By Jimmy dabhi

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Those who come to Indian Society for Applied Behavioural Science (ISABS) training events may have heard of Human Process Lab (HPL) but may or may not know in details what these HPLs are. Human Process Laboratory training is also called T-group Learning (Training Group Learning), originally known as Basic Skills Training Group (Bradford, Gibb and Benne, 1964). It has evolved from human relations training which arose from the study of behaviour in small groups (Lewin, 1947), and later developed into a wider focus on human interactions in many settings. This article is an attempt to help people understand the objective, method and modus operandi of the Human Process Laboratory training organised by ISABS in India over the years.

Let me begin by stating what I have argued (Dabhi, 2005) elsewhere. It seems to me that there is no best way of training. Various factors and actors – trainers, trainees, environment, emotional climate, and contentinfluence training. The methodology will also depend on the trainees' preference for learning style and the use of learning faculties – audio, visual, behavioural, experiential and experimental. Experience also bears out the fact that methodology which reduces trainee-taught dichotomy [Freire, 1972; Heredero, 1989], enhances the training process. It is also acknowledged that the method of learning, if made more participatory, would yield better results.

Components of T-group Learning

There is a huge literature on training and training components. I would like to highlight six components which are important to me, as Human Process Lab facilitator and helpful when taken into account and should be conscious of during the lab (for details see Dabhi, 2005).

- 1) The participants: The socialisation of trainee-participants, their world view, assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, 'the nature' developed over the years and motivation to learn considerably influence nature and quality of participation and learning process.
- 2) The facilitator [trainer]: Similarly, the socialisation, values, worldviews, assumptions, attitudes, needs, motives, prejudices, biases, personality and behaviour of the facilitator influence the facilitation of the training-lab. Max Weber (1947) looked at power as the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behaviour of other people. Obviously, being in the position of power, the facilitator influences the participants and training process considerably at least initially when dependency on her/him is high. The personality of the facilitator, as much as that of the participant, influences learning process.
- 3) The content of training [subject matter]: In the experiential lab training environment the subject matter is people who are in the lab the participants, the facilitator; and the thinking, feelings, perceptions,

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¹ Personality refers to those attributes that affect the manner of interaction with others, attitudes, needs, values, beliefs and drives [Rowe and Boulgarides [1992:63].

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feedback and behaviour that they bring to the group there and then. The learning agenda is generated as people act in the group, articulate and present themselves in the group. Persons that we are and what we want to become is the subject mater of learning in HPL setting.

- 4) The human processes in lab [the human dynamics]: Various processes take place in training as people interact and different issues emerge through these interactions, such as cooperation and competition, inclusion and exclusion, power and authority issues, gender and sexuality, acceptance and rejection. Concepts, issues and processes pertaining to leadership, conflict, decision-making, participation, equality, decision-making, power equations, co-option [between trainers and trainees and trainees themselves] often arise in training. These concepts, issues and dynamics may totally escape the attention of the trainers but if well handled and addressed, training can become more enriching and effective.
- 5) The methodology used [the technologies and instruments used]: Means are better received when they are sensitive to participants needs and considerate to the milieu in which training is organised. Human beings are not guinea pigs and therefore ends do not justify means. Having said this, creativity and spirit of experimenting need not be abandoned in choice of methodology. There are dangers and concerns raised when the facilitator primarily focuses on the methodology and instruments of the training and fail to address the subject matter for learning. In the HPL it is the group and persons within the context of a group where they have chosen to be to examine and experiment on their behaviour and its impact to enhance effectiveness, mutual respect, dignity and greater satisfaction in human interactions.
- 6) Culture and milieu [event and organisational environment]: The social culture of the place and the organisational culture of the institute which holds/conducts the training play a key role in conceiving and delivery of the training. Often, taking the participants away from their daily milieu helps in focusing on the training content and avoids other dynamics, which may be hindrance to trainees' experimentation in the initial stages.

Let me now come to the Human Process Lab where we basically focus on experiential learning. There are several ways a person may learn, e.g. intellectual, affective, behavioural/motor, etc. Hicks and Gullet (1976) state a few other ways too:

- 1) Imitation copying others,
- 2) Vicarious learning learning by seeing others,
- 3) Learning by habit doing something repeatedly,

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4) Learning by 'putting through' – where a group/facilitator may suggest a new behaviour for person concerned.

