

Exploring and Managing Differences in Groups and Organisations

February 5 - 10, 2010

Pune, India

Third Group Relations Conference

Offered by



Human and Institutional Development Forum
Bangalore

Supported by

The Sir Ratan Tata Trust
Mumbai

Exploring and Managing Differences in Groups and Organisations

An Experiential Group Relations Conference

"We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion."

Suma Varughese

Editor-in-chief, Life Positive Magazine

Our greatest strength as a human race is our ability to acknowledge our differences; our greatest weakness is our failure to embrace them.

Judith Henderson

Composer, lyricist

Why is understanding and working on differences important?

We live in a society where diversity pervades our social life, groups and organisations that we belong to. *"Diversity encompasses acceptance and respect. It means understanding that each individual is unique, and recognizing our individual differences. These can be along the dimensions of caste, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, colour, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual."*¹

However, we tend to focus on differences between people all the time. *Difference* has a more negative connotation; it isolates and points out dissimilarities between people. There are insidious ways that differences influence the way we are and how we relate to each other.

At a deeper level, there is a search in each one of us to be meaningfully related for fulfillment. Yet the focus on differences mars relationships and leaves us all with residues. Opinions, biases and deeply constructed value positions wall us on all sides - preventing us from looking at others from their perspectives and opening up channels of communication and dialogue for consensus building and greater understanding. Our social fabric is deeply fissured - torn, more than ever before, by rigid positions and hierarchies that stem from differences in caste, class, religion, ethnicity, gender, and political ideologies among others. Everyone wants to tell everyone else how to lead his or her life.

¹ <http://gladstone.uoregon.edu/~asuomca/diversityinit.html>

At the base of this problem is that while nature produces differences, human beings allocate values on differences. At an extreme point of this evaluation, human beings have put themselves above nature so that we talk of “man and nature”, and not “man and the rest of nature”. Also, for example, we debase animals by talking of someone as behaving like an animal when the fact is that in terms of atrocities and cruelty human beings easily beat all other animals. A predator kills for satisfying its hunger, for survival; humans kill for sport, envy, jealousy, increasing possession etc. Thus, the idea of race was created by social scientists belonging to imperialist European nations to justify exploitation of “inferior races”. Religion was brought in for further justification. Thus Christianity had declared non-whites as soulless people who could be coerced to become Christians to save their souls or killed with impunity since they were like any other (soulless) animals. The Hindu religion was used to create a dehumanizing system called the *jati* system or caste system also for, basically creating an exploitative order backed by projection of the evil in one’s own group on the so-called lower order of castes. This kind of converting differences of one kind or the other into inequality has been going on from time immemorial and has today taken on such proportions that unless one learns to look at the reality of differences for oneself by reflecting on and exploring one’s actual experience of the differences, destructive forces already unleashed in the society will perhaps lead to some kind of an apocalypse. This Conference provides the opportunity to precisely do that, i.e. to explore and reflect on one’s experience of differences and test those against age-old ideas of inequality based on superficial views on differences.

Organisations are continually faced with challenges arising from difference in position, roles and tasks and concomitant privileges, power, and opportunities. However, we assume that as the task brings us together in organisations we are all, in some sense, equal. We do not question or acknowledge how the differences affect us. We are thus confronted with a virtual web, which keeps us both from relating to people and from being really true to our role and fulfillment of task.

Differences continue to influence us – consciously and more often unconsciously. The influence is often unconscious because we are not aware of the deeply held beliefs, stereotypes and prejudices, and associated fears and anxieties that we hold against that which is different from us, or of how we are perhaps seeing in others what we refuse to see within ourselves. Every now and then we need to look at ourselves, examine deeply our own experiences and emotions, in order to understand the other. This process of understanding and being in touch with ourselves gives a deeper sense of being in touch with not only ourselves but through that, in relating to the other. It establishes a deep connection to self and others, leading in turn to the acceptance of differences as a rich potential that holds positive energy for change. Or, to put it in terms of Upanishadic teachings based

on experiential learning, it is for us to reclaim our heritage through realizing that the connections already exist.

What are Groups Relations Conferences?

Group Relations Conferences are temporary educational institutions for learning through direct experience. They are designed to provide a variety of opportunities for members to exercise leadership and authority in the here and now situations, unravel and deal with the problems and resistances encountered in doing this, and manage oneself in role. The hope is that these explorations, experiences, and insights, will lead to transformed ways of being and relating in a range of interpersonal, institutional and societal spaces.

