

Pravaah - a journey towards expansiveness

Category 1 - ***My Tryst with Process Work***

The Self in a Process Group Work Setting

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Preamble

What is Process Work?¹

Process Work is an interdisciplinary and interactive method of working with self and others in the relationship challenges of daily living. It offers attitudes and skills to facilitate transformation and growth and facilitates both individual and collective change processes. With embodied learning and increasing awareness at its heart, Process work is underpinned by the multi-dimensional framework and philosophy of deep democracy, which has embracing diversity at its core, and provides helpful tools and frameworks for facilitating teams, organisations and communities. Process Work is awareness based – a transformation and growth facilitation method, which can be adapted and implemented in a wide range of ways; from leadership training to the facilitation of diversity and conflict in relationship, groups, organizations and public events. It also supports individuals and families experiencing challenges, illness and loss. Process Work is applied on both individual and collective levels, and perceives the two as interrelated.

- Get to know yourself better
- Establish more conscious relationships with others
- Encourage better communication amongst groups
- Cultivate a culture based on diversity and inclusion
- Develop your own skills and acquire the necessary knowledge to work with organizations, groups, couples and individuals.

My trust with process work stems from my association with and membership of the Indian Society for Applied Behavioural Science (ISABS), a pioneer institute for applied behavioural sciences in India. ISABS uses the Laboratory Training Methodology also called T-Group, a Behavioural Modification Model of process work that aims at bringing changes in

¹ Adapted from the definition of 'Process Work' by Process Work Institute

<https://www.processwork.edu › what-is-processwork>

behaviour among learners. T-Group and process analysis was accidentally hit upon in 1947 in Bethel, Maine, when a group of Social psychologists including Kurt Lewin, were concerned with the rapid personal and social changes taking place in modern society. T-Group is an educational strategy based primarily on the experiences generated in the various social encounters by the learners themselves and which aims to affect attitudes and develops competencies toward learning about human interaction. It rests on the assumption that the skills of participating in social groups and organizations can be learned through the process of participation.

In this paper, I will share my experience of being in a process work group setting both as a participant, observer, facilitator and co-facilitator for over a decade and half. The entire experience is based on work with several groups of people drawn from different walks of life in India and abroad – corporate, education, social and religious institutions that has directly touched the lives of more than 3,000 people.

I - Introduction

At all moments in our daily lives, we live in relationship with ourselves (intra-personal), with others (inter-personal) and with the group that we belong to (group relationships). In this relationships, the way we talk and behave impact others and the way others talk and behave impacts us. Getting to know such behaviours and attitudes that support/derail our relationship efforts is vital for our effectiveness and T-Group is one double-loop learning system that offers opportunity for giving and receiving authentic feedback based on the 'here and now' experience of the individual.

Group work is always viewed as process work – a set of activities that when completed, together accomplish the goal of the group. However, group processes are of two types – the structured and the unstructured. In the structured process, the start and the end states and activities are clearly defined while the unstructured process has a start, but the activities and tasks are not defined and the end state is not predictable.

Process work in ISABS follow the unstructured approach where, Time, Task and Territory rule the roost and “Here and Now”, the existing reality of the group.

The approach calls for

- **Collaborative:** Each item of the issues that emerge in the group requires the collaboration of other group members by way of information gathering, experience sharing and/or listening.
- **Content-Intensive:** Decisions are based on lots of information from people of diverse experiences, walks of life, places and values as the people in the lab represent all these.
- **Analysis-driven:** There is no single answer or end-result in this process as conclusions on each step is driven by the shared experiences of the group members.
- **Dynamic:** There is no single way to complete this process. Each next step depends on the previous one, and could be completely different every time you run the process.

The unique and intriguing feature of this methodology is the coming together of the microcosm of society/organisation unknown to each other with a seemingly passive facilitator but experience unprecedented bonding at the end of the programme.

Assumptions, objectives and concepts/philosophy

The assumptions of this approach is succinctly presented by Rolf Lynton a co-founder of ISABS who set up the Aloka institution in Mysore 1957, "No new knowledge can assist the young pioneers until they could become more flexible instruments of change. At Aloka, the leader puts himself for the first time in an exposed position. Under pressure from his colleagues, he is forced either to become more sensitive to their needs or to resign. The objective is understanding and addressing personal needs to putting them together for the achievement of purpose.² The Johari Window which talks about open, closed, secret and unknown windows of individual behaviour and communication provides the ideal concept/philosophy to this approach.³

II - The Need Hierarchy in a process work group

The dynamics in small group setting is interesting. At the beginning of the meeting, people ask⁴

- What do we do and what are our goals?
- Who am I to be in this unconventional situation and what role do I play
- How can I keep sufficient control over the group to prevent it from doing things, which will make me uncomfortable?

