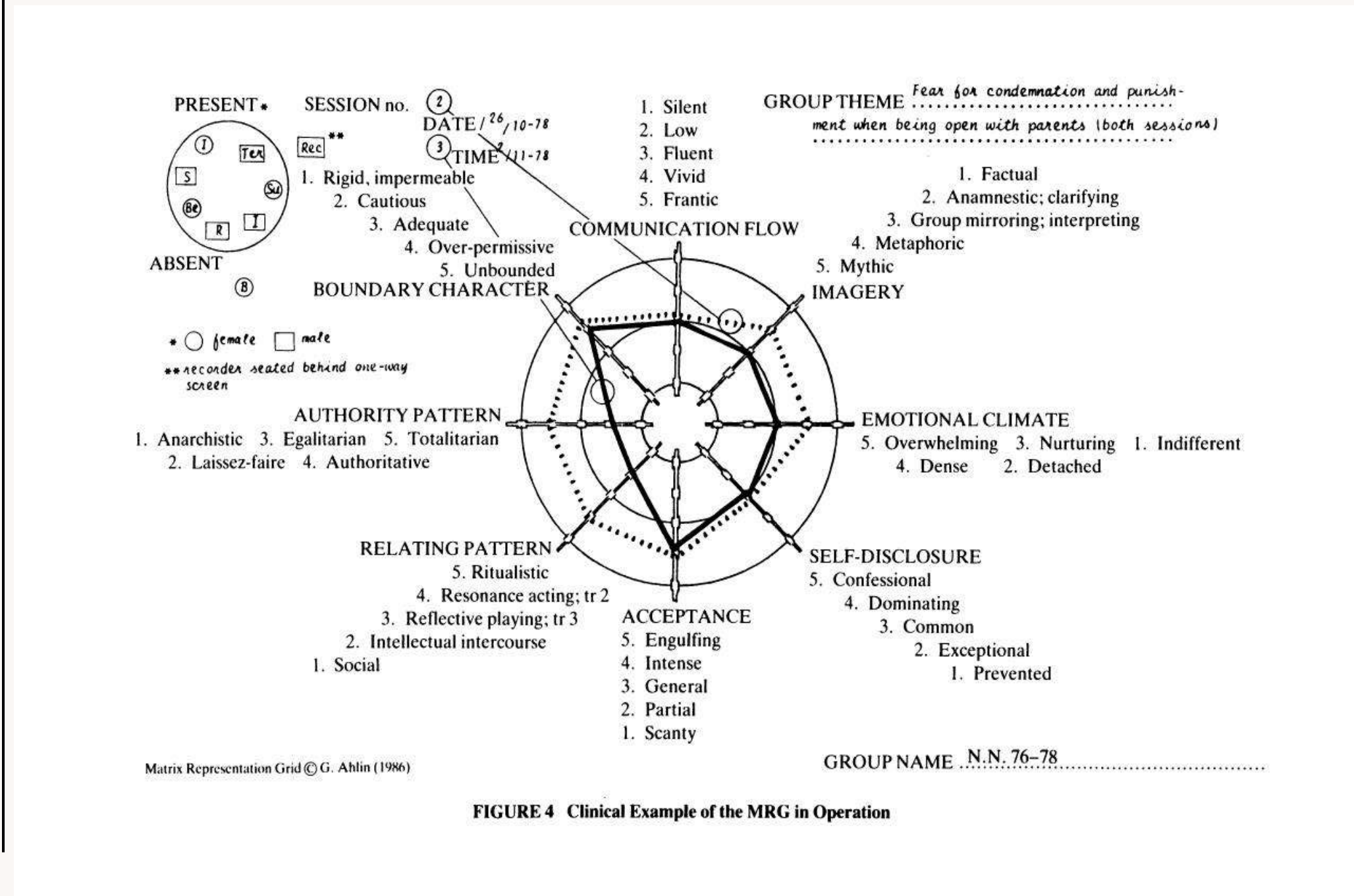