The focus is not only on one's conscious behavior, thoughts and emotions but also the unconscious processes - those that take place beyond one's normal awareness within one's self and in the groups that one works with. The GRC does not focus on individual/personality variables or interpersonal relations like other temporary experiential learning institutions do. It focuses on groups as systems and how they develop a conscious and unconscious life. The individual member has the opportunity to discover where she / he is in such a milieu. In a variety of events members can exercise their authority and deal with the problems and resistance encountered in engaging with the primary task of the Conference. Since GRCs do not have any set curricula or evaluation of performance, members accept or reject learning and insights based on their personal authority. They are therefore, likely to achieve different kinds of learning.

The Group Relations Conferences (also known as Working Conferences) were started by The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, London, in 1957, based on the pioneering work of W. R. Bion. The design and structure of the Conferences have undergone many changes in various countries the world over. However, the focus on groups as systems and learning through experience has remained intact. GRCs in India were started in 1973, which was before GRCs came into existence in any other European country, Israel, Australia and South America. Participating members have so far come from a very wide range of institutions - the corporate sector, civil services and other government organisations, the churches, academic institutions, consulting organisations, NGOs, networks and movements.

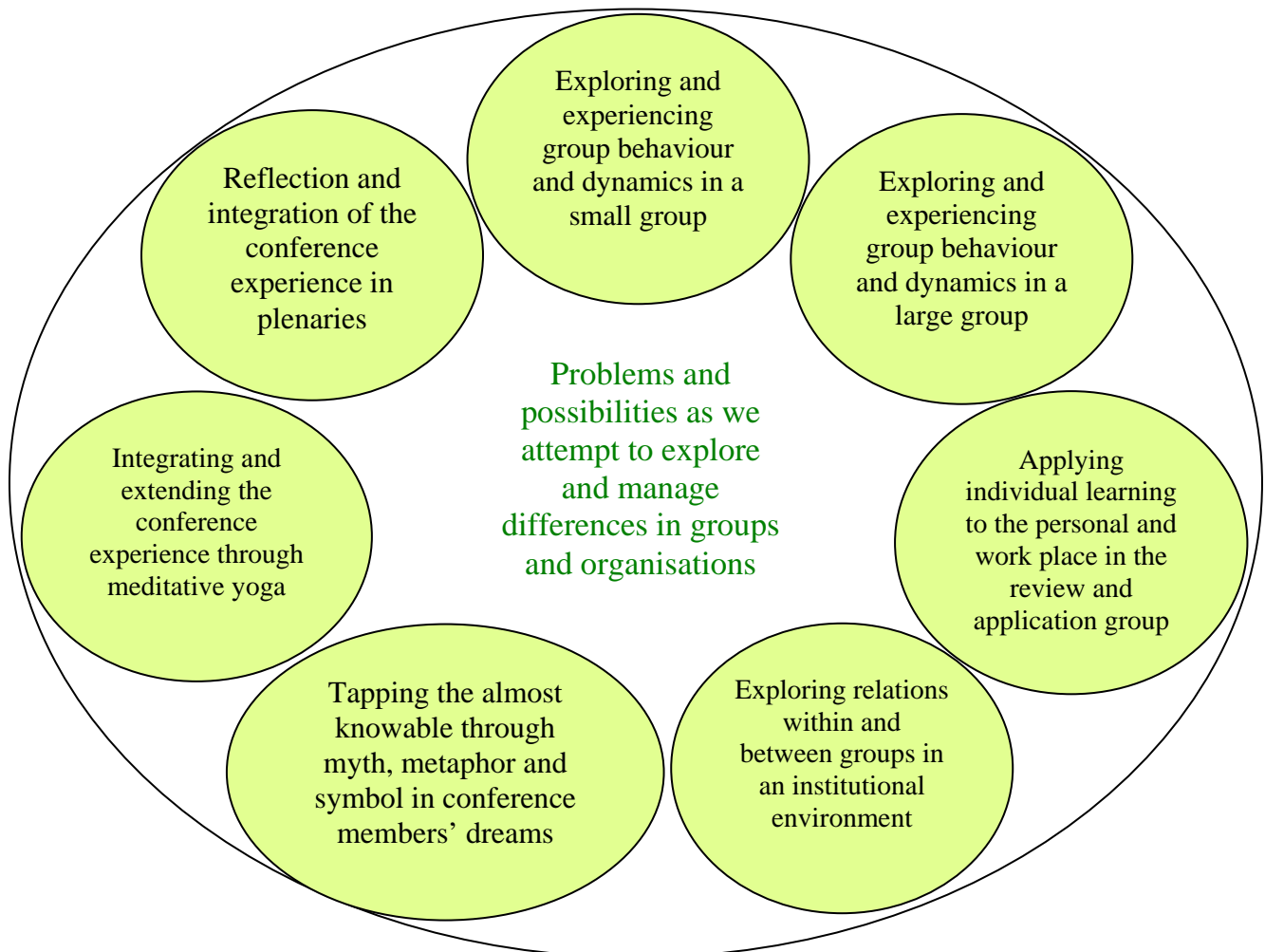
Primary Task

Primary task is the one that defines the nature and core purpose of the institution. If not worked at, the institution would lose its meaning. This Group Relations Conference has the following primary task:

To explore the nature of assumptions that underlie our experience of differences and therefore, the possibilities and problems associated with working with differences within the conference as an institution.

Each event in the conference also has a stated primary task, which is in relation to the overall conference primary task.

Processes in the Group Relations Conference



Conference Design and Events:

The Conference is a temporary learning institution that provides repeated opportunities through various events to differentiate between here and now reality and fantasy, i.e. unchecked assumptions based on both conscious past experience and experience stored in the unconscious. In the absence of the hurly-burly of day to day life and the presence of a minimum number of structures in the Conference, it is possible to find the space to reflect, explore and connect one's outward behaviour with one's inner data of thoughts and emotions. Each event is planned to vary the view from which one perceives oneself and others, which may change as sessions proceed.

The stance of the Conference is one of learning and developing a spirit of enquiry into the realities of one's experience in the here and now through attention, reflection and exploration. The staff members of the Conference are neither in the role of teachers, nor are they what is commonly known as the "faculty".

