

A First Guide to Process Work

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Process Work - Etymology

“We live in a world that is constantly changing and only ever partially known” writes the Cambridge academic (1). Science has now firmly established that there is nothing static – everything is in movement – including our minds. The idea that there is an objective observer studying and measuring reality – giving out error free accurate observations was a convenient staging post in the journey of knowledge itself – nothing more. The convenience that the ‘staging post’ offered was/is to create a range of knowledge that permits substantial command over the material world – so essential for the technological progress with tools. This staging post also served the desire to “conquer nature”. This range of knowledge has constituted what may safely be called mainstream. In the Social Sciences this is represented by the “cognitive” and “positivist” lines of thought. Burell and Morgan call this the functionalist school in the ‘objectivist’ quadrant of their schema mapping the various paradigms in the Social Sciences.

Philosopher A.N. Whitehead is probably the earliest to have used the phrase “Process Work” in recognition that the mind – in constant movement – is applied and deployed – to study the world and the self – all in eternal movement. The philosophical position is that the observer and the observed, both in motion are all parts of processes, indeed are processes themselves.

The “work” part of the phrase Process work – is the act of volitional engagement with these and related processes. This implies a world view that holds the universe as a set of mobile forces that are in a complex “dance” without end. Quantum physics deepens this notion by raising the idea that the universe has nothing called particles. It negates the age old world view that the universe is composed of “solid” particles in “open” space. The famous “two – slit experiment” leads to the conclusion that what we consider solid matter is also a complex bundle of “waves” of energy as well (watch the first part of “The Holographic Universe” - Youtube, startling material)

The World View

In India we find a similar world view embodied in the concept of “maya”. Widely misunderstood as “illusion”, maya simply posits that anything that is empirically manifest is in motion – and thus not to be mistaken as eternal – it will pass, is changing forever. The “ancient literature” (Vedas, Upanishads, Geeta, Yogasutra etc.) seem to be based on a worldview that sees the universe as an intricately interwoven set of waves of energy, much like a multi dimensional Kaleidoscope with infinite boundaries. This worldview seems to honor the unknown – does not see it as a liability and posits that it can become known if the seeker alters his point of view adequately. (2)

1. Wagoner, Brady (Ed) - Symbolic Transformation: The Mind in Movement through Culture and Society – Routledge (accessed by a Google search)
2. See ch.15 in “Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness” by Satprem, Institut de Recherches Evolutives, Paris 1996 – 2003). Available at Aurobindo Ashram outlets.

Process Work is founded on a similar world view. It is a school of thought, practice and philosophy. It may be called a branch of the social sciences – the unique differentiating aspect being its dedication to action – it is therefore not fully amenable to being defined as only a body of knowledge. Action being an integral part of it – it is also a practice. Its boundaries of theory are flexible – drawing from any or all fields of knowledge. This fuzziness of the boundaries complicates debating validity. At the same time it expands the scope of application of process work practice into several new areas thus offering huge scope for adventure.

Human Nature

Associated with the issue of world view, but with another focus is the set of assumptions concerning human nature, and their relationship with their environment. There is a range of assumptions that characterize the multiple paradigms in the social sciences. At one end is the set of assumptions that view a human being as a “thing in the world”, intelligent albeit but essentially responding in a mechanistic or even deterministic ways to his environment. The human being is seen essentially as an intelligent monadic entity separated from all others, in a stimulus – response nexus with his environment. At the other is a view that attributes a more creative role where “free will” is a significant player (3). In this view the human being is a part of a whole, as well as, the “whole” universe is reflected/present in him. No longer a monad each individual is responsible for creating the world he lives in. This view posits therefore ideas such as a collective mind and spirit along with the idea of an intelligent, interconnected, cosmic whole that can be apprehended but not comprehended, it is beyond the capacity of the mind. Thus this view admits to a stand that the mind has its limits as much as the sense organs – we can see only a certain band of light frequencies, hear similarly a limited band of sound waves etc. This implies that existence is in fact much greater than what we can mentalise. What we experience, thus is always greater than what we can intellectualise/conceptualise.

Multiple foci of Process Work therefore emerge, depending on the world view and assumptions about the nature of the human being.

Our Tradition

Our tradition firmly chooses the second set of assumptions that view the human being and his context in a holonic relationship. Each human being is conceived of as a complex set of all that his context is (many people, beliefs, culture etc.), that he has infinite potential and that the roots of his experience are located in his existential self. Not only that he contains his context but that he is contained in his context. This is resonant with the views embodied in Indian thought and resembles those embedded in Existential psychology of the west. Our tradition holds that the individual is far more than just a body with a mind in it - transacting with others in order to make his mark before dying. The tradition subscribes to the idea that each individual is a part of the cosmos (that includes this world), is born several times, has access to phenomena both temporal and manifest, as well as, transcendental and infinite. The spirit is his source of energy, the body its expression through actions.

