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Technical Report

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TECHNICAL REPORT

the report .. TRAINER INTERVENTION: A CASE ..

the Authors, .. P.R. Baliga, and P.K. Garg ..

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**INDIAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT
AHMEDABAD**

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Technical Report

Title of the report TRAINER INTERVENTION: A CASE STUDY

Name of the Authors B.R. Baliga and P.K. Garg

Under which area do you like to be classified? Sensitivity Training Behavioural Sciences

ABSTRACT (within 250 words)

..... This paper presents a series of Trainer Interventions
 and their efficacy in building up a Group Climate at a time
 when the Reactive Processes in the Group had reached a
 dangerous point which was affecting the working of the Group. ...
 The observations of these interventions were made by a Group ...
 of observers who were in the Second Phase of their Training ...
 Program for T-group trainers. These observations were then subjected
 to a critical analysis under the Guidance of the Phase-Two
 coordinator and were, then, cross-checked with the observed
 Group and its trainers. The case study is very revealing in
 regard to the manner in which empathy processes can be generated
 in the group and also indicates the efficacy of 'Modelling'
 as a trainer-intervention. The paper also shows the value of
 'Process-level' observation for understanding the underlying group
 processes.

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Date 1st October, 1973

Signature of the Author

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TRAINER INTERVENTION—A CASE STUDY

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August 1973

Indian Institute of Management
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TRAINER INTERVENTION—A CASE STUDY

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One of the enduring dilemmas of a trainer in a T-group situation is to decide on the nature, timing and effects of his intervention in the developmental processes of a group. Though there are undoubtedly a few general guidelines, these, at best, are very empirical in nature. Just as the configurational patterns of interactions, contents, processes, feelings are unique to each group so are the interventions. An experienced T-group trainer, more often than not, intervenes in a rather intuitive manner. This does not mean that he goes by his hunches alone. Consciously or unconsciously he has to evaluate all that has gone on in the group till that moment, the processes in the here and now and the concerns expressed by the various participants. His main concern is that his interventions promote growth and dissipate the dysfunctional processes that could be prevalent in the group. This constant evaluation and coordination of the various inputs provides him with a broad "map" of the group that is helpful to determine for himself his role and interventions in the group. This "coordination, implementation and evaluation process" is an extremely dynamic one at the back of the trainer's mind during the life of the group and for sometime before and after the group meets.

In the pages that follow we take a critical look at a series of trainer interventions made over a day and their efficiency in building up a group climate. The study assumes importance for, in our opinion, had these interventions not been made the build-up of reactive feelings and underlying hostility displayed earlier could have reached such a point as to make the group entirely dysfunctional.

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THE STUDY

The study evolved as a part of the training process for a group of aspiring T-group trainers. ISAB, a professional body had recently undertaken to train new personnel for 'T'-groups in India. The study was carried out during a summer program for trainees who were at different phases of their professional growth. All the participants, except one, had experience as a member of at least one T-group. The faculty comprised of well-known trainers.

In the sessions under consideration—3rd day of the phase one training—members of the phase 2 programme observed the handling of phase 1 group by two senior trainers. They were asked by their phase co-ordinator to focus on the trainer interventions as well as on certain specific members of the group. The critiquing was to be based on the observed data of these sessions only. However, the permanent observer of Phase 1 was also invited to provide validation of critiquing from the history of the group. Such historical data was used to elaborate, modify or reject certain hypotheses regarding the trainer intervention. The critiquing was carried out by the Phase 2 trainers under the active guidance of the Phase 2 coordinator. The hypotheses worked out were then presented to the Phase 1 group and their trainers to check their validity. This checking confirmed, in the majority of cases, that the hypotheses that had been built up in the critiquing session were in fact valid.

HISTORY OF THE PHASE 1 GROUP

The group was essentially a "stranger group". It was not a stranger group in the strict sense because a few members of the group had experience of each other in the past (as members of the same organization or through professional contacts). It comprised of senior executives from various organisations in India, members of religious orders, and faculty members of some educational institutions. Another important feature of the group composition was the presence of only one woman participant.