The desire to change is in everybody but the desire to remain the same is higher, unless

- discomfoting data presents itself to cause serious discomfort and disequilibria,
- the connection of the discomfoting data to important goals, self-perception and ideals cause anxiety and/or guilt, and,

² Lynton, R.P. The Tide of Learning the Aloka Experience, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960.

³ The Johari window is a technique that helps people better understand their relationship with themselves and others.

⁴ Reactions on the first day of a laboratory training setting

- there is psychological safety, in the sense of seeing possibilities without loss of identity and integrity

As the group progresses, and while the need to explore behaviour is accepted, 'push-backs' set in to diminish the needs, curiosity begins to dissolve, intrinsic motivation is dented, cognitive flexibility decreases, emotionality suffers and self-esteem is affected. This learned helplessness is responsible for conformance, socially acceptable interaction and avoidance of threat. This time one can observe participants needing control; people leaning forward to control; safety and approval needs increase. There is the struggle to express discontent, disagreement and lack of understanding all of which suggest how unsure people are about themselves. In so being, people do not give credence to their intuitive ability and creativity (personal agency takes a backseat). The surrender of self-authority is abdication to the influencer's role, and results in inability to take charge of oneself, owning up and standing for what one believes. Even in relatedness, it prevents connecting to the heart as cognitive structure determines one's behaviours.

Some people who attempt to fill the power/leadership vacuum are perceived as dominating or playing the facilitator's role. Some people communicate power through silence, some through confrontation and some through emotional expression of high need for inclusion. Issues of authority, relationship, affectionate need, loneliness, belongingness, competition emerge from time to time as touch-and-go issues while issues that build and destroy interpersonal relationship start to emerge on their own.

As the group continues to meet, familiarity increases, comfort levels establish, relationships emerge and members' interaction move from one of cynicism to belief, from lack of trust to trust, from fear to courage, from isolation to belongingness. These offer the opportunity to express feelings that were earlier difficult to express, explore areas of pain and discomfort without encumbrances. The self in the group is the same everywhere; the degree of association makes the difference.

The lack of structure and limited involvement of the trainer provides space for the participants to decide what they want to talk about. This results in certain characteristic responses; participants are silent or aggressive or struggle to start discussions or attempt to structure the group's proceedings. By not filling the group's time with answers to these needs, the group eventually begins to notice what is under the tip of the iceberg. Participants experience anxiety about authority and power, inclusion and exclusion, intimacy and loneliness, but these are not stated.