Learning is also a change in behaviour based on experience. It does not include maturation; or change in behaviour due to organic factors such as fatigue, drugs, or illness. Learning greatly affects the way people think, feel, and act and modifies their beliefs, values, and objectives.

HPL is a part of applied behavioural science learning. The focus of learning is human behaviour and the motives behind the behaviour. It is suggested that our behaviour is not at random, it is goal oriented. It is caused by and directed toward some end that the individual believes to be, rightly or wrongly, in her/his interest (Robbins 1989). Behaviour can be predicted if we know the individual's perception of the situation s/he is facing or imagine what is important to her/him in that situation. The goal of HPL is to facilitate behavioural effectiveness and satisfaction through interaction within a group and social setting.

Human Process - The Laboratory Method

The history of human relations training has been largely influenced and advanced by the laboratory method of learning and change. It is further argued that the laboratory approach is an educational method developed primarily by the national training laboratories (Bradford, Gibb, and Benne, 1964, Hanson, 1981). Feedback from facilitators and participants suggests that individual and group behaviour, together with the experiential learning generated by interpersonal and group activities, appeared to produce greater learning and stimulate more interest than traditional learning structures (seminars, lectures, etc.) of the training programme (Hanson, 1981). My own experience and feedback from others suggest that laboratory method offers a different kind of learning experience compared to the structured methods, and difficult quite effective with some people, though difficult.

The laboratory concept of science is largely effective because of the experimental and experiential nature of the training with individual and group behaviours and its effectiveness in the group. The "there and now" human process (not only what we do but how we do) is experimented upon, tried out and learned in the laboratory situation and is hopefully applied outside the lab situation, in the back home situation and environment.

The group normally consists of 10-12 members who meet with a facilitator/s and work together as a group during the training event. The number of hours of work and duration of training that have been suggested are based on previous experiments and studies. As you may have experienced, it is unstructured; in other words there is no formal agenda, no guidelines about appropriate or inappropriate behaviour, and no clear leadership.

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HPL Facilitator is the one who facilitates

The role and function of the facilitator in HPL is to facilitate and not to lead. S/he is in some way like a coach in a soccer team who is part of the team but has the role of a coach to ensure that the team develops and the members in the team are empowered. The empowering process is done in a group and not by individual coaching. Therefore the facilitator in HPL unlike the counsellor or a group therapist focuses on and helps the group and the individuals as the members of the group in and through the group. The focus of the facilitator is the group and persons within the group.

Experience suggests that often facilitators have varied style within the broader perspective of group focus. Sometimes these styles are loosely talked about as 'nurturing', 'aggressive', 'confronting', 'empowering' etc. My own personal experience and observation suggest that some facilitators' styles tend to create high dependency in the group on the facilitator while some function very democratically. The interventions and the words and statement used in the interventions have often been indicative of the facilitator's approach to HPL and the values they uphold and exhibit.

Facilitators and participants must guard against false (sometimes camouflaged as self presentation) which can lead to ineffectiveness and dysfunctionality in the training set up. This behaviour need to be discouraged which is exhibited in story telling, false exposure of 'who I am', and blowing one's own trumpet. Unfortunately at times a few facilitators are found to indulge in self presentation and occupying group time and space with a motive best to serve their interests. Self presentation in HLP is a tricky business and can be subject to manipulation if facilitator and participants are not constantly and consciously aware of the 'self-presenting' processes and their influence. Openness on the part of the facilitator to learn and abide by the values and ethics of HPL has an empowering effect on creating and sustaining the learning environment in the lab.

Understanding group processes

Group processes are often called group dynamics and used interchangeably. Group dynamics is a field of study concerned with interactions and forces between members of a group. It is the field of enquiry that deals with the nature, formation and functioning of groups. It also involves the study of the structure, processes and behaviour of groups and their influence on the behaviour and performance of individuals. Group dynamics was developed as an academic and research discipline in 1930s by Kurt Lewin, a social psychologist of the University of lowa, USA. Understanding and handling group dynamics (processes) is important in order to increase the effectiveness, empowerment and productivity of the group (Gibb, 1975).