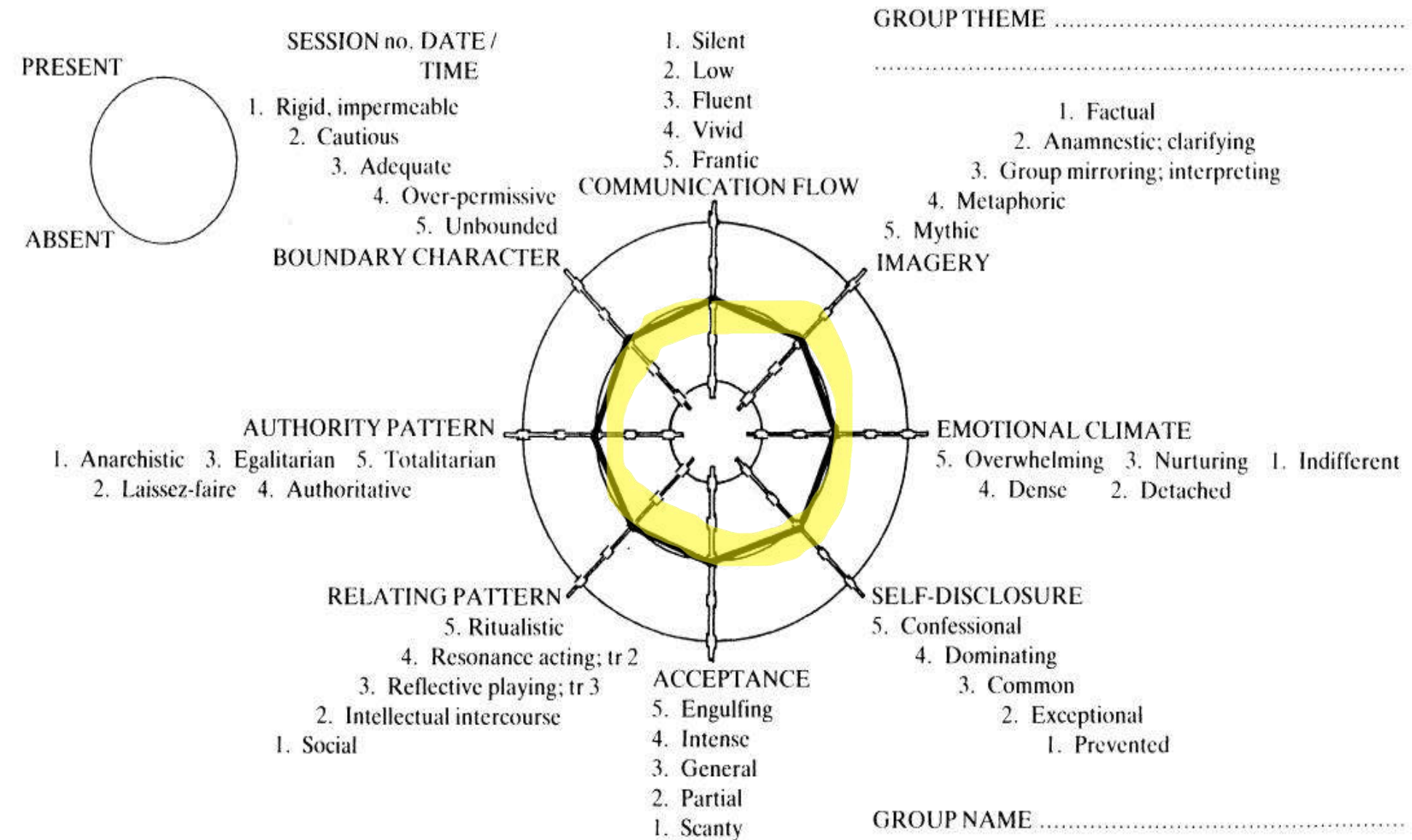