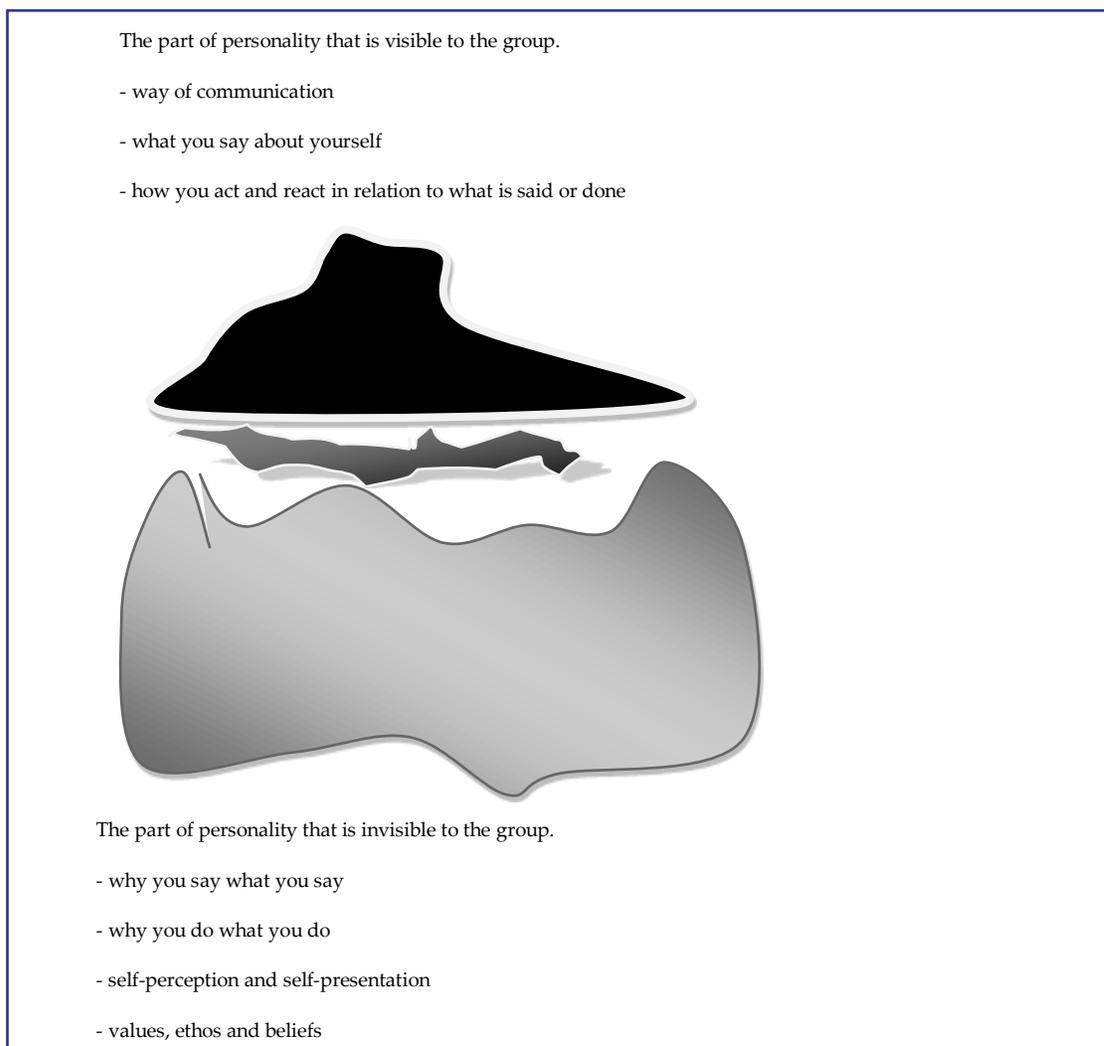


Figure 1: Iceberg Model of an individual in the lab

However, for personal growth, a deeper dive is needed and individuals need both awareness and development of values and beliefs. This opportunity is met through the laboratory method where, participants interact with each other even on matters that has no relevance in the group.

It is through these interactions and with the help of the concept of the Johari Window⁵ that people give feedback to each other. Joint exploration for uncovering the unknown is activated. This process opens the opportunity for more self-disclosure, more openness to feedback and increased perceptiveness⁶

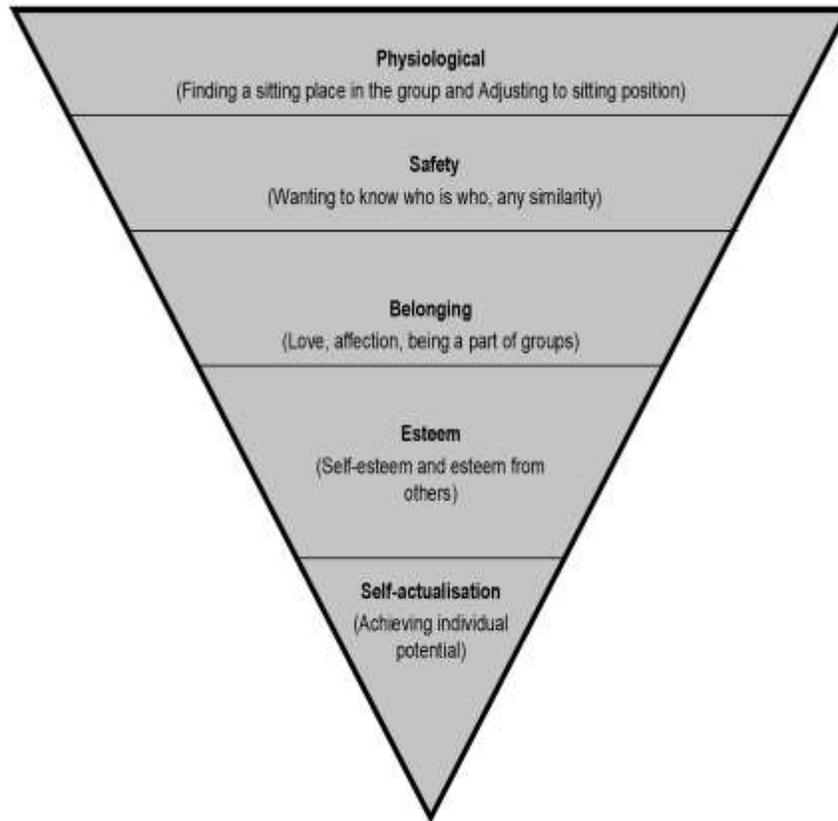
Looking at what happens in the lab and how it happens, the imagery I get is the reverse of the sketch of Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