Though Staff and Members are both participants, the conference accords them different roles. Staff members are allocated to each of the events in the role of consultants or in the role of collective management to help keep the focus on the primary task. Individually they also take the roles of Director, Administrator and Consultant to offer hypotheses and other forms of interventions relevant to the primary task, on the basis of their here and now experiences. The hypotheses and interventions of the staff are aimed at highlighting group process in relation to the primary task and it is for each member to scrutinize what it means for her or him. While the staff members in their collective management role manage the Conference boundaries of task, time and territory, it is expected that the membership will also use its managing capacities to manage their boundaries.

The Plenaries: The Conference begins with an Opening Plenary (OP) that has the task of introducing the conference as well as of exploring one's joining experience. The Inter Group Event also begins in its own plenary (IGE OP). There will be an opening plenary of the Institutional Event (IE OP) to introduce the event and also a closing plenary to reflect on the experiences of the event (IE CP). The Closing Plenary (CP) on the last day is for reflecting on and exploring one's Conference experience as a whole, and in particular for focusing on one's learning in the Conference. Other Plenaries (P) have the task of reflecting on one's experience in the conference.

The Study System comprises of work groups of two sizes, the small and the large group.

Small Study Event (SSE): This event consists of groups of up to 12 members. The task of the SSE is **to study the behaviour of the group as it occurs**. It provides opportunities for exploring emotions and thoughts as they arise, and how this process is affected by the dynamics operating at the level of the group. Membership of each SSE group remains the same throughout. A consultant is allocated to each SSE group.

Large Study Event (LSE): This event comprises of all the members. The number of consultants allocated varies with the size of membership and in this Conference the LSE is likely to have two consultants. The task of the LSE **is the same as that of the SSE**. However, the difference between the two lies in the nature of the dynamics. In the SSE, the size of the group allows everyone to see at a glance the others, while the size of the group in the LSE implies that some may be heard but may be out of sight, paving the way for such phenomena as sub-group formation, myth making, identity crisis, etc.

Conference Sensing Matrix (CSM): Group work on dreams and reveries has proved to be a fertile field for getting a purchase on the group's unconscious dynamics. The conference sensing matrix is intended to share dreams and reveries that occur in the conference and to allow, like in a matrix, (a place where things grow) to build or grow together from this a sensing of the conference experience. The task of the CSM is **to share one's dreams and reveries, associate with (not analyse) one's own and others' dreams, reveries and physical sensations and connect these with one's experience of the Conference**.