HISTORY OF THE GROUP

At the start, as usual, there was discomfort expressed in an intense silence. A member of the group seized on two points to make

an entry into the group. These were:

- (1) the faculty had decided to combine persons in the O.D. programme along with the Phase 1 members owing to insufficient registration.
- (2) the living conditions at the place where the programme was being conducted were considered to be below standard.

The other members of the group immediately seized on these two factors to reduce their anxiety on the silence and also indicate obliquely their hostility towards the trainers who were considered to be a part of the Organising team for the programme. Various members spoke on the ethics or otherwise of merging O.D. with Phase 1. At about this stage of group development four sub-groups were evident:

- (1) persons extremely hostile towards the trainer
- (2) persons who were neutral
- (3) persons who were pro-trainers
- (4) persons who were either indifferent or bored

All of a sudden some members of the group realised that things were not moving on to the emotional and "self" level. As they had been through a T-group they knew what was supposed to happen. The hostility then shifted from the trainers to the member who had initiated this anxiety-breaking entry. The member reacted quickly by saying that he was prepared to drop the topic but as this would lead to a vacuum in the group the other members were not agreeable. The group then shifted around in circles trying to evolve some sort of a consensus either on or against a member's point. All through this process the trainers were silent. Each member sought a consensus around his point and was unwilling to examine the others point of view. In this process the group went through the usual phases of ice-breaking, hostility towards the trainers, pairing etc.

As the group moved on a new pattern emerged. It seemed to be progressing in fits and starts. The minute any member of the group started talking about feelings of the 'self', the group would pick it up momentarily and then drop it like a hot potato. This created a climate in which the members of the group became very defensive and

reactive; no feeling or empathy processes emerged. Throughout this build-up of reactive processes, the interventions from the trainers were extremely minimal. In fact, the majority of interventions came from one member who had had some T-group training experience earlier; his interventions were extremely disliked by one section of the group but favoured by another section which more or less polarised the group into two parts.

At about this stage of group development, a member stated that he could not confront others as he was afraid of hurting anyone and that he would like to work only through a process of consensus. The trainers quickly seized this cue and snatches of what went on are reported below:

- Trainer : "So you are afraid of 'confrontation'. Now could you name one person in the group to whom you would be uncomfortable in saying "No".
- Member (hesitant) : I wouldn't like to do this
- Trainer : Come on! You have to do this
- Member (looking around) : I think that I would uncomfortable saying no to Maya (the woman member)
- Trainer : Could you share with us why you would feel uncomfortable to say "No" to her.
- Member : Its just that I don't know her very well; also I am confused—when I was first introduced to her she appeared very cheerful, spoke a lot but here in the group she's been very quiet; also she's a lady.
- Trainer : Does the fact that she's lady have quite a bit to do with this feeling of discomfort.
- Member : Ithink so....

After this interaction had taken place there was an intense silence for some time. Then Maya wanted to know whether the fact that she was the only lady member in the group was making the group feel uncomfortable. Practically all the members answered in the negative. And then they in turn wanted to know whether she was feeling uncomfortable being the only lady member in the group which was once again answered in the negative. The trainer then asked Maya how she felt on being singled out. Maya answered that she had not liked it one bit. Thus the last stages of the sessions on the first day of group life were somewhat akin to an interrogation process.

Immediately after the session concluded Maya discussed with a faculty member what had happened to her in the group and her inability to confront the member who had implicitly discriminated against her for being a woman. This faculty member with whom she was very close suggested that she deal with the situation herself and that if she felt like confronting she should go ahead and confront.

The sessions on the second day commenced with Maya asking the other members for their views on the "Role of Women". She said that she had felt hurt yesterday on being singled out; other members in the group were as such strangers to the initiating member. She said that one of her major problems was her inability to take initiative or to confront. She had also added that people were rather sceptical about her role as a career woman who had in addition also to be a housewife. Repeated exposure to such barbed comments had resulted in her being pushed back everytime she had initiated a serious discussion, the consequence being that she was now afraid to get involved in an "intellectual discussion". Being graceful, people demanded that she perform the "social-hostess" and housewife role exclusively. She then challenged the member who had "discriminated against her" to tell her what he thought a "woman" was. The member retorted by saying that he could not answer such an abstract question and he had already given his reasons for saying why he felt uncomfortable with her and as far as he was concerned these were the only reasons and that he had not meant any insult as he himself had a very high regard for working women. Perhaps this emphatic and hostile statement set the direction of hostility towards Maya. She was being told not to be impertinent through defying male authority. Quite a few of the group members were feeling uncomfortable with this topic and