FIGURE 4 Clinical Example of the MRG in Operation

## The idealized 'Good' analytic group

When the group is operating like this, they produce a creative group climate, ripe with constructive gains of insight, working-through and change.



Matrix Representation Grid © G. Ablin (1986)

FIGURE 5 Idealized MRG Figure for 'Good' Groups

# A good enough group

More realistically though a good enough group - in a productive analytic group state of mind will be more like this- somewhere within the shaded area

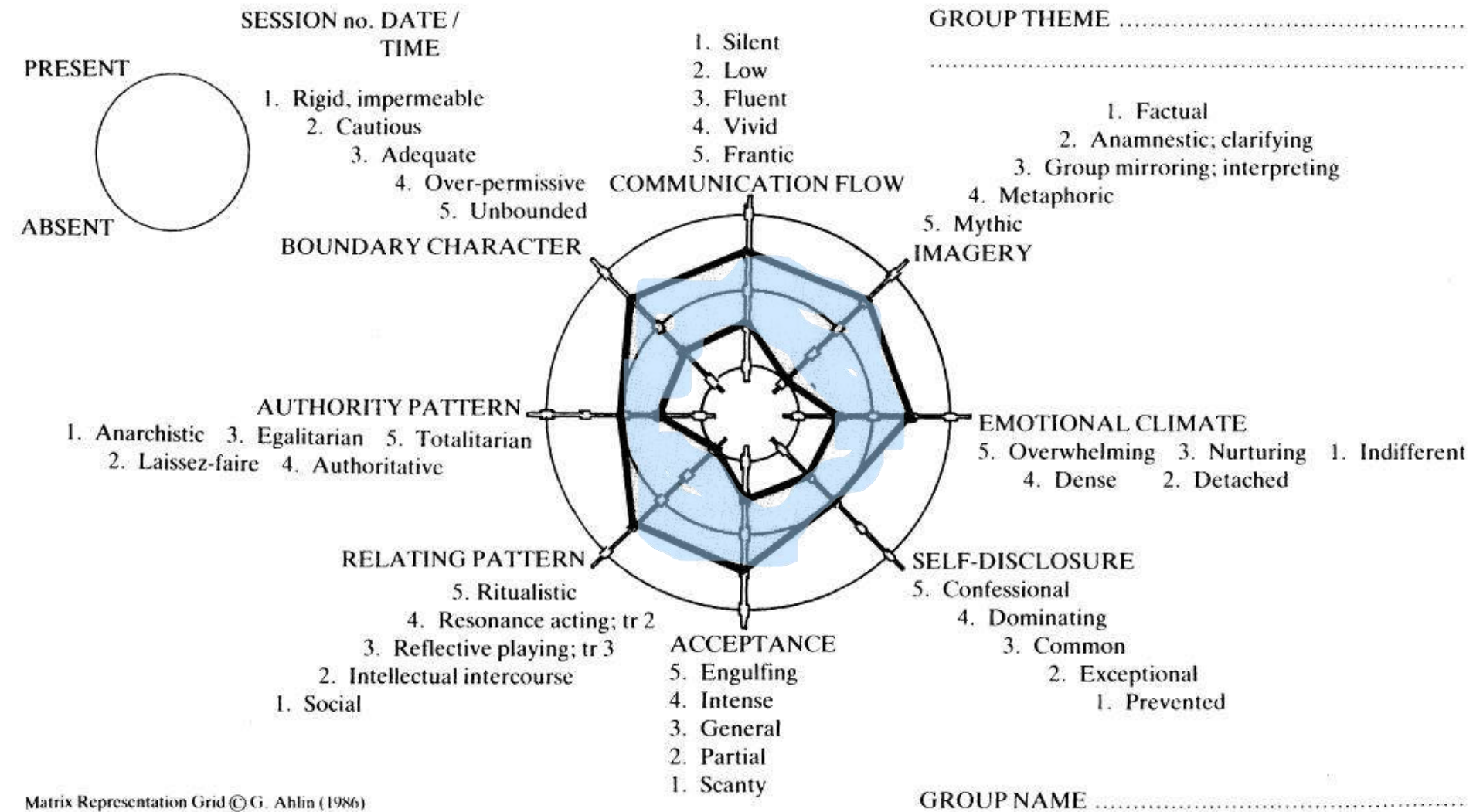


FIGURE 6 Area for MRG Figures for 'Good' Groups

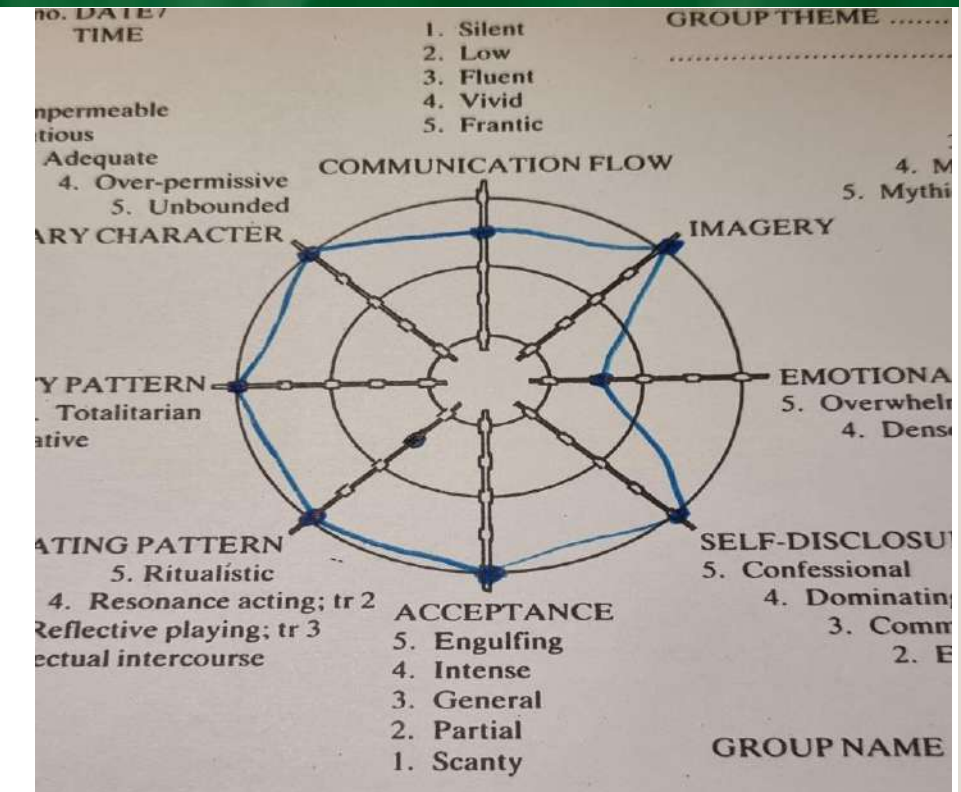


## Bion's Basic Assumption Concepts:

Wilfred Bion, a British psychoanalyst, identified three **basic assumption group states**, which describe unconscious dynamics that can take over a group, often **hindering** its ability to function effectively.

These states emerge when a group is **unable to engage in productive work** and instead falls into **primitive**, emotionally driven patterns:

1. **Dependency (baD)**
2. **Fight-Flight (baF)**
3. **Pairing (baP)**



### Dependency (baD)

The group **unconsciously believes that one leader** or authority figure (often the therapist) possesses all the knowledge and will take care of them.

- Members become **passive, helpless, and overly reliant** on the leader, expecting guidance and solutions.
- If the leader fails to meet these expectations, the group may become **disillusioned or hostile**.

Example: A therapy group looks to the facilitator for all answers and refuses to engage in self-reflection, believing only the therapist has the power to help them.