- The participant is seated in the group and adjusting his position from time to time to gain familiarity with the environment and get used to the unconventional sitting arrangement (Physiological).
- The need for safety in the group, wanting to know who is who both in person and position, attempting to identify common grounds that can bring them together or give reassurance of support including discussions on place of work and position, work experience....
- The need for identity and belongingness – love, affection and being part of the group. This is required if one has to feel safe and do what one wants to do and say what one wants to say.
- The need for self-esteem. The need to be recognised by the group as having the potential to understand, provide clarity, leadership....
- The ultimate aim is Self-actualisation which is the behaviour that drives everything in the group but not apparent as it is protected because of its vulnerability or the inability of the participant to handle if this is revealed to others.

⁵ The **Johari Window** is the psychological model developed by Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingham, that talks about the relationship and mutual understanding between the group members.

<https://businessjargons.com/johari-window.html>

⁶ Training Instruments for HR and OD, IIInd Edn., Tata McGraw-Hill Publishing Company Limited, 2002, Udai Pareek, pp.98



Adapted from Figure 2: Zeb and Manoj's Model of Need Hierarchy in

T-Groups⁷

Note that in Maslow's case, the drive towards self-actualisation is clear, but in this case, the participant hides it until he/she feels comfortable, trusted by the group, sometimes competing with other participants and sometimes with the facilitator... When the group meets for the first time, especially 'strangers'⁸ group, people don't know each other, physical location is the primary drive. Impressions or perceptions play important role at this stage to determine where a person would locate him/herself, for example, women mostly sit near each other – psychological safety.

⁷ Facilitating Self-Awareness, Zeb and Manoj; Serenewood, New Delhi

⁸ Stranger group is defined as people from different organisations or walks of life, meeting for the first time

In the case of 'cousin'⁹ labs people are known to each other or to some others in the group. The initial drive is to sit close to known people.

This methodology actually challenges participants to become aware of what happens to them when there is no one to direct or instruct them. The emptiness experienced in such situation reveals how dependent we are on others for direction and our complacency in our comfort zones as we abhor anything that challenges us to step out from this zone. People experience how their behaviour impacts others and how other's behaviours impact them, in short the system brings people together in small groups for the purpose of studying their own and others' behaviour.

The work of the group is process rather than content oriented and focus is on the communication of feeling rather than information, opinions or concepts. Feedback is on behaviour rather than on the individual and focuses more on the impact of the behaviour rather than questioning the 'why' of the behaviour. This is a place where one learns how to separate the "behaviour" from the individual and individual can well condemn his/her own behaviour when he becomes aware of the impact on him/her or others.

Working with different groups of people including students, teachers, corporate executives, social sector employees, homemakers, over these years, I have captured the diagram below as an indication of the behavioural cycle in a process lab.

⁹ Cousin group is defined as people from the same organisation or walks of life, meeting each other more than the first time.