3. See Burrell and Morgan, *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*, Heineman, London 1979

Finally, arises the question 'to what is this body of thought dedicated?' Our tradition holds that the body of thoughts and action constituting process work is dedicated to 'understanding' human beings and societies from the subjects' view point as well as from an external viewpoint. It is dedicated to fostering the dynamism of the Being, as well as of human organisations. This implies going beyond maintaining and regulating status quo to accepting a notion of 'potential' that is available and ready to be found, tapped and mobilised. (The reader is advised to look through the Annexure before proceeding to the following parts).

As noted earlier process work has been effectively applied for many goals. For the purposes of this note we are restricting the discourse here to its application for personal growth. Personal growth is defined as a desire and voluntary engagement with learning in domains of self improvement. We are qualifying this self improvement to anchor it in the objective of changing one's identity by choice. This includes changes in world views, in values, action choices, enhancement of well being and indeed the ability to learn from life's living experience. Pulin Garg defined it as enhancement of the dynamism of the Being, harmony in the living process. This obviously then implies discovering and enhancing one's living creativity in managing the self and relatedness with the other. Sartre talks of learning to live not only by the givens but be guided by what he calls "nothingness" the infinite potential of the Being. Moreno talks of restoring to a state of spontaneity.

How does it Work?

Process Work manifests in many forms. The most frequently found form is in group settings. For this present article we shall outline what we call "Personal growth" groups. Group sizes can vary from around 7 to 15, several groups can run in parallel. The colloquial name is a 'lab'.

Technically the name we used, now gone into disuse is I-Groups, 'I' taken from identity. This was an innovation when begun in the 70's. The identity group movement's emphasis is on creating the space and psychosocial infrastructure to the members, to facilitate cognize their identities and make changes by choice. This was a distinct departure *from* the study of effective relationships *to* identity change. Such a change implies that the group process shifted focus from looking at ways of relating to the nature of the identity.

I groups are based on a construct that postulates two levels of the identity. The 'exterior' called the *role identity* and an 'inner' one called the *self identity*. The role identity is deployed in interactions and in 'role making' while the self identity is a more interior set of definitions of the self, and a complex network of deeper position creating aspects such as the relationship with oneself, defining beliefs about oneself and deeply held residues of the story of one's life. I group work believes that for interventions to be effective in one's own life is possible only when the self identity is reconfigured. The engagement and the work addresses both levels of the identity. Reaching there (self identity) is contingent upon the group's emergent choice made in the course of the lab's unfolding.

A group is 'anchored' by one or two persons. It is designed and conducted as a space for studying the experience of being oneself. Using self reflection as the basic thinking tool, the group establishes a setting that invites sharing through voluntary articulation, the 'inner worlds' of members in progressive steps. Membership to groups is voluntary in

the main. The Anchor Person ensures the maintenance of the essential boundaries of time, space and the task at hand. He fosters the emergence of a space which is free of the usual socially ritualised evaluations and behaviours. He fosters self disclosure and at appropriate moments provides frameworks that facilitate self disclosure and expression of the emotive content of the experiences members bring in. He makes ongoing observations on the emergent identity of the group. He engages in sharing his own vulnerabilities and sorrows as well. In our tradition this is a highly valued step as it reduces the prospect of the Anchor person being set up as a God or a Devil and keeps him at the same human level as the members. This reduces the impact of counter-transference, inevitable in such situations.

The learning process or epistemology is based on the notion that such learning cannot be taught, it is something that has to be personally experienced. The learning is emotion based in the main with cognitive frames to help conceptualise the new learning. It must remain completely free of prescriptions and evaluations, except when decided and agreed upon. Evaluation of any person is completely bounded out.

Early stage

The Anchor Person has the responsibility to make an opening statement of the goals and the primary task of the group. This must include an invitation and an evocation that help bring in the world of emotions. The AP must lay down norms such as 'speak in the first person, no advising, no explaining or prescribing'.