they indirectly tried their best to change the topic but a small section of the group including the trainers brought the topic of "Women" back to the group. As the foci of perceptions on this topic were at great divergence, the discussions generated a lot of heat. A small section of the group was, by now, getting extremely irritated; they gave the impression that a mountain was being made out of a mole hill and every thwarted effort of theirs to change the topic made them more and more hostile towards the trainer and the members of the group who were in favour of continuing with this topic. A couple of members of the group did try to explore this topic through personal experience but apparently others were not comfortable doing so and wanted to preserve the group processes at an "intellectual level".

On the whole the members felt accused by Maya's statement about her experience in the Man's World and counteracted by asking her: "What was it in her that had made her react so intensely on the "Role of Women". Maya in turn tried to tell the group that it was not only her problem but that it was the problem of the group as well as indicated by the initiating member himself. Thus the group was effectively moving at a level where each member was asking the other members of the group to be more open but was himself not prepared to be so. Consequently no empathy process had been generated and reactive feelings were building up to greater heights. Another phenomenon was that the irritated sub-group was reacting in a hostile manner to Maya and whenever they tried to drop the topic, the other members of the group insisted that the topic be continued. The trainers, like the rest of the group, focussed on Maya to share her feelings and demanded through interventions that she look at 'herself'. This Maya saw as collusion and felt angry. It made her insist on her earlier demands that the group faces upto its problems which included their feelings towards her presence as the only female in the group. She as much voiced this feeling by accusing the trainer of having failed to support her in her hour of need. Not knowing how to cope up with the process that were going on the group sought to take 'flight' at the slightest pretext. These opportunities were provided fairly often by the one member of the group who hadn't been to one before. He appeared rather perplexed and his perplexion was utilised by the group members as centres of flight. Maya then once again voiced her feeling that the trainers had failed to support her or guide the group. This accusation was actively supported by another group member who had been repeatedly trying to put things in the proper perspective. Despite these attempts, the group remained entrenched in a hostile interaction between the males and the single female.

At this stage the trainers decided to try and break this reactive response matrix through the use of Role Exercise. He requested Maya to come to the centre and express her feeling to any member of the group who she thought understood her best. She refused to do so. The trainer then sought permission from her to let another group member play her role which was once again rejected in an outright manner. Just when things were heading for a stalemate, a group member started playing her role as an aside and the trainer joined in this scheming. This was intensely and expressively resented by the other members of the group. Maya also joined in the end charging the trainer of joining hands in acts of ravaging her sanctity. The group fell back to its old patterns of directing all queries towards Maya i.e. turning its'f into a court of prosecution where Maya was the criminal in the dock and each group member was the prosecutor. Maya became more and more withdrawn and ultimately burst out saying that she had had enough of interrogation and that she would not answer any questions thereafter. Despite her categorical assertion the group members continued to direct queries at her which met with no response. The group refused to give up its defensive and what appeared to Maya a sadistic role. Having failed to shift the focus on to some other issue the trainer decided to exert his authority as a trainer and imposed a "Ban" on discussing Maya or her problems for the remaining sessions of the day. In spite of the ban some members tried to defy it by oblique statements such as "If one has this problem..." but all such attempts were summarily put down by the trainers.

It seemed as if the males in the group were so frightened to face the problem of 'man and women' that they became 'naked and blatant' in aggressing on the woman who confronted them.

It is in the context of this history that observations were made on the third day.