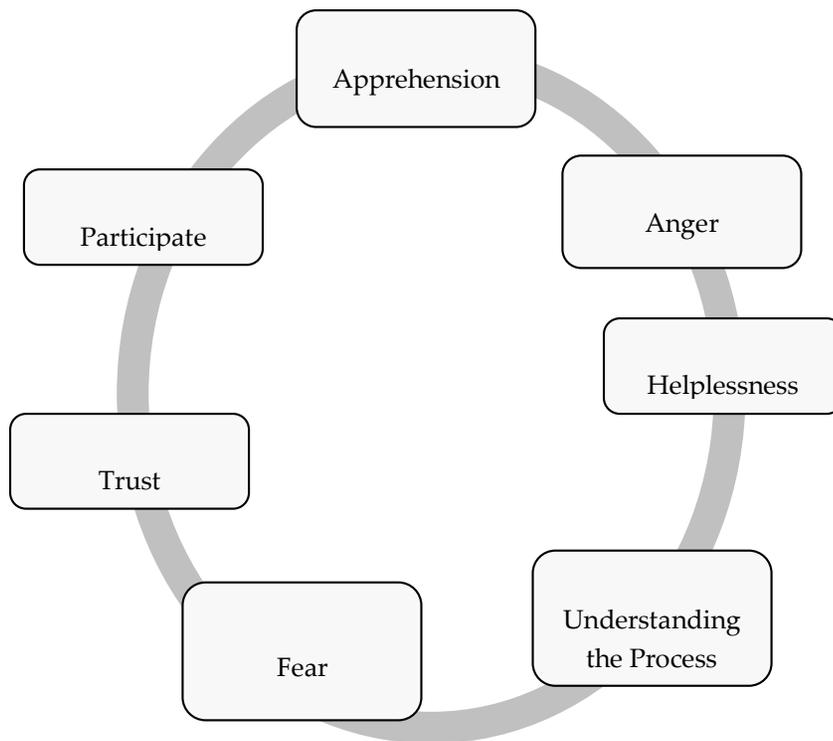


Figure 3: Zeb and Manoj's Model of Behavioural Cycle in a Process Lab

In the first stage of the cycle the individual is quite

i. Apprehensive especially when the facilitator pleads inability to know what would happen and having nothing to offer.

ii. Angry - feeling of being non-productive as people just sit and stare at each other.

iii. A sense of Helplessness – knowing that the process can be useful but not knowing how to go about it. Learned behaviour has become a bottleneck to navigate the confusion.

iv. The transition to Understanding the process. The unlearning and learning to learn in the process begins to emerge. The process and how it can be utilized to drive individual and group learning becomes clearer.

v. Dealing with Fear of sharing feelings that could cause unintended impression from others.

The struggle is to decide what to share and how personal he/she can become.

vi. Facilitator's subtle participation encourage role models in sharing feelings, Trust starts to build and others take turns in sharing their emotions.

vii. Group members become comfortable with each other as Trust drives the behaviour, Participation increases. However, some participants may still be sitting on the fence and testing waters. The group then will try to get them involved.

The group is now in a hurry to experiment in the consciousness that if they miss this chance there is a possibility that they will not be able to do it again. Depending on forces, such as, the dynamics of the group, the past experience and competence of participants, and the skill of the trainers -- the group, to some extent, usually develops a sense of itself as a group, with feelings of group loyalty. This can cause groups to resist learning opportunities if they are seen as threatening to the group's self-image. It also provides some of the climate of trust, support and permission needed for individuals to try new behaviour.

As an individual participant begins to experience some degree of trust (in him/her, the group and the trainers) several things become possible - The participant may notice that his/her

- feelings and judgments about the behaviour of others are not always shared by others.
- interpretation of supportive or threatening was not experienced in that way by others.
- response to authority, acceptance and issues of affection is different from that of others.
- individual differences emerge in how experiences are understood.
- scope to try new behaviour or another way of doing the same thing.
- Openness to and asking for feedback has increased
- independence and personal power

One way of describing what may happen for a participant is -

- Unfreezing habitual responses to situations - this is facilitated by the participant's own desire to explore new ways of behaving and the trainer staying non-directive, silent, and providing little structure or task agenda
- Self-generated and chosen change by the participant. Experiment with new behaviours - Practice description not evaluation
- Reinforce new behaviour by positive feedback, participants' own assessment of whether what is happening is closer to what she/he intends, supportive environment, trust development