# Bion's Basic Assumption

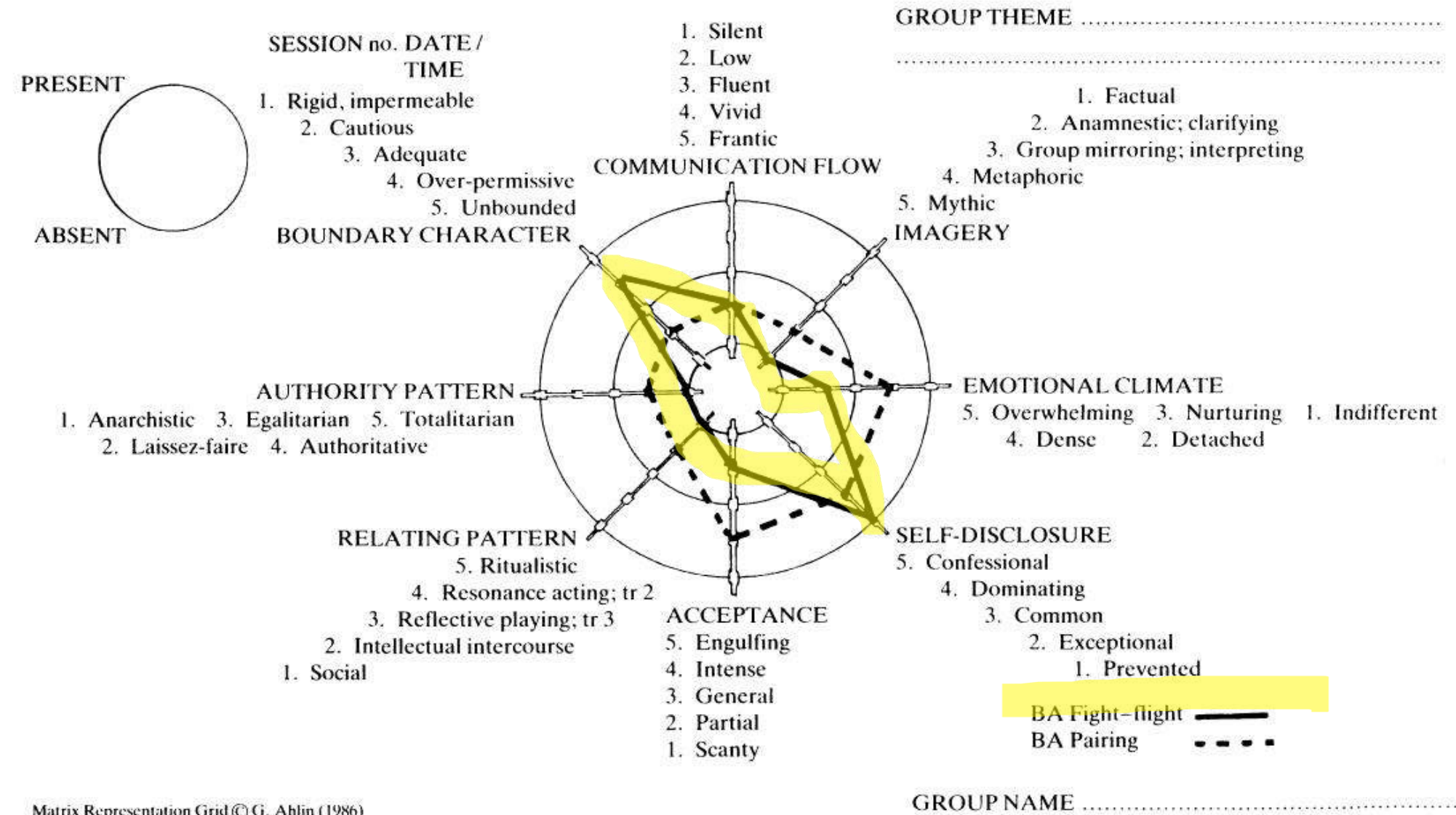
## State: 2. Fight-Flight (baF)

The group acts as if there is a **threat**, either external (an outsider) or internal (a group member or the therapist).

Members may become **aggressive (fight)** or **avoidant (flight)** rather than engaging in meaningful discussion.

- Conflict, scapegoating, or even disengagement from the group process are common.

*Example: A team in a workplace meeting avoids discussing an issue (flight) or attacks a single member for being the problem (fight), rather than addressing the real concern.*



## Bion's Basic Assumption State:

### 3. Pairing (baP)

- The group unconsciously believes that two members (or a subgroup) will "save" them by forming a special connection, alliance, or romantic/parental-like bond.
- The group becomes **passive, waiting for this "pair" to produce a solution** (symbolically seen as a "messiah" or "new idea").
- This can lead to exclusion of other members or unrealistic expectations.

*Example: In group therapy, two members dominate discussions with their mutual support, while the rest of the group disengages, expecting them to find answers for everyone.*