The starting stage is designed to stimulate self disclosure, less of the facts more of the feelings, the experience that is occurring in the present life space and life journey. During the early life of the group a key goal is to establish the primacy of dignity and subjective truth over socio normative standards of 'success/failure' and 'good/bad' or socially appropriate/inappropriate evaluations of behaviour or thinking. These criteria hold good especially when studying the interaction between members as well. The members begin forming relationships of affect. The Anchor person also keeps drawing attention to the changes taking place in the emotive ambience in the group while helping strengthen the voice of the 'experienced reality' in contrast with the socially dictated forms of appropriate behaviour – this encourages and establishes the value of authenticity in the group. The group begins to move towards studying the processes and developing relations in the group itself. Simultaneously each member's attention is strengthened in studying one's own thinking and behaviour. A key development that usually happens at this stage is the emergence of the observation "we are all in the same boat". This insight is a key threshold as it signals the emergence out of the socially prescribed and approved evaluative modes. It also signals that members have begun to experience the 'community of experience' moving out from the 'islandhood' that social living engenders on so wide a scale.

During this early stage a key task requirement of the AP is to establish the distinction between experienced feelings, conclusions, residual feelings and most importantly the feeling tones – the feelings about the reported feelings – the deeper emotional underlay that begins to bring to light the identities of the members.

Mid stage

The group begins at this stage to seek resolutions to 'problems' either in the individual lives or in the group's own emergent relations, may even be with an Anchor person.

These 'problems' are, in most cases examples that highlight the participants powerlessness while concretizing a 'villain'. It is ordinarily preferable in our tradition for the AP to judiciously direct attention to the way in which the 'problem' is being created, how the very identity of the individual is the context of the problem. By this time the AP will likely have noticed that the thinking that is creating the problem back home has also appeared in the group itself. Alternately the AP can set up an exercise that helps 'explore' the problem in its wholeness. It is at this stage that the power of the use of 'here and now' becomes very important.

Enter -The 'Here and Now' – Attention is everything – Directing and expanding the Attention

Directing the gaze of Attention

Here is the essential hallmark differentiating process work and placing it in a unique position, and that is the use of the construct – the Here and Now.

The socio normative world with its exclusive focus on 'success' develops in our minds a near blind dedication to the future. All actions are dedicated to culmination in some 'better' future. This also develops an associated frame of cause and effect, thus training the mind to look backwards in time to explain the present.

Our thoughts thus are trained to travel into the past and the future, finding it very difficult to perceive what is happening in the present. This gives birth to the belief that each transaction is for an instrumental purpose that is, to achieve a goal. It completely masks the truth that each action is an expression of the self as well, in fact to a much larger extent than we would like to accept. The attention, like a beam of light, is almost entirely directed to the past and future.

A key work that must happen in a lab is turning the gaze, the beam of attention to the present – the 'Here and Now'. The AP now is best advised to bring attention to the Here and Now. This means bringing the groups' attention to 'this moment' and the acts in it as an expression of the identity of the actor.

Indian thought has in many different ways emphasised the philosophical import of 'this moment'. The Yogasutras for instance begins with the sanskrit word 'atha', meaning here, now (begins an exposition/instruction of yoga).

Freud brought to light the notion called repetition compulsion. The AP by now will be in a position to show the various ways in which the history brought in by self disclosures and the present experience in the group have parallels. Human beings end up reproducing their symbolic psychological world in all spaces they occupy. If the AP can establish these links even for a few individuals the group is likely to gather the resilience to enter into an exploration of their identities. If not, the group settles down to examining the interpersonal world.

Expanding the Gaze of Attention

The use of structured experiences of the type we have brought in to this workshop at this stage is a useful and often very fruitful move. The themes at this stage ordinarily are related to universes of discrimination, denial deprivation// abandonment, violation,

powerlessness and self worth. Exercises focusing on issues of acceptance- rejection, isolation- relatedness, are useful at this stage. Alter ego becomes an extremely valuable approach. It can very effectively bring the 'group mind' away from a linear *past to future* pathway on to a lateral expansion of the attention to examine the present. It is here that the fourfold attention expanders work very well. These are:

1. articulating the unarticulated
2. seeing the invisible
3. owning the disowned
4. enacting the withheld

The AP can apply this frame to the various statements/phenomena in the group. It is usually the case that the group's attention 'wakes up' to seeing a space of freedom in thinking and action available to the members. The linear pattern of thinking (cause - effect, if then therefore) predicated by the focus on instrumentality loses its stranglehold on the mind, now set free to see new vistas.

The extent of movement in the group is not entirely in the AP's hands however. The group will have evolved in its own unique configuration and will show its preference of exploring identity related issues or focusing on role related issues. This in my observation is governed by the level of 'faith' the group is able to collectively muster. The higher this is, the greater will be the movement towards self identity field. Faith here will be manifested by the value the group collectively places on the emotive world.