Kurt Levin's Theory of Unfreeze- Move – Freeze

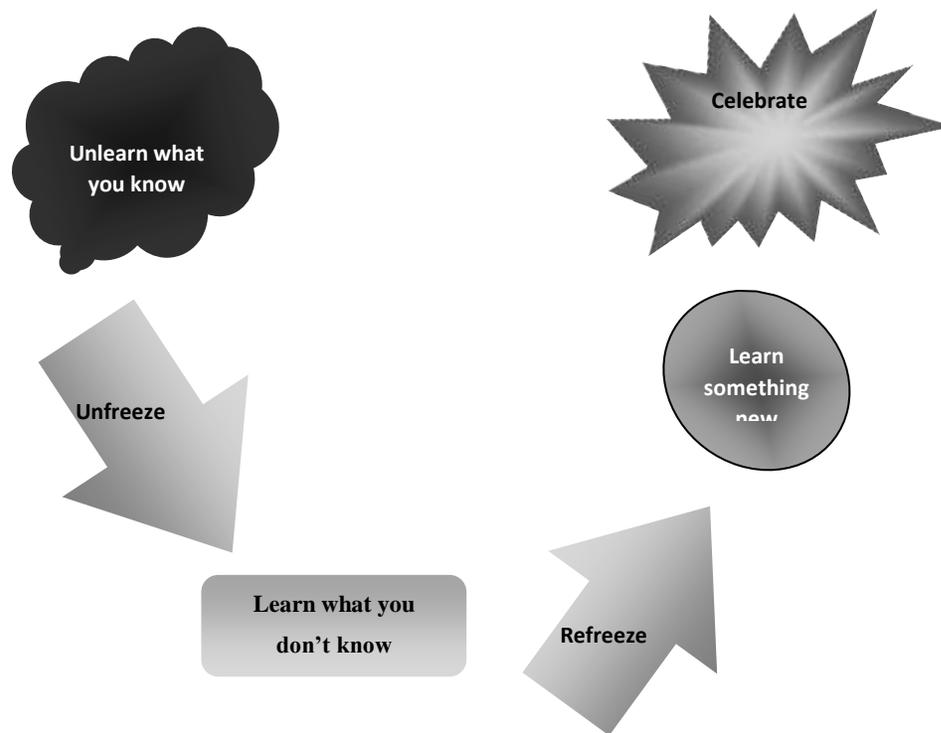


Figure 4: Kurt Levin's Theory of Unfreeze-Move-Freeze

The process requires that the individual suspends all assumptions, interpretations and judgments. This is the requirement that makes it difficult in the beginning because of the learned behaviour that each one brings into the group. The pressure of not knowing what to do or say,

causes the individual to accept whatever comes up as a relief intervention. In the process, new ideas start to emerge, new and reinforced awareness percolate and the individual is learning something now. The new learning is not a replacement of existing knowledge or skill but bringing to the awareness of the individual that alternatives are available from which the individual can make choices.

Case I. Personal Experience

I was recommended by a member of NTL, USA to attend a process lab in ISABS. I had gone with the sole intention to pick tools to brush my training styles to enhance my training effectiveness. I was shocked to notice that I stood out as the only person of African origin in a group of almost 200 people. This shock did not last long as I had good perception of myself and my ability to outclass people irrespective of what they think about themselves. When we went into the small group and the facilitators had nothing to offer, I became **apprehensive** of the situation and wondered if I would meet my need. Remembering how much I have spent from my pocket for this course and nothing was happening **angered** me so much that by lunch I lodged a complaint to my wife and told her that I would come back the same evening. She did advise me to stay on as no knowledge would be a waste. However, I was still clueless as to what it is all about and how to go about it. This **helplessness** was confounded by the fact that I was just a group member inside the lab and not outside. I could not understand the process nor did I have the guts to ask questions or challenge the facilitators.

After six months when I was invited for the advanced lab, I refused to attend but could not resist the December invitation of that year when my wife shared her new experience of me after attending the first lab. I went to the advanced lab with little bit of hope in **understanding the process** but still **feared** making mistakes and asking questions. I wanted to be accepted by the group and the people, hence, I held myself from those things that I know might push people away from me. I thought I was compromising but later learnt that I was actually understanding the process – impact of behaviour and feedback. It was through these experiences that I started

trusting this whole process and today, I am not only a **student** but a **practitioner** and **advocate** of the process and the system.

III - The model of Facilitation styles in process work lab settings

Facilitation is both a skill and an art. It is a skill because one can learn techniques and improve with practice. It is an art because some people just have more of a knack for it than others.

Each facilitator leads a group in a unique way because of the mix of their values and norms, psychological make-up, degree of skill and development, plus the objectives and composition of the group, together with the cultural context. Facilitating a group of people from diverse community with different objectives and who do not know each other is not an easy task. People differ in their opinions and issues raised by one might not be clear to others. It takes the skill of the facilitator to enable them build a common ground that will tolerate different opinions. The safe haven for the facilitator is the knowledge that process lab is not a solution-centred approach but a helping relationship that can assist people to make their own decisions. It takes a certain amount of intestinal fortitude and authenticity to meet the demands of this role.