Group processes also refer to the manner in which group actions are constructed on a continuing basis. In other words, processes are *how*, the manner in which it does *what* it does. The process emphasises changes in

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the flow of activities; indeed group processes indicate how structures are established and how they may change over time. Process also points to the subjective perceptions of group members and their active involvement in group life. The grasp and analysis of group processes provide a better understanding of the following: How is the group being formed? How is the group developing at various stages? What forces (power equations) operate in groups? How do groups make decisions and solve problems? How do group members and the group as a whole change and adapt? How do groups achieve cohesiveness and handle conflicts? How does the group influence the behaviour and task performance of its members?

Experience suggests that all groups are different just as all people are different. Working with each group and facilitating each group is different. However, over a period of time, one realizes that certain group processes occur often enough that it is possible to make some general statements about them. These processes, taking place in the "here and now" are often described and categorised as themes, issues, stages, etc for better understanding and facilitation. Processes can be complex and not all the processes are picked up and addressed in the group. The facilitators have their own preference and priorities and thus address some of these processes that unfold in the group. Apart from considering the stages of group facilitation that are involved in planning a group learning session or a workshop, the facilitator also needs to know something about the process/es that can occur in such a group. There is no best way or the correct way of coping with a particular process; everything is dependent upon the people concerned, the context, the perceptions and analysis of the facilitator/s and of group members (Bernard, 1995).

It is common experience that in the initial stage of HPL, a good amount of time and energy are spent on discussing the content of what is to be said or articulated in the group. This is called the content, different from the process. The anxiety of the group about what we want to do, the topic for discussion is to do with the focus group on the content and not the process/es. Not that they do not have relevance in a group life but in HPL the process that is the how is equally relevant and focused on. Therefore the facilitators facilitate the group to pay attention to not only what is being said and done in here and now but how it is being said and done. To function effectively and derive satisfaction, the process is equally important. In fact, when there is discussion about changes in behaviour, emphasis is again on the content, package of knowledge and skills that s/he should know so that s/he can behave in a different way. underlying human-process in training is often neglected. Understanding processes means to allow the group to observe and reflect on how and why they behave the way they do and what impact their behaviour has on people and vice versa (Dabhi, 1999).

Group processes - food for learning

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As suggested group, processes imply the manner in which group actions are conducted on a continuous basis. Pareek (1998) defines processes as the underlying human interactions and behavioural dimension of an organisation. Therefore actions which are interactive with other members in the group become interactions. In HPL these interactions are food for learning. Clarity on these group actions or behaviour will throw some light on learning in HPL. George Homans, a social psychologist has identified three basic elements of group behaviour:

- 1) Activities: These are physical movements which people make and which an outsider can observe while analysing the working of a group. Who is looking at whom, who speaks, how long, after whom, who goes to the toilet and when, who sits next to whom are examples of activities.
- **2) Inter-Actions**: These imply the stimuli and responses of people in the group participating in the activity (what is happening). These may be verbal e.g. two members addressing each others, or non-verbal e.g. someone offering tissue paper or a glass of water to someone.
- 3) Intra-Actions (within oneself): Homan calls this activity as sentiments. These actions refer to all that happens to an individual in the group within herself. It could be the feelings experienced, attitudes and drives that exist within a person about what is happening in the group and others and how she perceives all that. These are not directly observable and must be inferred from the activities and interactions which express them. For example, we may infer that a person is angry or sad from what she says and how she says it.

Often in HPL one hears people say "I don't know what is happening in the group". Yet others say with a smile on their face, "I do not know why we are silent but somehow this silence is upsetting me, it is creating a tension". Silence in the group is an activity as stated above and it stimulates action — intra or inter as described above. When intra-actions are articulated, they have a potential for inter-actions and these are processes which provide data for the group to learn from about oneself, others, group and about various issues such as how we communicate, whether we have a purpose in our communication, if there is a struggle for power in the group, or if we are competing or cooperating.

Here and now vis-à-vis there and there

A word about here and now is appropriate at this juncture. It has two aspects — here, the space dimension and now — the time dimension. The here dimension refers to the processes that take place in this laboratory setting, in the room we are sitting and not so outside of the room or the lab. The now dimension refers to time of the process. These process are of the present and not the past. What is happening to the members and the group now is under the scanner and not what happened in the past. Group members discussing the content and processes of the past are sometime referred to as 'kite flying' or 'story telling'. The process of group sliding

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away from here and now to there and there can be very subtle and at times even facilitators are found to be doing or even encourage it.