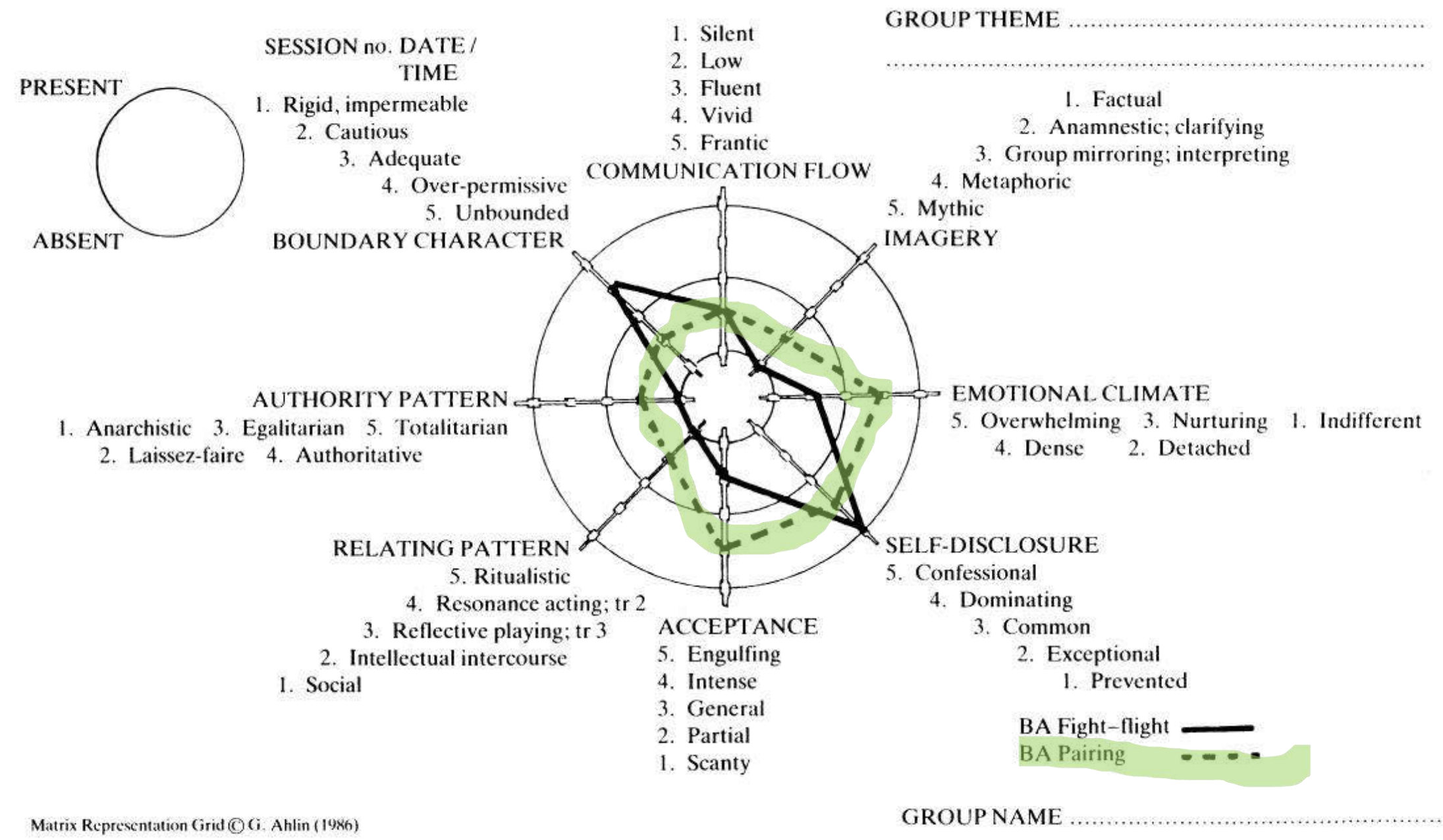


FIGURE 7 MRG Figures for Two Bion Basic Assumption States

# Clinical Applications

- Used to:
  - Analyze therapeutic group processes.
  - Monitor group development over time.

Support training and supervision of group therapists.

# Research Implications

- Complements existing tools like sociograms and chronograms.
- Offers insights into latent collective unconscious processes

