

Tavistock Institute

This article is about the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations. For the organization which contains the Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships, see Tavistock Institute of Medical Psychology, and for the current National Health arm see Tavistock Clinic

The **Tavistock Institute of Human Relations** is a British charity concerned with group behaviour and organisational behaviour. It was launched in 1946, when it separated from the Tavistock Clinic.

1 History of the Tavistock

The Institute was founded in 1946 by a group of key figures at the Tavistock Clinic including Elliott Jaques, Henry Dicks, Leonard Browne, Ronald Hargreaves, John Rawlings Rees, Mary Luff and Wilfred Bion, with Tommy Wilson as chairman, funded by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Other well-known names that joined the group later were John D. Sutherland, John Bowlby, Eric Trist, and Fred Emery. Kurt Lewin, a member of the Frankfurt school in America, was an important influence on the work of the Tavistock, according to Eric Trist, who expresses his admiration for Lewin in his autobiography.

Perhaps the most influential figure to emerge from the Institute was the psychoanalyst Isabel Menzies Lyth. Her seminal (1959) paper 'A case study in the functioning of social systems as a defence against anxiety' inspired a whole of organisational theory focused on unconscious forces that shape organisational life.

Many of these founding members of the Tavistock Institute went on to play major roles in psychology. John Rawlings Rees became first president of the World Federation for Mental Health.^[1]

Jock Sutherland became director of the new post-war Tavistock Clinic, when it was incorporated into the newly established British National Health Service in 1946. Ronald Hargreaves became deputy director of the World Health Organization. Tommy Wilson became chairman of the Tavistock Institute.^{[1][2]}

2 Focal point for psychoanalytical theory

Many well-known psychologists and psychiatrists have passed through the Tavistock Institute over the years, and it became known as the focal point in Britain for psychoanalysis and the psychodynamic theories of Sigmund Freud and his followers. Other names associated with the Tavistock are Melanie Klein, Carl Gustav Jung, J. A. Hadfield, Beckett, Charles Rycroft, Wilfred Bion, and R. D. Laing.^{[3][4]}

3 Current activities

According to its website, the Institute engages in educational, research, and consultancy work in the social sciences and applied psychology. Its clients are chiefly public sector organizations, including the European Union, several British government departments, and some private clients. The Institute owns *Human Relations*, the international social sciences journal. It also edits the journal *Evaluation*.

It provides two MSc degree courses:

- Advanced Organisational Consultation,^[7] jointly with City University, London^[8]
- Leading Change and Organizational Development, jointly with the National School of Government and the University of Birmingham^[9]

4 Relation to other 'Tavistocks'

The Tavistock Institute shares common roots with other organisations that emerged from the Tavistock Clinic. This is a source of much confusion, though the facts can be ascertained from the historical account of the Tavistock by Eric Trist, one time chairman of the Institute.^[1]

The Clinic is now part of a National Health Service trust, while the "Tavistock Institute", which once did research in many areas and was funded by many sources, is now a charity.

The name "Tavistock Institute of Medical Psychology", which was the name used for the original parent body, is now used to refer to an organization that grew out of

that parent body but now specializes in couples relationships under the section name of the “Tavistock Centre for Couple Relationships”.

5 Notes

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[2] A history of the Institute can be found in *The Social Engagement of Social Science: A Tavistock Anthology* published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in three volumes between 1990 and 1997.

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[4] Laing came to the Tavistock Institute in 1956 at the invitation of Jock Sutherland, who was then director of the Tavistock Clinic, to train on a grant.^[5] His training, under Charles Rycroft, was at the Institute of Psychoanalysis.^[6] He left in 1965, and went on to develop his own ideas, particularly with regard to schizophrenia, which he suggested might be a natural and understandable curative process, rather than a disease of the mind. His views of schizophrenia, based largely on the concept of family nexus, were explained in a series of famous books such as *Sanity, Madness and the Family*. Laing is often associated with the Antipsychiatry movement.

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6 Further reading

- Tavistock Institute website
- The Foundation and Development of the Tavistock Institute to 1989 by Eric Trist and Hugh Murray.
- “The A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems”. 2008. Retrieved February 13, 2010.
- Young, Robert M. “The Culture of British Psychoanalysis”
- Trist, Eric L. et al. *The Social Engagement of Social Science: A Tavistock Anthology : The Socio-Ecological Perspective (Tavistock Anthology)*, University of Pennsylvania, May 1997. ISBN 0-8122-8194-2
- Eric Trist - Autobiography online

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7.1 Text

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