Having said that let me state that in no way I want to argue that there and there data is irrelevant and of no consequences to group life. But for the purpose of learning in HPL laboratory setting where to some extent 'controlled' conditions exist the data generated here and now in the lab is focused upon and not the data of the past. Past data is of relevance where the residual or the past has impact on the group right here and now in the group. For example something was said or done in the first session of the lab and a member/members are carrying the hurt or anger on the fifth day and it is influencing their behaviour one way or the other. Bring this to the group and working on it is here and now thought the trigger and some aspect of the data are of the past.

Conditions for laboratory learning

The following conditions if met in various ways help participants to reach goals of personal development and change in insights, understanding, sensitivities, and skills.

Presentation of Self

Until the individual has an opportunity to reveal the way s/he sees and does things, s/he has little basis for improvement and change. Therefore articulation of what happens in one's head and what one feels is important in HPL. Presentation of self is not story telling or talking of one's past but articulating and placing in the group what is happening to me here and now. It is not only what I think but how I feel right now. For example, stating, "We have been sitting here quietly for the last 20 minutes and are feeling restless". Forcing, manipulating some one/group to say something may not be appropriate in a HPL however it is not uncommon that such behaviours are exhibited in the HPL groups by members and even facilitators.

Presentation of self, in brief, is to let the group know what I am thinking and how I am feeling in this group here and now.

Feedback, collaboration and confrontation

Individuals and group do not learn from their experience alone. They learn from bringing out the essential patterns of purposes, motives, and behaviour in situations where they can receive clear and accurate information about the relevance and effectiveness of their behaviour in reference to others in the group. They need a feedback system which continuously operates so that they can change and correct what is ineffective and dysfunctional. For example "What you just said seems to be very offensive and I do not like it. I do not appreciate the words you have used and I feel accused". This response in a group is one kind of feedback to the one who has responded. Mirroring other's behaviour and how it comes across to me and how it is effective or not effective provides room for learning and impetus for exploration and experiment for other behaviours.

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Confronting the other can be done with aggression and/or as matter of fact. Both have their consequences. Aggression and anger obviously are an indication that the person who is confronting or providing feedback is not happy with what is being done and has a preference for something else.

Collaboration in the group begins when the group is performing without much of performance anxiety. It implies building blocks — both linear and vertical in realising individual and group goals, creating knowledge for self and others.

Group climate

An atmosphere of trust and non-defensiveness is necessary for people both to be willing to expose their behaviour and purposes and to accept feedback. However a group often takes time to create and promote such an atmosphere or group climate. The group may have to address the issue of fear in the group. The facilitator's style, approach to group and behaviour as well as participants willingness to learn, take group responsibility and create learning climate influences the space and pace of group climate creation.

The higher the dependency of the group on the facilitator, the greater the unchallenged influence and greater the interdependency, the better the democratically arrived climate based on the process of consensus. The group, and the facilitator as part of the group and as a role holder are responsible in promoting the group climate of freedom, risk taking, learning and empowerment or otherwise.

The 'Norming' stage of a group formation has a lot to do with the atmosphere/climate creation. The values stated or assumed influence the group atmosphere and interactions in the group. The democratic value in HPL contributes to equal right and responsibility to contribute to group processes and learning, and dominated by the facilitators or a few members. It is observed "The greater the authority behind a particular drive or initiative, the more likely it is that it will be accepted. This is true whatever the form of authority, whether rational, legal, expert or charismatic" (Pettinger, 2000:167). Sometimes facilitators push for certain kind of climate, behaviour and *modus operandi* in the group and if issues of authority are not addressed, the group may simply accept what is 'suggested' by the facilitator's or dominant members.

The issue of interventions being individual - focused (as in group therapy) and group focused becomes a concern for group atmosphere. People see individuals with problems and they interact to resolve the problem of the individual. Facilitator colludes or encourages it at the cost of the rest of the group members. In their minds, the 'interactions between two people have to be over/complete' and until it happens the group or the facilitator will not allow others to intervene or do something else. There is a tendency among some in HPL including the facilitators to assume that interactions between people and the processes have to be completed only than the group can move forward. Therefore they would try to stop other processes and interaction and thus ignoring the democracy of the group.