THE SESSIONS UNDER OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS OF TRAINER INTERVENTIONS

As the group met on the third morning there was an intense awkward silence for sometime. Then one of the group members asked about an incident in which one of the trainers had had an argument with the Hotel Manager and had called him some names. The trainer seized this cue

in order to express his feelings vis a vis himself and vis a vis the group. He said:

I have been thinking about the whole of yesterday's sessions and especially about the remarks made by a few of you outside that my interventions had been very ineffective and that they had all flopped. I have been trying to understand what was it in me.* that made me blind to what was going on; at times I was not even involved with the group. The morning's incident had undoubtedly made me upset but then this doesn't really explain my preoccupation and why I failed to see what was happening. Perhaps the group could help me understand what I was doing in the group.**

We, the critiquing group, hypothesised that the trainer was using the process of "modelling" in order to break the prison that each individual in the group had built for himself. The individual might not have been aware of this captivity but what was need at that time in the group was to construct a more efficient group reality in which the individual would lose the fear of taking risks with himself. We hypothesised that by modelling he could indicate that he was not infallible; that he was receiving as much from the group as he was giving it and that was open to receiving feedback about himself. We felt that obliquely he was telling the members of the group that they had set up defensive mechanisms for themselves.

Going a step further one could ask what were the other options that were available to the trainer for his opening. Essentially the trainer could have looked at:

- (1) The interactions in the group, analyse them and present to the group such data as: "Who is doing what; to whom etc."

or

* getting on to the "self level" instead of explaining things away
 ** showing a willingness to receive a feedback from the group members

- (2) Identify himself with the group through self-presentation or modelling.

We feel that the trainer chose the latter alternative because of his need to reestablish himself with the group and secondly to serve as the nucleus for empathy building processes. Moreover, the first alternative, if not continuously monitored could lead to a rehash of the reactive processes. Moreover, the alternative chosen also enabled him to distinguish implicitly, at least, between the:

- (a) Functional Role--a transient role--i.e. What is he doing
- (b) Self Role--a stable role--what is he being

He must have hypothesised that emotive learning--for which the group situation is designed--would take place only when the "Self-Role" had been dealt with.

After this modelling the trainer, conceptualised, very briefly why he had made the type of interventions he had made, focusing on the "Ban". The minute he spoke of the "Ban", a section of the group claimed that the ban had been effective while another section were equally voluble in claiming that it had not been so. The group pressed the trainer to tell them what he thought the consequences of the ban had been. The trainer retorted thus:

I am not sure what the consequences were.
Could the group help me understand these.

By throwing the question back at the group the trainer achieved two things:

- (1) In our opinion had he answered the question he would have effectively polarised the group into two camps which could have generated a lot of discussion and arguments culminating in the creation of a horde of new reactive feelings.
- (2) He also succeeded in setting an explicit task for the group to work through. While the group was wrestling with this task a member of the group pointed out that whether or not the ban had been effective the fact remained that the main problem had not been solved. Maya emphatically agreed. She went on to say:

I refused to play the role yesterday because I thought: What is the point; everytime I said something, people would throw the question back at me saying: 'Why don't I look into my "Self"! And I was saying that I had looked into myself and realised what were my drawbacks and I am trying to work through them. I wanted the group members to look into themselves and answer: 'What is it in you that makes you perceive me in this light?' And I didn't see anyone do this and so I decided to shut up.

This was a critical phase in the development of the group. The responses that were made to this statement were:

- 'You are not prepared to listen'
- 'You are not willing to accept feedback'
- 'You are making such a big issue out of nothing'
- 'You are saying that you are not willing to submit to male authority'

to quote a few. These statements indicated that reactive feelings were once again about to dominate unless some direct and active measures were taken by the trainer. What went on after this is given below:

- Trainer : Maya, could you do me a favour,
- Maya (hesitantly) : I suppose 'Yes'... provided I can do it.
- Trainer : Well then! Imagine that these (rest of the group members) are a group of school children and that you are the headmaster. Give them some task to do.
- Maya : Any task,
- Trainer : Yes, any task.
- Maya : I will have to think about this
- Trainer : Sure! Take your time

In our opinion, the trainer hoped to achieve the following through the mechanism of the task:

- (1) ^{not} Indicate to the group that it was/the trainer who was controlling the group. It was the lady member who was in control of the group and the group was telling her do so in order to escape from the real problem. This could be inferred from the manner in which all queries were directed towards her and also the manner in which the responses to these decided the unfolding patterns of the group.
- (2) This control that was exercised by Maya in collusion with the group was dysfunctional i.e. it was negative control as was evinced by its impediment to the evolution of a group climate. If this control could be made positive then it would be useful as a resource in building up the group climate.
- (3) Through this task it would also be possible to obtain indications as to which of the group members were having problems with the lady members i.e. those who would not have her on an equal footing and an individual in her own right.