Yoga Event: This will provide an opportunity for members to practice breathing and physical awareness postures or *asanas* that attune one to the mind-body-spirit connection. The yoga event offers yet another way (and task) to **experientially integrate the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects within the conference**. (Loose fitting clothes {sewn} will be appropriate for the yoga sessions.)

The Review and Application Groups (RAAG): The task of the RAAG will be to review experience in order to reflect on how one has been taking up one's member role in various events in the conference. This reflection is expected to lead to applying this learning back into the conference and to one's work and personal roles back home. The composition of these groups will remain the same throughout the RAAG. Each group will be provided with the services of a consultant, and the members of the group will be encouraged to consult with one another.

The Institution as a System:

Inter Group Event (IGE): The group is a basic unit of most organisations and institutional spaces. This event provides an opportunity to work on the task of understanding the relationship and dynamics between groups and within groups with particular reference to the dynamics of differences. Members self select into groups based on criteria that they believe are relevant to the task. A consultant is allocated to each territory

Institutional Event (IE): All of us carry in our minds pictures of institutions to which we belong or belonged. These pictures include those that we consciously believe to be true or those that we wish to be true. We also carry unconscious pictures of these institutions. In order to understand through actual experience the dynamics that take place in institutions based on the pictures-in-the-mind, the task recommended for this event is to **study the picture of the Conference as an institution as it unfolds**. This event also provides opportunities to explore (a) the picture of management that one holds in the mind, (b) the relatedness and relationship between groups and (c) the nature of delegation and the problems encountered in giving and taking of authority to be exercised on behalf of others. Territories will be made available to members to deploy themselves in any way they choose for engaging with the task of the event. Staff will be present in the role of collective management and provide consultancy on request to members' territories for engaging with the event's task. The IE opens in a plenary to introduce the event and closes in another plenary in which the task will be to reflect on the experience of the IE as it has unfolded.

Conference Management and Staff:

Conference Director: Anuradha Prasad
Pre- Conference Administrator: Vanya Joseph
Conference Administrator: Brinda Pancholi

Consultants will be drawn from among:

Gouranga Chattopadhyay
Zahid Gangjee
Brinda Pancholi
Anuradha Prasad
Atul Sapre
Philomena Vincent
Rosemary Viswanath

Staff Profile:

Gouranga P. Chattopadhyay D.Phil.Sc. (Calcutta University), F.A.Sc.&T. (West Bengal), F.R.A.I. (London), F.A.I.S.A. & F.C.S.A. (Melbourne); Emeritus Professor, Academy of Human Resources, Ahmedabad; Independent OD Consultant, Executive Coach & Counsellor; Karma Sannyasin, Bihar School of Yoga.

Zahid Hoosein Gangjee B.Sc. Psych. Hons, M.Sc. Applied Psych. (Calcutta University); Fellow (Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad); Chief Executive, Zahid Gangjee & Associates, Kolkata.

Brinda Pancholi B.A. Psychology; M.S.W. (MS University, Vadodara) associated with HIDRC (Human and Institutional Development Resource Center), Janvikas, Ahmedabad in providing HID support to individuals, groups and organizations working with marginalized communities; Capacity and perspective building of grass root organizations, accompanying them in their struggle for the rights of the marginalized, strategic planning, linking them with advocacy organizations /networks are her interventions to strengthen civil society organizations.

Anuradha Prasad Ph.D. (Agricultural Extension, IARI, New Delhi) involved with the development sector for the past 29years; Facilitator of group processes and facilitator of change processes in a wide variety of development organizations; Professional member, Indian Society for Applied Behavioural Science; Certificate course on depth psychology, Jung Center, India; Executive Director of Human and Institutional Development Forum, Bangalore

Atul Sapre B.Sc. (Mathematics) P.G.D.M. has been an academic for over 20 years; Was Professor in Finance and subsequently Director at Institute of Management Development and Research, Pune; Currently visiting faculty at Institute for Rural Management, Anand and was a visiting faculty at Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad; Trained in Behavioral Science and Experiential Learning at ISISD and Tavistock Institute for Human Relations; Currently Director of Sumedhas Academy for Human Context and has directed two internship program in Organization Development for the Academy; Now works as an independent consultant in the area of business planning and Organization Development.

Philomena Vincent B.Sc., B.Ed., Director, Aikya Bangalore; Treasurer-Bion Institute; Anchor, Aagaz Academy Karnataka (THP).