The Concluding stage

Delightfully no two groups are identical. At the same time it is possible to see trends. I will here talk about three that I have come across most dominantly.

If the group has made a choice to stick to 'increasing' instrumentality and success, usually at the closing stages a member comes up with a 'major' problem he is facing in life. It is best under such a situation to seek the groups cooperation in exploring the grounds of the 'problem' and let the articulating participant experience a sense of 'receiving' gifts from each member.

A second trend is the emergence of questions and clarifications. In my experience these questions are loaded with a search for new perspectives on life and values to live by. The AP ought to be prepared to share his perspectives in an open manner fostering dialogue and exploration. I have found it useful to set up exploratory exercises as if the group were moving onto a whole new field of self and world discovery. It is important to also own up to the limitations in one's own living reality and own up to being a co-traveller.

A third trend I have encountered is where the group has arrived at fairly wholesome resolutions for the members. It is then time to gently help the group set the next goal for its own unfolding. The moment of closure of the group is recognised as a threshold, it is also recognised that 'growth' is an unending process. Structured exercises in identifying the new dawning goals to help crystallise them is a significant support to the whole effort. It is also an affirmation of the group's effort during its lifetime which is now coming to an end.

The concluding stage ought to bring in attention to values to live by, perspectives on human existence, perspectives on the nature of society and organisations and man's ongoing struggle to live dignified meaningful and creative lives that are founded on the principle of simultaneity of the well being of self and system, self and other.

Designing a Lab in the I Group tradition.

The lab as outlined till now is conceived of as a space. A space that invites and facilitates self enquiry via self disclosure during which the group synergises to speed up the enquiry, helps generate data by becoming the stage for the unfolding of the drama of each member's life. Pulin Garg describes it as a space of entering the inner space of each individual, 'the pathways to the Being' in what otherwise would be a 'public setting'. (p 98, Aphorisms of Being Human, Pulin K Garg)

The lab is a 'process space'. The attention is consistently and persistently brought on to the processes occurring in the group and its members. Processes of expression, inhibiting forces, emergent relationships and interactions, relationship with authority and of course presentation of oneself in the setting. The attention is being (this is the early stage) brought to the here and now of the group space. It is also creating the ground, the language and setting the norms for entering into the inner spaces. In parallel the AP focusses the members' attention to the inner world of each individual. He helps co create with each individual a recognition of the 'pathways' into his inner world. The AP operates with the use of his observations and a great deal of reliance on his sensing. The AP's 'way of being' in the lab is governed by the process of exploration through sharing, not by 'giving' products that may 'help' fulfill the members' needs.

Every lab is nestled in a context of goals chosen for it. These goals are related to the larger context of society and the membership profile. While the supra goals have been outlined above each lab has a specific learning goal, usually chosen/dictated by the sponsors of the lab. These goals are not in the nature of 'targets' to be achieved. These goals must be articulated as the *process* the lab will emphasise. Taking our Internship as an example, the goal for each lab is distinct. In the past for instance we had defined the Phase I lab's goal as an induction into the process world, a space for coming to grips experientially with the construct of identity itself and discovering ways in which one may be able to bring about changes by choice. The first week by design focused on facilitating articulation of the role and self identities emerging in the group. The second week through the 'Life space exploration' helped recognise the 'inherited' or given identity generated by the developmental experience. This 'inherited' or 'given' identity connects the self and the role identities. The lab would create spaces for participants to design new action that in their experience would help reduce the inhibitions embedded in the 'given' part of their identities.

Process spaces are designed by process, never by 'outcomes'. The key question for the designer is "What is the process you wish to pay attention to". Here are three examples:

A 'Self Renewal' lab for instance will need to bring attention to the residual feelings accumulated in the life journey so far and help participants articulate the self affirmation that has 'gone underground' as a consequence. A fresh look at one's own journey through failures and successes together, a weaning away from the accumulated

self disdain with failures – into a new location vis a vis the narrative so far. Designing with these as outcomes would not create a process setting.

A second example is the one week lab we offer for 'Industry' participants – the Roles, Membership and Self program. A space to articulate the living experience of being in the role, of being a member in an organisation and what it implies to the task of being human. The design must focus on the *process* of articulation and the frames of making meaning. It must not get focused on any outcomes of 'feel good/strong/venting' etc. The larger aim is to expand the vision and the narrative to include an attention to the world of the being – one's own and others.