Immediately after the task had been set there was an uncomfortable silence. One could feel the tension build up. Then one of the members suddenly burst out saying:

Mr...(trainer) you are controlling the group. You have always controlled the group and I don't like this.

There was an audible sigh of relief and another member joined in to say that he also thought that the trainer was controlling the group and he acted in a rather hostile manner to the trainer. The trainer kept silent. Then a couple of other members came in!

- Member 1 : But Mr....(trainer)yesterday you said this...
- Member 2 : You intervened at the wrong time
- Member 3 : What is the purpose in giving us this task.
I think that it is extremely irrelevant to the issue on hand.

In the opinion of the critiquing group the trainer through this process succeeded in diverting the manifest hostility from Maya to himself.

At this stage the trainer intervened.

- Trainer : You are not allowing Maya to set you a task.
(Turning to Maya) Are you ready with your Task.
- Maya : I am not quite ready. I want some time and I don't exactly know what type of task I should set.
- Member 1 : See, I told you she doesn't want to set that task.
- Maya : I said no such thing. I want to do it but you are not allowing me to do it.
- Trainer : Well now imagine once again that these are children and now set them some task as a headmaster.

The above sequence of interactions indicate that the group members were very reluctant to carry out the task. There was an underlying fear and anxiety being churned up; apparently arising from two factors:

- (1) Anxiety about the nature of the task that would be set and the necessity to carry out the task.
- (2) The direction the group processes would take once the task had been set.

Moreover, the trainer intervention, served to reinforce the authority given to Maya and also to emphasise symbolically that the group members were hindering the group processes. However, the subsequent interactions indicated that the group was in no mood to get on with this task. At this stage the trainer intervened once again.

Trainer : "As all of you seem so reluctant to allow Maya to give you the task let me ask you a question. Had she set the task how many amongst you would have been prepared to carry out the task?"

As this was precisely what the trainer had been trying to establish all along—the group too doing its best to evade it—there was a stunned silence after this remark. There were attempts made to evade this question too but the trainer stood firm and insisted that this question be answered before the group progressed any further. On seeing that there was no way out, the members started admitting one by one whether they would/would not have carried out the task. Through this process the group was able to identify the members who had had problems with man-women relationships. Surprisingly, however, it turned out that the member who had been the cause for initiating this topic didn't seem to have any problems. The trainer then suggested that it would help the group to resolve these feelings and asked the group the manner in which they would like to go about resolving the same***. A member suggested that these 'problem-members' form an inner group in which they could discuss their problems; some members were in favour with this suggestion whereas others weren't. Before a complete consensus could be arrived at it was time for the tea break and the trainer presented a crisp and lucid diagnosis of the group problems as he saw it. He also requested them to reflect over what he had said and then decide on how they should go about resolving the problems after the tea break.

When the group met after the tea break the topic on which it focused its attention was the resolution of the problem confronting the group. A member said:

"It has been decided that the group goes about it in this way..."

Whereupon the other members reacted immediately saying:

*** By asking the group to seek alternatives, the trainer was trying to build up a group climate through consensus; had he suggested a specific method he would have run the risk of polarising the group.

"It was not decided; it was only suggested". The trainer at this stage kept quiet—one could call it a silent intervention. We felt that he was giving the group enough rope to decide on a method to resolve this issue. He also did not wish to encourage group dependency on him. The group, however, kept going round in circles which forced the trainer to intervene as follows:

Instead of arguing about how we should go about resolving this, let me suggest a way and if it is acceptable to all of us we will go along. Let me define the problem as a man-woman relationship problem and we will discuss this in the group itself without forming an inner group and see where it gets us.