Rosemary Viswanath B.Sc. (Hons) Mathematics (Delhi University), P.G.D.M. (Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore); Involved with Organizational strategy and change processes with social development and justice organisations; Professional member, Indian Society for Applied Behavioural Science; Orientation Committee Member of International Forum for Social Innovation (Paris); Director, Learning Network, Bangalore and Chief Functionary, EQUATIONS.

About the Sponsor Organisation:

Human and Institutional Development Forum (HIDF), Bangalore

HIDF was set up in 2000 by a group of human resource development professionals to work on human and institutional development for the nonprofit sector. The services of HIDF focus on enhancing competencies and increasing effectiveness through: (a) intensive support in designing and guiding human and institutional development processes in organizations; (b) organisation development consulting to help organisations respond to their changing environment; and c) action research. The Forum conducts the Organisational Change Facilitation Programme (OCFP) to develop the capacity to facilitate planned change in social development organizations.

Administrative details:

Conference Venue:

BAIF Development Research Foundation

N H No 4, Mumbai-Bangalore Road,
Near Vardhman Petrol Pump; opp Popular Nagar
Warje,
Pune, 411029,
India
PH: 91 20 25231661

This is a residential programme and accommodation is on twin-sharing basis. Single room accommodation can be considered subject to availability. The administrator has to be contacted about requirement and about contribution to the costs prior to applying.

Timings /registration and reaching the venue:

Participants are expected to arrive latest by **1200 noon** on the **5th of February 2010**. Detailed information on how to reach the venue will be sent to participants when they apply.

Registration begins at 1130 am and the Conference will open punctually with the Opening Plenary at **1330 hours** on **February 5, 2010**. The Conference ends at **1430 hours** on **February 10, 2010**.

Application details

Contribution for the Conference

- Individuals from Non-Profit organisations / Networks / Development and Social justice sectors: **Rs 10,000 per head.**
- Individuals from Corporate Organisations/ International organisations / Universities / Individuals working with these sectors / International applicants: **Rs 20,000 per head.**

A few bursaries are available for applicants from non-profit organisations and individuals working with social justice sectors on a first-come, first-served basis. Applicants need to clearly state their case for bursary along with the completed application.

Applications will be accepted on a first-come first-served basis, provided they are accompanied by the member application form signed by the applicant and the conference contribution in full. **Application forms without conference contributions enclosed will not be accepted.**

Contributions for participation by demand draft or local cheque payable at **Bangalore** in favor of “**HID Forum**” have to be made by **January 15, 2010**.

Acceptance of applications will be confirmed in writing.

For cancellations up to the 22nd of January, 2010 the contributions less 25% (for administrative charges) will be refunded. After the 22nd of January 2010 conference contributions will not be refunded in case of cancellations.

Send to:

HID Forum

26 Jayashree Nilaya

Old Kanakapura Road

Basavanagudi

Bangalore 560 004

Ph: 080 26578193; Mobile nos: 9449033004 (Brinda Pancholi); 9886672856 (Vanya Joseph)

E-mail: hidftraining@gmail.com



The Schedule: Exploring and Managing Differences in Groups and Organisations
February 5 - 10, 2010

						1130-1230	1230-1330	1330-1430	1430-1500	1500-1600	1600-1615	1615-1715	1715-1730	1730-1800
5 th Feb Fri						Registration	Lunch	OP	Tea / Coffee	SSE 1	Break	LSE 1	Break	CSM Briefing
	0700-0800	0800-0855	0855-0920	0930-1030	1030-1100	1100-1200	1200-1330	1330-1430	1430-1500	1500-1600	1600-1615	1615-1715	1715-1730	1730-1845
6 th Feb Sat	CSM 1	Breakfast	P	SSE 2	Tea / Coffee	IGE OP / IGE 1	Lunch	IGE 2	Tea / Coffee	LSE 2	Break	RAAG 1	Break	YE 1
7 th Feb Sun	CSM 2	Breakfast	P	IGE 3	Tea / Coffee	IGE 4	Lunch	SSE 3	Tea / Coffee	RAAG 2	Break	YE 2		
8 th Feb Mon	CSM 3	Breakfast	P	LSE 3	Tea / Coffee	IE OP / IE 1	Lunch	IE 2	Tea / Coffee	IE 3	Break	RAAG 3	Break	YE 3
9 th Feb Tue	CSM 4	Breakfast	P	IE 4	Tea / Coffee	SSE 4	Lunch	IE 5	Tea / Coffee	IE CP	Break	RAAG 4	Break	YE 4
	0700-0800	0800-0855	0855-0955	0955-1020	1020-1120	1130-1230	1240-1340	1340-1430						
10 th Feb Wed	CSM 5	Breakfast	RAAG 5	Tea / Coffee	LSE 4	RAAG 6	CP	Lunch						