This idea of 'design by process' assumes great importance in the design of large and median groups – what we call the Community Sessions. The design only sets the process which the group will engage in. The outcomes may be predictable upto a point for the seasoned process workers – but these are not a part of the design consideration.

Essential 'oughts' of the Anchoring

The AP must enter a lab only after having spent time bringing his attention on himself and his own inner space, its dynamism and pathos. He enters with the commitment to “enliven the strangers that each explorer holds within himself along with his (the AP's) own strangers discovered” in the lab setting (p 101 Aphorisms PKG).

A key ought is “to operate from the premise that each explorer is a stranger, any prior knowledge of the explorer is held in abeyance” (p 99 Aphorisms PKG). This is in keeping with the *here and now* principle. Only that data which has emerged in the space and hearing of all present, is treated as valid and admissible. During a lab, the data picked up from outside, say during breaks are completely inadmissible for use in the group. This boundary is essential to the emotional integrity, dignity and safety of the participants, any break in this generates serious sense of violation and even damage to the participant. Only in very special cases may this be altered, that too with prior permission of the participant.

It is almost a matter of course that members will tend to 'set up the AP as a symbol of their significant others who dictated their 'shoulds and musts' ' (p 102 Aphorisms PKG). The AP is well advised to neither deny nor counter. Counters and denials in fact will generate entrenched conflicts leading to the dynamics of rejection by the AP and the idea of “favoured' and 'disliked' participants. He can dissolve these projections by bringing in his vulnerabilities, owning them up without shame and guilt. This route substantially reduces the dynamics of transference and counter transference.

The AP through his presence and interventions ought to

evoke articulation of the contents of the nebulous inner space of the explorers,

look at the reality of human existence,

help link these with the experience of others,

articulate analogies and symbols of the experience as much as possible,

to evoke as many alter egos as possible.

evoke the search for multiple alternatives and choice making

establish the understanding that socialisation addresses only the cognitive and logical realities and may in fact be contrary to imperatives of wholesome existence

promote autonomy and the ability to be the Subject in one's own life space

(from PP 103 to 106 Aphorisms PKG)

be aware and remain alert to his own 'inner world' of thoughts, emotions and the state of his sensing – including body sensations and breath

suspend all judgment dictated by his own social, personal, communal, cultural beliefs

refrain from giving prescriptions or advice

keep asking himself 'what am I thinking' and, 'what is the group using me for? - what am I using the group/this space for?'

hold the shared data sacrosanct,' not to be taken out' from the group space

He essentially ought to keep integrating multiple and diverse strands into differentiating between life enhancing and energy destroying lines of action, thought and feeling, and, leaving the members to make their own choices. In the same vein he differentiates between dignifying and undignifying phenomena.

It is important here to note that the list above is neither comprehensive and not to be taken as a 'sequence'. These are oughts, guides to the AP and are known to help in the task of breaking away from 'catches of the history' of members of the group including himself.

In the best sense of the words he is a Drashta who observes without judgment. The Drashta brings to the group the subject, the object and the context of as many phenomena as come up by articulating the unarticulated, seeing the invisible, owning the disowned and enacting the withheld. He is also a Weaver. The weaver takes the various strands of thoughts emotions and actions and weaves a tapestry of the group as a sample of human existence.

As the Drashta he leads the movement of throwing light on the living experience in its myriad colours, promoting the acuity of drawing distinctions between competing strands of experience. This strengthens the members' (and his own faculties for realistic choices and dynamism) for acting from conviction not convenience. As the Weaver he promotes integration by fostering simultaneity as the metaphor for living. To that extent he is a Sutradhar – no more no less.

Annexure

Notes from Innerground

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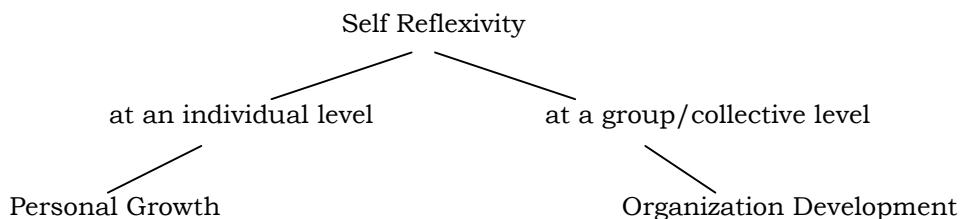
I suggest that as you get into this work ask yourself a question: Why are you entering this world of enquiry? What is the push, what is the pull? Why disturb your status quo?