In our opinion this was a very crucial and timely intervention. The focus of the group had by now shifted over to the three 'problem-members'. This definition served to indicate clearly that two parties were involved and managed to bring Maya back into the group. Though the group members had, all along, a general idea of what the problem was about they had apparently failed to pinpoint the problem in order to provide themselves with a format for discussing and resolving the issue. The trainer achieved precisely this by his intervention. He provided a format but, simultaneously, left the definition of the situation sufficiently wide in perspective in order that the group could decide what to make out of this issue for itself. Moreover, this definition also left the problem at a relatively manifest level; had he defined it more specifically and at a deeper level it could conceivably have blocked the group from exploring the issue. The reader could well ask at this stage: "Why did the trainer not choose to use 'modelling' as an intervention at this stage." As mentioned at the beginning of this article such questions cannot be provided with a categorical answer. We think that had he done so then probably two consequences could have followed:

- (1) he might have overstructured the situation for the members of the group.
- (2) he could have increased the dependency on the trainer and also created a demi-god image for himself.

Once the situation had been defined, one of the group members narrated some personal experiences through which he had developed a mental set that women were inferior to men and that if they were given authority they would use it to control men. Hence he was very reluctant to let women be given any authority and that was the reason for his reluctance to carry out the task. Immediately following this another member narrated his personal experiences in which work and career demands made it very difficult for him to develop any degree of intimacy with his wife as a person and how these feelings upset him and made him tense and anxious all the time.

As these experiences were being narrated one could feel empathy and empathy processes building up in the group. After the second member had finished his narrative there was a pregnant silence. Apparently the group members were waiting for the third member to start narrating his experiences but then he did not show any indication of doing so. In critiquing the group raised the question as to why the trainer had not allowed the silence and the tension to build up on this member. We thought that had he done so this member - who had been putting on a front all along - would have only reacted in a defensive manner, thus destroying all the empathy and empathy processes that had been built up. Just then the trainer intervened and started narrating his experiences with his wife—a modelling intervention. He described how in the interests of furthering his own career he had neglected his wife and had "manipulated things so that his wife would not grow." Only recently had he realised how his wife must have felt in that period and now he was doing his best to allow his wife to develop both professionally and personally. He described very poignantly the feelings of his wife during her period of "suppression" (quotes and words ours).

This intervention achieved a few things very effectively:

- (1) It showed to the group that the trainer was also a person, with his own strengths and weaknesses. This made his acceptance in the group complete.
- (2) It also showed how the trainer was open to an emotive renewal of the self; it indicated a willingness to be open to feedback and to act on these inputs.

- (3) Moreover, in a very subtle manner it changed the focus of the empathy processes. All along during the earlier personal narratives the focus was on the feelings of the self of the narrator i.e. "I felt hurt when my wife did this etc. Now the trainer's narrative opened the door for empathy processes to be generated for the objects of one's actions i.e. the other person.

This intervention was deeply stirring to the members of the group and triggered off a host of personal narratives at the feelings level from the other members of the group. Maya through the narration of her personal experiences clearly indicated to the group how her feelings had developed on the subject of giving a woman her due. This narration put things in the proper perspective.

CONCLUSION

At the end of the critiquing session, the group summarised what could have been in the mind of the Phase-1 trainer at the start of the sessions on the third day. These were:

- (1) Reactive feelings were at a very high level in the group.
- (2) Empathy generating processes had not evolved.
- (3) The whole group processes revolved around one member; the tenacity with which she was pursued indicated that there was some "hidden agenda" that had not come to the surface.
- (4) As a result of the above, a "definition of the situation" could not be evolved in which to build up an atmosphere of trust for sharing of experience.

- (5) There was extreme hostility towards the trainer; one section of the group perceiving him as ineffective and unhelpful, the other section perceiving him as controlling. In brief, one could say that the trainers were effectively alienated from the group.

He may also have recognised his tasks as:

- (1) Reestablish his identity as a trainer and make himself acceptable to the group.
- (2) Prune all reactive feelings and thus build up a climate for empathy generating processes.
- (3) Work through with the problem faced by the lady member of the group towards some resolution such that the group would be able to build up a positive group climate.

As he worked through with the group he was able to achieve what he had set for himself and managed to create a group climate for emotive learning.

Another question that was raised was regarding the role of the co-trainer, who had maintained complete silence even when directly sought by the trainer. As a result there was practically no data through which to comprehend and evaluate the role he had played. Thus the critiquing group had to fall back on past experiences. The Phase 2 coordinator said that having worked with him and knowing his style he would have done so as his philosophy was to let the resources emerge from within the group. As these were forthcoming in good measure he had permitted the group direct and guide itself.