There are multiple modules for process facilitation but the one that I found most effective and the first step in this profess is facilitator self-awareness module. To build a more functional team, a facilitator needs to practice conscious and mindful actions at all times and this is only possible if the facilitator is equipped with her/his own self-awareness. This is important since the facilitation is done in the presence of dynamic, sometimes dysfunctional groups. The basic requirement for effective facilitation is being conscious of content, context, process and human psychology that operates at every moment in the group.

Facilitating happens in real time and in front of other people. Therefore, facing challenges brought in by this role is transformative for the practitioner as well as for the group itself.

Facilitation style is determined by the facilitator as a person – the unique and distinctive process of creative and selective imagination and his/her way of being. Facilitation style reflects what the facilitator deeply values about human development and personal principles that follow personal

values such as respect and authenticity. In my practice of facilitating labs, I am able to distinguish two different styles that I use and has seen many of my co-facilitators use the same style.

Authentic Self (Embedded Style) Facilitation

In this style, I have seen myself and others committed, highly energetic, humorous, talkative, peaceful as well as thoughtful. For me these are the traits of authentic style facilitation as these things don't change from one lab to the other or from one group to the other. They are what I have cultivated over a lifetime as what some people call personality, personal qualities or others call embedded patterns of behaviour. There are some of these general qualities of my authentic self that are modifiable when a group needs something different and I do this with a bit of intentionality. I have heard people describe my style as calm, well grounded, unobtrusive, depth and welcoming. Generally, these qualities serve most groups well but there are times when calmness does not work with the group. There are moments that I need to empathise, confront, challenge and even rescue. In other words, this style is not fixed but focussed on what the group wants.

Intentional (Cultivated) Style Facilitation

There are several other important qualities that needs be cultivated beyond the embedded style. In other words, while the embedded qualities are inborn or have become part of habit, intentional styles need be cultivated and practiced over time. I have learnt that such qualities include

Pace and energy

As a facilitator, though there's no prescribed rule of engagement in group, it is important to understand and keep the pace and energy of the group in mind right from the beginning. This awareness will enable you choose when to intervene to speed up the pace of the group (if required) and when to interven to bring more energy to the group.

Tone of Voice/Facial Gestures

The tone of voice and facial expression are strong tools for intentional intervention. You can use these to mesmerise group members even in their resistance to participate or constant urge to dominate. But these cannot be faked.

Content Neutrality

Content neutrality enables you to focus on the here-and-now happenings in the group especially the behaviours displayed in discussing whatever the issue is. Many times, what is happening or spoken in the group is well known to the facilitator but content neutrality enables focus and unbiased intervention.

Transparency and Honesty

Modelling is a strong intervention by itself. Sharing feelings and locations by the facilitator has helped groups to come forward to work on their individual and collective issues. Transparency and honest is the key that will make one acceptable as well as imitated by the group.

Possible Problems

Some of the possible challenges of the T-Group methodology includes -

- The mismatch between organisational reality and the group reality in the 'here and now' make people anxious as to the back-home applicability of the learning in this space.
- Working in a group with strangers does not threaten anyone but working with colleagues does.
- Self-disclosure may recall past events and the associated feelings to the effect that the participant loses control.
- The system may open a chain of questions in the mind of the participants in relation to behaviours that have been accepted and practiced over time. Is there need for change? Is it possible to change? What will people say? What will be the gain or loss? All these and other questions bring more confusion to the participant than when he/she started.

- Openness among strangers may be easy but openness to known people may be difficult
- Lots of hold-backs may take place.
- Unwillingness on the side of the participant may be another difficulty especially when the participant is nominated. Sometimes there is apprehension that reports are sent directly to the organisation.

IV. The dynamic interplay of Being with Environmental Relationships

Root Cause Analysis

As behaviour patterns have deep rooted causes, the individual may not be aware of the how and why of such behaviour. The diagram given below identifies some of the elements in self that can have an interplay with environmental relationships to affect behaviour. Observing several tendencies in the way people protect themselves or argue for their point of view or even defend/protect themselves, I became curious to look into some of the root causes of certain repeated behaviour observed in labs. The facilitator can work along with the individual and the group to explore these reasons based on the symptoms observed in the group.