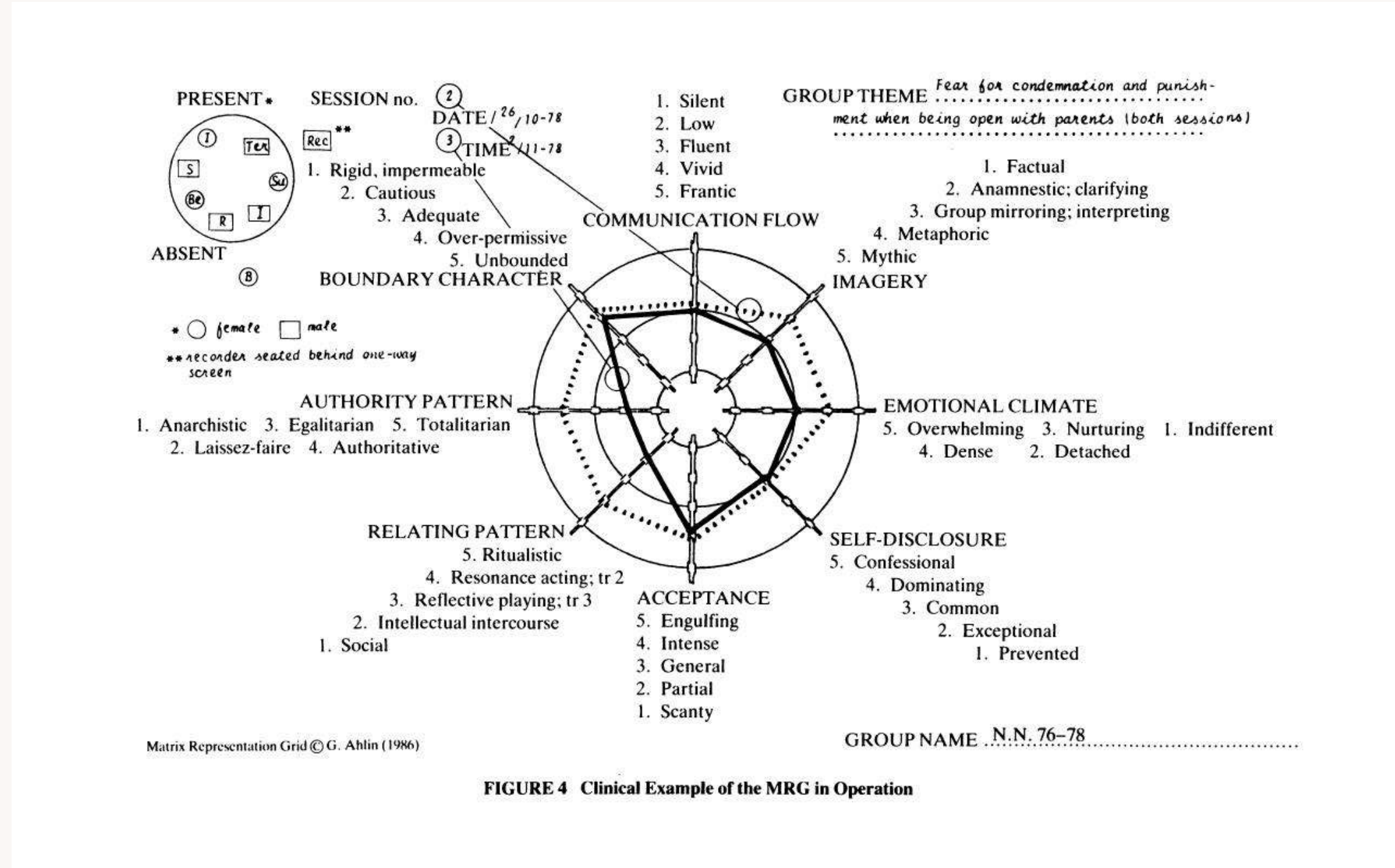


FIGURE 4 Clinical Example of the MRG in Operation

## Summary

- The MRG provides a **visual** and **structured** method to study group dynamics.
- Helps **identify therapeutic factors** and **group processes**.
- Encourages deeper understanding of the **unconscious group-as-a-whole process – the Group Matrix**
- It is a research tool focusing solely on the **group-as-a-whole level** of abstraction, measuring the group matrix



*Ever since psychotherapists began treating patients in groups, they have had to face the issue of understanding the dynamic forces that are set in motion, as well as the more challenging problem of how to use these forces to therapeutic advantage. The controversy in the field has not been whether group dynamics exist in therapy groups, but rather to what extent they can be exploited therapeutically*

Horwitz 1991, p.275

***“The MRG expresses the ever-fascinating & ever-complicated search for a better understanding of what is beyond the apparent surface of a ‘good’ ‘healthy’ and ‘growth-promoting’ group, as opposed to a ‘bad’ and ‘destructive’ one;***

***which in turn is a matter of primary importance not only to group-analysts and institutional staff in general, but to administrators, politicians, societal group-networks and nations as well...***

***And even- in our own time, just around the corner – literally to the survival of mankind” and planet earth itself.***

**G. Ahlin 1988, p 225**



# Thank You!

## Questions?

Contact Information:

Vera Auerbach

[vera@gymealily.org](mailto:vera@gymealily.org)

P: 02 9545 4772