Scanning Skills for Working with Collective Client Systems
(Ragg, 2010, Garvin 2011-2012)

Scanning is an ongoing practitioner activity when they work with collective systems such as groups, organizations, teams and community collectives. When scanning the worker:
1. Remains interactively passive allowing the group to interact unencumbered.
2. Monitors interaction dynamics contrasting them to dimensions that indicate healthy versus unhealthy group development.
3. Identifies moments for intervention so the group development and dynamics can be influenced.

3 Critical Continua for Scanning

Continuum of Self-Centered Versus Group-Focused Goals
The first continuum focuses on the focus of group energy. If energy is focused on promoting the group purpose there is very little for intervention. However, when energy is focused on the selfish member pursuits practitioners need to block the development of unhealthy dynamics. When scanning watch for the following themes.
1. **Group Maintenance versus Fragmentation**
   Practitioners monitor for themes that indicate that the group itself is developing healthy dynamics that will maintain the group over time. The following elements can indicate strong development or areas for intervention.
   - **Affiliation** – in some groups members share elements of their lives and situations forging relationships with others. In other groups members share very little and do not seem to care about each other at all.
   - **Support** – in some groups members enhance each other by helping each other overcome weaknesses. In other groups members allow or actively encourage others to fail. Failures are used for comparison and self-promotion purposes.
   - **Reflexivity** – in some groups members are able to address how they work together. Suggestions for group improvement can be entertained without being experienced as a threat. In other groups feedback is experienced as threatening or as personal attacks rather than as impartial suggestions.
2. **Group Task Accomplishment versus Stagnation**
   - **Mindfulness** – in some groups members are logical and measured in their response. They explore the situation and plan a response. In other groups members are emotionally reactive resulting in deflection and obstruction.
   - **Encouragement** – in some groups members are encouraged to contribute while in others member contributions results in negative consequences (e.g., unrealistic expectations, more work, undermining ideas, dissuasion)
   - **Collaboration** – in some groups member work together each contributing with a clear sense of desired outcomes. In other groups there is a competitive feeling with each person promoting their own vision rather than building onto other people's contributions.

Continuum of Empowerment Versus Domination
The second continuum monitors how the decision making and authority is distributed in the group. Mutual aid occurs when group members have significant input into the direction and activities of the group. Without such group investment, individual people such as the group leader of the group leader and elite members control the group activities. When monitoring this continuum practitioners attend to the following dynamics.
1. **Transparency versus Illusionary Involvement**
   - **Openness** – in some groups the information needed to make decisions is shared with little editing or packaging. This allows all members to ask questions and respond to the situation. In other groups information is carefully packaged and some elements omitted

so group members can be better managed and the powerful elite members can control the outcomes.
- **Problem Solving** – when issues emerge some groups assess situations and generate options through the discussion and group deliberation. Even if the options are only suggestions, they are respected and considered. In other groups leaders and elite members have already discussed the situation and have a plan developed. During discussion they try to guide the group into endorsing their plan.

2. **Inclusion versus Exclusion**
- **Democratic processes** – in some groups all members are included in framing and making decisions that concern the group. Problems and the need for decisions are shared openly and input is solicited. In other groups individuals or subgroups assume more power over the group direction.

The Continuum of Positive versus Negative Responding

The final continuum is on how members of the collective system respond to suggestions. For a group to operate well member contributions must be valued and affirmed. This promotes ongoing engagement and continued contributions. If contributions are not valued members will start to withhold suggestions. The following dynamics help identify how this continuum is developing in the group.

1. **Strength-Finding vs. Pathologizing**
- **Resource Identification** – in some groups members respond to each others' areas of competence and strength identifying areas where each member can best contribute to the group goal. Members pick up and stress these areas of potential contribution. In other groups people argue that the situational requirements exceed the capacity of the group to respond promoting helplessness.
- **Shared Efficacy** – in some groups members maintain a faith in the collective to master situations. Members promote a shared efficacy in the group's ability to respond. In other groups people pick up on mistakes or weaknesses. When discussions evolve they focus on areas of weakness and express concerns rather than confidence in the group's capacity.

2. **Affirmation vs. Discounting**
- **Incorporation** – in some groups members pick up on each others suggestions and contributions. Members may improve or build on contributions by enthusiastically embracing them then sharing associated thinking or ideas. In other groups contributions are ignored or even worse attacked. Members respond with reasons why contributions are inadequate for the situation.
- Acknowledgement – in some groups people make sure that contributions are acknowledged. Even if the members elect not to build onto the contribution it is treated as a valid suggestion. In other groups members immediately negate each others' contributions. Members openly imply that contributions are in error or inadequate by dismissing them and moving directly (without further discussion) into offering and alternative suggestion.