Legend

OP = Opening Plenary, **SSE** = Small Study Event, **LSE** = Large Study Event, **CSM** = Conference Sensing Matrix, **P** = Plenary

IGE OP = Inter Group Event Opening Plenary, **IGE** = Inter Group Event

RAAG = Review and Application Group, **YE** = Yoga Event, **IE OP** = Institutional Event Opening Plenary, **IE** = Institutional Event,

IE CP = Institutional Event Closing Plenary, **CP** = Closing Plenary

Please note the difference in time schedule between Days 1 and Days 2 to 5. The timings of events on last day are also different.

Some concepts intrinsic to the conference:

While concepts like systems, roles, leadership, authority, power and management and gender at the institutional level and those like identity, beliefs & values at the individual level are likely to be familiar to most participating members, these are also areas where transformation may take place by discovering new ways of interpreting one's actual experience of them during the GRC. Other concepts relevant to the Conference experience are "here and now experience", "primary task", "boundaries", "the unconscious", "working hypothesis", "relationship and relatedness". Some of the concepts mentioned above are briefly explained below in terms of how those who design and staff the Conference understand them.

Here and now experience: The experiences that are available to a group as data during an ongoing session.

The unconscious: It is widely accepted on the bases of various experiments and clinical data that much of human experience is relegated to a part of the mind from where it is very difficult to access it by the conscious part of the mind that stores memory and also interacts with the environment, i.e. the part which people are normally in touch with. Experiences stored in the unconscious are mostly anxiety provoking or frightening in many ways. At the same time the unconscious is a rich storehouse of resources for oneself if one can work through one's defences against accessing the data. Also, beyond one's awareness, one spends a good deal of energy all the time keeping the data from surfacing to the conscious part of the mind. The more one can access the unconscious data, the more one frees energy to be used consciously. Whenever these unconscious experiences resonate with here and now experiences, one acts out beyond one's awareness whatever is held in the unconscious that had resonated. This more often than not leads to unexpected and unplanned for consequences.

The individual in the group: Quite often individuals in any group unconsciously take in the group's wishes that for many reasons remain unexpressed. The reasons are mostly around the group members' general emotions of anxiety/fear/danger around the wish. These emotions may not even be articulated by the members. However, unless the issues that create these emotions of danger are surfaced and worked with, they fester and create problems for the individual & the group.

Hypotheses and interventions: Working hypotheses and other forms of interventions are offered by the staff of the Conference based on their own experiences in the situation to highlight the unconscious processes as they take place in the group, particularly around the primary task of the conference or the task of the event. These are offered to the members to work with in order to gain fresh insights. It is expected that the members too will develop the skill to diagnose unconscious group dynamics and offer hypotheses and other interventions as the Conference progresses.

Personal authority: Information and knowledge become part of one's wisdom and insight only if these are explored and scrutinised on one's own experience-based authority, rather than through other people's authority based on their position or credibility in other ways. Personal authority based wisdom and insights allow one to apply those creatively in different situations.

Primary task: It is that task which must be performed for the system to survive and grow. In other words, it is the topmost priority task that gives meaning to the system. Other tasks of the system are expected to contribute towards proper engagement with the primary task of the system. The word task is used to encompass those at home, the workplace & social situations.

Relatedness and Relationship: Relatedness is the picture of past relationships that one holds in one's mind, partly consciously and partly unconsciously. Relationship is the way in which people relate with one another in the present situation. However, the picture of relatedness held in the mind at times comes in the way of developing appropriate relationships in the present context. For example, one may hold a particular picture of relatedness with authority based on one's past relationship with one's parents and/or schoolteachers. If these remain unexplored, one may keep projecting this past picture of relatedness onto current authority figures in order to build one's relationships at the place of work or other places. This is likely to hinder building of an appropriate relationship for collaborating with others in engaging with tasks, and, may cause misunderstanding and conflicts without one being aware of the reasons.