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Cognitive Map

Knowledge from research, theory, and experience is needed and important to enable the individual both to understand her experiences and to generalize from them. But generally information is most effective when it follows experience and feedback. Providing conceptual and theoretical clarity based on experience and feedback in the group therefore seems to be more effective than mere inputs.

In HPL, in the advanced stages, facilitators sometimes choose to invite cognitive map of the participants (their perception and analysis of what happens in the group and why) and provide some theoretical frame to understand the processes better for effective learning.

Learning derived from experimentation and practice

HPL is basically experiential learning and therefore greatly depends on what one experiences and experiments in the group. Contrary to class room learning there are no topics to discuss, debate and lecture about. The matter for learning is yourself and the group and therefore experiencing yourself and others in interaction — how we come across to others as we interact here and generate data for learning. Trying out alternatives and checking out new experiences and their effectiveness in the group is the modus operandi of learning new behaviours, new ways of relating, communicating and functioning in the HPL. Unless there is opportunity to try out new patterns of thought and behaviour, they do not become a part of the individual. Without experimental efforts relevant change is difficult to make.

Like other learning, experiential learning leads to empowerment of a person and group. In the context of Community Development (see Parmar and Franco, 1996) it is argued, "Empowerment is realisation of power within an individual/s, group, organisations/communities, in a concrete reality of life (psychosocial, economic, religious, cultural, political etc.) which makes the subject and her/his environment more humane and just" (Dabhi, 1999:26).

HPL in someway is geared towards empowerment of the group and members within the group. A person who exhibits greater self-awareness of thoughts, feelings and behaviour may be said to be empowered. For example an individual becomes aware of feelings of anger and the thought pattern within her which goes along with that feeling. Sometimes the feelings and behaviour do not match (incongruencey between feeling and behaviour), like, one sounds angry but there is a smile on the face. An empowered person would become aware of such contradictions between feeling and behaviour and make an effort to be more congruent (Dabhi, 1999).

Practice of what one wants to learn is equally important. Like in soccer, one has to practise what one has learned so that the s/he gains confidence and security in being different.

Back home Application

Well, learning is for life and to be applied in real life situation. Unless learning and change that has occurred and realised in HPL can be applied

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to back home situations, they are not likely to be effective and lasting. Attention needs to be given to helping groups and individuals plan application and translating the learning to reality beyond the HPL.

Relearning how to learn

Since much of our academic experience leads us to believe that we learn out of listening to authorities, there is frequently the need to learn how to learn from presentation-feedback-experimentation.

The initial HPL experience provides opportunities to explore traditional patterns of behaviour. In the HPL a vacuum is experience in absence of the facilitator's refusal to carry out the traditional expectations of her role: leadership, agenda, and procedure setting. Into this vacuum of lack of formal/positional leadership and lack of clarity about goals and procedures, members rush in with the purpose of filling in the missing ingredients (Bradford, Gibb and Benne, 1964; Hanson, 1981).

Each HPL has as its goal the enhancing of the learning of each member of the group collaboratively. For feedback to follow presentation of self, an appropriate climate needs to be developed. Adequate and legitimate opportunities for individuals to try out new ways of behaving need to be present. The HPL Training is designed to meet these conditions and the facilitators are to facilitate the group in creating these conditions.

Conclusion

Human Process Laboratory Training is one of the several ways of learning methods which may suit some and not others. It posits greater responsibility for the learner and assumes that individuals can create their own learning in a group setting.

Differently put, HPL training is a way of enhancing the process of empowerment of people. It facilitates action, processes and I would like to suggest that these processes have a three dimensional effect - it is a process which goes on within the individual, it happens between two or more individuals i.e. interpersonal (group), and organisational/communitarian in which the individual/s live and function.

Hierarchies are unavoidable in a group setting and so is the case in the HPL. However the facilitators help address the issue of authority and help create a climate where people work towards self and group learning, practise in the group and get prepared to carry back home. It hopefully creates greater faith in oneself and enhances confidence to journey through life more humanely and be fully alive to self and others.

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