The aim of my suggestion is not for you to be able to defend, nor to question the legitimacy of your choice. The aim is to nudge you into developing an ever clearer goal for yourself. Speaking personally, for me this question has been a stabilizer and indeed a guide at all stages of my journey. In this essay I share some of the issues I have encountered and the patterns that have emerged. You will need to discover your own, for what I share with you is inevitably the post facto crystallization of the experience. The experience itself on which the following rests will remain in the past.

The Innerground

At different stages of my journey the answers to this question have taken varying forms and complexions. As I look back these answers fell into two categories dissatisfaction with the world and dissatisfaction with myself, the push and the pull respectively. Without these dissatisfactions the journey would not have commenced. At the same time, the faith, that by engaging in a quest something “better” is likely to emerge, always accompanied the dissatisfactions. The engagement in the latter decade has begun to reveal an independent element that draws me, and that is, a strange sense of beauty in the process itself – but more of that later. The main part of what follows will dwell on the first two elements.

For me these dissatisfactions were an invitation that had a by line “enter at your own peril”. You are the “case study”. Something will surely change, and if it does not then you must review the original choice of entering the world of self enquiry. Most people are content to not raise questions of self enquiry, they live their lives with the aid of their own wisdom and mainly the traditions they have inherited. For them the key goal is to be “happy” within the givens. A realistic struggle with the world is an inevitable accompaniment. Maintaining status quo is the invisible goal. A few like you raise the question of self enquiry, usually because the “givens” are not fully acceptable to you. Self enquiry therefore is inevitably accompanied with questions about the world and the “reality”. Thus self enquiry will raise questions about others, relationships, the nature of social and familial organization, about history and so on. Two main streams thus emerge from the root source. These are a need for personal growth and, a need for change in the way groups are organized. The latter stream organizes itself into the world of organization development. Both streams rely on self reflexivity, the need and the ability to look at oneself individually and collectively with the objective of arriving at a new place (location) that is in some sense “better” than the starting point.



Elsewhere [Process Centered Institution Building (2006) and Pebbles on the Beach (2007)] I have shared some of the patterns that have emerged from my experience with organization development so far.

In this note I propose to walk you through the personal growth world. I propose to only alert you, not equip or arm you.

Personal Growth

As you engage with your concern for change and growth a key focus will emerge in your enquiry. I will share with you the five foci that I have encountered over the years. I observed that the concerns crystallized into the five I share below. Subsequently I propose to introduce to you the question “what is the end of process work”, i.e. what goals, outcomes or end states are achieved. Finally in a later note I propose to introduce you to a conceptual frame that helps identify inter connection between the apparently wide canvas of experiences, emotions and states of being that are inevitable in the process of being human.

A significant number of people enter process work with an eye to solving “problems”. In almost all cases the concern is with restoration. The experience in life has left behind a loss, of a dear one, or of prestige or of opportunities, of relationships and so on. The participants’ concern is with restoring a sense of “wholeness” or of restoring a state of acceptance, or of recovering a “just” due. This concern with restoration at times takes the form of needed healing from pain and hurt. In my view that is only a specific form, the genus is the same that is, a need for restoration to wellness. In a similar vein we encounter the pains of deprivation, denial and discrimination as the various faces of a need for restoration to a state of wellness.

Resolution of the need for restoration reduces the immediate anxiety. The manifest interfaces and behavior of the individual will alter to a less disturbed tone and the world is likely to see this change almost immediately. The amelioration of pain or the removal of anxieties however does not create any change in the identity pattern of the person. As such the possibility of recreating anxieties and pains does not change. A resilient change in the identity pattern happens when a significant modification in the world view and self concept occur. These occur when the “problems” are recognized as an outcome and not the source of the pains. Personal growth aims for this switch in looking at the universe of experience. A “problem solving” or “healing” approach thus is a viable starting point but is in itself not personal growth. The pains and the problems that we need to resolve are the outcomes of the personal philosophies we hold. It is only when the process work focuses on establishing the links between the experienced problems and the personal philosophies that the door opens for personal growth to begin. From a lay point of view it is perfectly valid to posit that personal growth is a natural process and all human beings go through it whether they engage with process work or not. This is certainly true. Engaging with process work however brings in an additional dimension. It is not only the process of maturing but it is “maturing with awareness of the journey and the nature of the journey”.

It thus operates at two levels – one is the level of doing the necessary actions and second being aware of the underlying dynamics and phenomena. Thus consciousness about the process in addition to engaging with the process of being and becoming is the hallmark of disciplined personal growth.