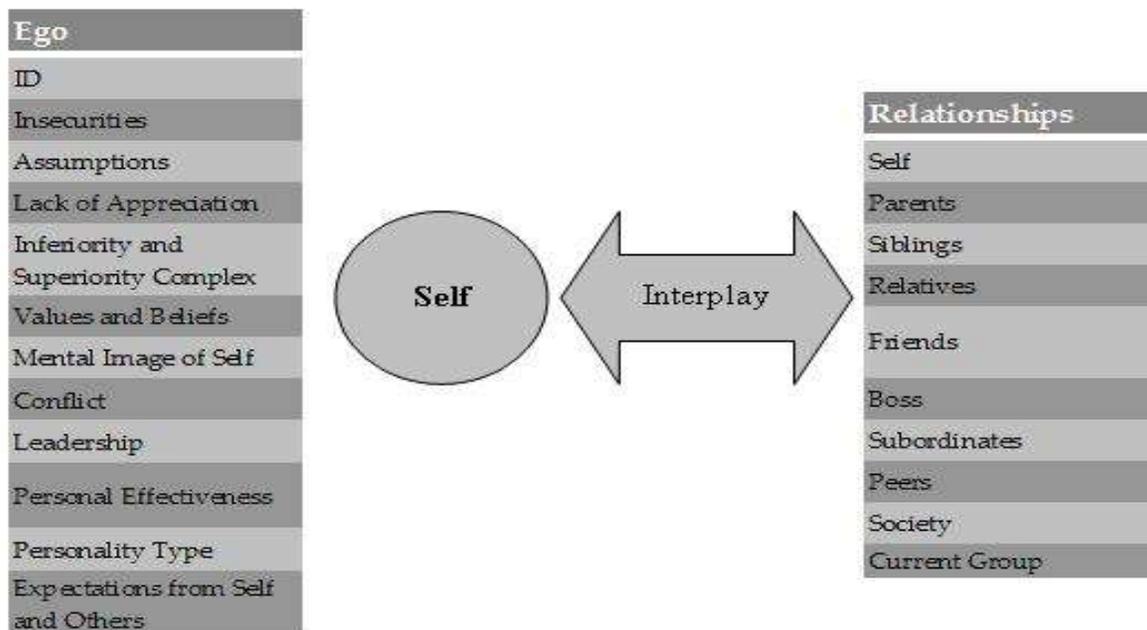


Figure 5: Zeb and Manoj's Model of Dynamic Interplay of Being with Environmental Relationships

Although it is difficult to predict the root cause for a particular behaviour however the diagram above can be a directional assistance for the exploration of different possibilities. There is no doubt that the 'Ego' plays a significant part in relationships because the 'Ego' is an internal drive while relationship is an external orientation. Obviously, the interplay of the 'Self' represented by the 'Ego' and manifestation through relationship orientation is apparent. What is clear in the above model is that there are two dimensions which can work together or against each other. When the two dimensions work together, the individual experiences "congruence" and when they work against each other, the individual experiences "incongruence". There is no doubt that everyone experiences this form of dichotomy from time to time but which is the dominant nature of the individual is what rules behaviour.

Case II.

A repeated uncanny expression of attraction between participants in a "cousin's lab" which nearly derailed the work I was doing for a company is a good illustration of the above model. A boss was not willing to accept his attraction to a female participant in the group but kept behaving in a way that was obvious to everyone that he was attracted. A male participant in the same employment category of the lady in question confronted this boss to come out clearly and make his intentions clear. When questioned, the participant claimed his attraction to the same lady and this kicked off a 'war of words' in the group. When the group looked at this case from the above model, it was discovered that the boss was suffering from his tainted ego at being questioned by a subordinate and the subordinate was incongruent by claiming his attraction towards the lady when his intention was to confront and wound the boss's ego. The processing of this incident brought so many things to light and the group finally celebrated this incident as having been the best moment of learning for the group.

Conclusion

This paper is a sharing of my personal experience as a process work facilitator using the Human Laboratory training methodology taught, promoted and practiced by ISABS. It has described how people come in to the lab with their hierarchy of needs so couched that the main need of self-actualisation is not visible until trust is built in the group. The paper describes the different processes an individual goes through in a process work group and maintains that the process is not sequential or chronological but most of the time, many people in the group go through this entire process in sequence. It also shares the author's understanding and use of various intervention styles. The paper concludes with interplay between the Self represented by the Ego and the Self in relationship which has an external orientation. **When the two dimensions work together, the individual experiences "congruence" and when they work against each other, the individual experiences "incongruence".**