The Five Foci of Personal Growth

As I have worked in personal growth laboratories I have found five aims that people engage with

1. Self clarification
2. Life clarification
3. Reality clarification
4. Dissolving compulsivities
5. Creating New Directions, Life goal creation

These are neither sequential nor exclusive. At any given point of time one is likely to be relatively more dominant.

1. Life Clarification

Most of us have only very little recall of our early childhood. It is common for us to hear "I can remember bits and pieces from age 10 onwards, prior to that it is very vague and nearly non-existent". It is not an issue of how good or bad one's memory is. But soon the question comes up "why has my life turned out the way it has?" This question can be a very potent starting point for personal growth.

2. Self Clarification

A focus that drives the personal growth efforts of some people is the question "why am I the kind of person that I am?" This query is equally potent as the previous one. Both these questions have an element of curiosity built into them giving them their special potency. Quite clearly both these questions are interlinked since both imply a study of the history of the individual. The unique feature of this question however, is that it reveals that the individual seeking this clarification is probably ready to take responsibility for herself. A second unique aspect of this question is that it can lead to the universe of the basic angst of being human and thus open the doors to the unfolding of the philosopher that lies within each one. It also thus helps create links between the individual and the larger cosmos. The pursuit of self clarification, in addition to touching upon the basic aspect of being, also leads to progress towards what may be termed as a great attainment and that is self acceptance. I have yet to come across a person who truly accepts herself completely. I find that most people are somewhere in that progression towards higher levels of self acceptance. The lack of self acceptance is one of the biggest sources of stress and anguish.

3. Reality Clarification

The third focus in the quest for personal growth that I have encountered is the question "why is the world (around me) the way it is?" This quest is founded on the need to resolve practical problems in the living process. It essentially focuses on the world of relationships, expectations, power distribution and a need for greater levels of autonomy and closeness. It also has the largest element of "problem solving" concerns and leads to reduction in conflicts and stresses. The personal growth component of this focus is that it creates the ground for the individual to discover the ways in which he contributes to the existing problem set. Thus issues of responsibility, competence, emotional maturity, cooperativeness, autonomy are the chief dimensions on which

learning occur. Patently this focus has the greatest overlap with the world of organization development.

The three foci above are interlinked. At any given point of time one will appear more dominant than the others. Working on any one of them is likely to lead to the other two. All three have a meta goal of improvement or expansion and removal of some undesirable emotion, behavior or arrangement. For some people the removal itself is the goal and deliberate moves for further personal growth are not made. For some however the liberation from the “negatives” lead to new visions and an invitation to persist with planned deliberate growth.

The balance two foci are the relatively more advanced stages of personal growth. These are:

4. Dissolving Compulsivities

The human being is a complex set of aims and goals. Only parts of this complex set appear in the plane of our awareness. The motivations we are aware of as well as those that are as yet not in our awareness together inform and shape our action choices. As such taking full responsibility for all our actions is a challenging proposition. The motivations that we are not aware of are popularly called “unconscious”. These give rise to parts of our behavior that are patterned, repetitive and give rise to defensiveness and often become the core of conflicts, both with ourselves and those we relate with. A simple example of compulsivities is the issue of addictions. In this domain actions happen as if without our volition or active choice. In a similar vein, lies the whole domain of psychosomatic disturbances and idiosyncratic mannerisms, food habits and other appetites. These are not amenable to simple logic and rationality.

This focus of personal growth therefore requires a higher level of self disclosure and finer examination. It calls for explorations into “non logical” purely associative lines of thought and often has to resort to symbols and non linear processing and explorations into the intelligence of the body and spirit.

5. Creating New Directions, Life goals

This focus usually emerges once an individual has encountered and engaged with the first three. Engagement with the world of compulsivities definitely opens the door for this fifth focus. In this focus the protagonist has discovered that the large part of his aims and goals are the products of history and culture. In some sense it comes alive if and only after, he owns up that the goals and aims he has lived with so far have emerged from managing/responding to the givens and the imperatives of living, and are not the result of autonomous choices. He arrives at a point when it becomes necessary for his own sense of being, to generate commitments and directions for the rest of his life. This focus is characterized by the question “what am I here for?” or “what is the purpose of my life?” While these questions look rather like career concerns they are existential in nature as they respond to the individual’s need for meaningfulness and relatedness.

The World of Evocation

Evocation is the world of arousal, touch, invitation and aliveness. All the five foci of personal growth begin with pain and anxiety. As such one aim, as noted earlier, is the

removal or amelioration, a kind of cleansing, healing or restoration. However, successful restoration or cleansing will not necessarily lead to new aims and directions. When the cleansing/restoration is accompanied with arousal and a need for new commitments the identity is ready to shift. Thus the world of evocation that an individual holds needs to expand.

In common parlance and in our experience of living, the first encounter with the world of evocation is in the sense of liberation from past mortgages. My observation of others in their struggles with personal growth and my own efforts, restoration is certainly not enough, it is only a starting point. The capacity for receiving evocation itself needs to expand. Ordinarily this means an expansion in the ability to love (more people and more “things”), as well as, expansion in the ability to give up, 'let go' of old 'favourites', habits. Likewise an expansion in the capacity to commune, emotive, identify with others, and, accept with grace one's own separateness and distinctiveness, are all key ingredients in personal growth. The field of emotional intelligence makes some mention of these, most of the literature in behavioural sciences does not. Spiritual literature extols this as a virtue however. In my experience deliberate efforts in this direction, without a foundation in self awareness tends to create a synthetic action pattern. An authentic expansion of the capacity to be evoked begins at home. It begins by the growth of sensitivity to one's own emotions without judgment, be they appropriate or otherwise.

The experience of “experiential learning”

Mulla Nazruddin bought a duck. He took it home and made delicious duck soup. Friends dropped in and soon the Mulla was running out of stock. Meanwhile word spread and friends of friends also started dropping in. The situation was desperate. To the next stranger who said “I have come to taste the duck soup” the Mulla asked “who are you?”. The stranger gave his links” a friend of a friend of a friend”. Not to be undone, the Mulla went in and brought out a steaming bowl. The visitor sipped it and spluttered”hey this tastes like water, what is it?” and the reply was “it is the soup of the soup of the soup that was cooked three days back”.

I propose in this note to share a few distinct aspects of the nature of experiential learning. I know it is not a comprehensive statement nor am I at all sure that what I am sharing here will not change like a kaleidoscope tomorrow. One certainty I have, and that is, all this sharing will never take away the need for you to craft your own journey of discoveries. The intent of this note to that extent is the sharing itself, a recording of my experience and an invitation to you to share yours. The fact remains that any such sharing is a note from the past and to that extent like all knowledge, stale and second hand. It is “the experience of the experience that happened yesterday” (with apologies to the venerable Mulla Nasruddin)

The early part of the discourse in labs is in the domain of the known. It tends to be logical, rational and consists of several facts. Progressively it moves into the world of feelings and emotions and begins to inch towards stepping into unfamiliar territory.

This story begins after the stage of moving into unfamiliar territory. It is at this stage that the world of experience starts shifting more into the range of “apprehending”. Here apprehending is in contrast to comprehending. Comprehending is the process, simply put, of understanding. Looked at it more minutely, comprehending is a process of fitting the incoming information into previously familiar frames. Mismatches create

either “I don’t understand” or “you don’t understand”. In either case it is an exercise in fitment. The experience in apprehending is one of uncertainty. It is the first whiff, doesn’t quite fit into known categories. As such one of the connotations of “apprehend” is connected with fears and trepidations. Learning from experience is often, if not most often, presaged with this. It is only a sensing. A simple way to escape is to deny the sensing as “nothing”, in other words, to look away. The opportunity to learn is lost. The sensing is often vague, hazy often not crystallized, just a disturbance. The intrepid learner seizes the opportunity however. He makes an effort and articulates the unfamiliar, the unarticulated situation and gets closer to a discovery. The tonality is of uncertainty, “am I the only one?”. The intrepid learner takes the step, ready to walk it alone facing the danger of “being wrong”. As the apprehending becomes clearer he is ready to explore, to take an unfamiliar step. This may be construed as deviant behavior. He takes the risk, the risk of failing but he is willing to enact the withheld to reach out and touch, to speak his truth.

The exploration has begun. Discoveries start occurring, about reality, about others but most critically about the self and its potentials. New frames and categories, new links and commonalities become clear and new comprehensions dawn. If he now owns up, within himself and to others, the discoveries about himself and the external reality he has taken a step. He starts facing what he was unable to see before and owns up potentials, fears and anxieties that he had hitherto disowned. New elements are ready for integration and some are ready to be dropped from his repertoire of action and thought.

He can now conceptualize and create new knowledge for his own guidance and information.

How long does all this take? It happens in a moment that may feel like a lifetime. The time dimension becomes completely subjective and the protagonist may never be the same again. This, in short is the “ends of process work” to keep one in the flow.

So, are you ready to “never be the same again?”, are you prepared to keep changing, not only evolutionarily but by active choice ? Are you willing to 'wake up' and remain awake? - to the inner and outer worlds.
