

**NON-DIRECTIVE COUNSELLING :
AN EFFECTIVE TOOL IN
PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
IN INDIA**

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The author outlines the definition and operation of non-directive counselling. While management has paid too much attention to machinery, material and production, it has ignored human values and emotions of employees. The author believes that an effective counselling programme could be introduced in Industry with a view to strengthening the feelings of the employees that management has genuine interest in them.

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Counselling is a relatively new term in Industrial Relations and Personnel Management. It was with World War II that the term acquired currency. The development of counselling as an accepted concept in industry is, in large part, due to the application of experimental procedures to modern industrial problems. Although "pioneering industry" during and following the World War had revealed the wide extent of maladjustment among industrial workers and the actual effect of such maladjustment on production on the whole, very little effort had been made by management to remedy the situation. There was the growing need to attend to the emotional problems as well as the physical welfare of the employees, but very few companies developed special programmes to help the employee to cope with his personal problems. Industry was reluctant to undertake personnel hygiene services, and, at the same time, it "shied" away from any problems related to the mental health of the personnel. Industry was not alone in this attitude of indifference toward the employees; the community also, to a great extent, did not concern itself with welfare work generally.

This is the situation as far as counselling is concerned. When we come to non-directive counselling, we discover that this approach is still more recent. Even though Western Electric Co. and some other firms in the U.S.A. had reflected a pattern which was non-directive, it was really Dr. Rogers of the University of Chicago who systematized this new theory. This effective counselling consists of a definitely structured, permissive relationship, which allows the client to obtain an understanding of himself to a degree which enables him to take positive steps in the light of his new orientation. For the first time in industrial history, emphasis was given to the individual rather than to the problem. This humanistic approach has been accepted and recognized by a large number of industrial establishments as the most useful approach to counselling.

I

An Outline of Non-directive Counselling.
—Non-directive counselling can be defined as a certain type of guidance which enables the employees "to seek readjustment of their problems in the light of their newly acquired orientation." In the first place, we have a

very skilled counsellor. It is his job to make the client, in this case the employee, feel quite at home in his presence, to the extent that he feels that this hour of interview is his to do as he wishes with it. The counsellor, in other words, "gives the counsellee the idea of his acceptance of him." He establishes a situation which will enable the subject to clarify his feelings and emotions without the customary fear of disapproval. There is a good deal of reassurance to be given to the consellee by the counsellor in the course of the interview.

As the very term signifies, it is very different from the directive method of counselling. The latter makes use of persuasion, points out specific problems that need correction, and asks the patient direct questions. The counsellor actually guides the therapeutic process and is responsible for the individual's readjustment. But in non-directive, what is also called "client-centred" therapy, the counsellor merely recognizes or re-states the client's expressed feelings. It is the counsellee who actually guides the process, and who assumes responsibility for the success of the therapy. In fact, the key of the whole process is that it is the employee who is permitted to give expression to his intimate feelings and emotions. The counsellor merely permits this unravelling of the client's inner personality, so that the client is given the opportunity to gain a new perspective towards his problems and to make the necessary adjustment.

The counsellors who are specially trained to handle non-directive counselling handle various problems. They can be marital, emotional, or vocational, or even psychopathic and neurotic. The employee may be one who has personality conflicts with other employees, or who habitually breaks the

rules. Persons with a high degree of work accidents, and those with a record of absenteeism, usually display some kind of maladjustment. Such persons are recommended for non-directive counselling programme.

The first step that the counsellor makes is to assure the client that he has no pre-conceived answers, and that the answers will rise in the course of the interview to meet the specific situations. As the interview proceeds, the client expresses his deeply concealed feelings of mistrust, guilt, and doubt.

Mr. Erwin Schoenfeld affirms that "as he (the client) realizes he is understood and accepted, he becomes less inhibited and feels freer to work out his problems. Soon he is expressing feelings he had repressed before, and as the therapy proceeds, he may feel less self-critical. With the help of the counsellor he gains insight and acceptance of himself and his problems, mostly as a result of his own efforts."¹ As time goes on, the client gains more and more confidence in himself, so that, after a time, he does not feel the need of a counsellor in working out his problems. Further "positive steps" towards readjustment can be taken by the client himself, alone and unaided.

This is a brief outline of the procedure used in non-directive counselling. At this point, it is necessary to study the "objectives" of this type of therapy and to glance briefly at the development of counselling programmes.

Helen Baker in her book, *Employee Counselling*, introduces two fundamental aims of counselling :

1. The primary object is to improve morale and efficiency by a closer contact between the personnel staff and employees and supervisors. The employee is enabled to

¹Erwin Schoenfeld, "Client-Centered Therapy in Industry," *Personnel Journal* (April 1954), p. 412.

secure more easily information on personnel policies and on such varied off-the-job matters as transportation, rationing, medical care, child care, and shopping from a friendly personnel representative, who may also listen sympathetically to the employee's statement of his problems.

2. The second aim is the more specific effort to facilitate the adjustment of the individual by helping him to understand his own difficulties on- or off-the-job and to solve them himself. Programmes with this aim are either implicitly or explicitly concerned with mental hygiene, and their procedures and methods have to be viewed with some consideration of standards developed in non-industrial counselling.²

E. M. Bowler and F. T. Dawson in *Counselling Employees* point out that counselling is advantageous in two ways, as being helpful to both the employer and the employee. Thus:

If the worker has a problem, real or imaginary, he gets satisfaction one way or another. Either someone in the plant adjusts the matter to the worker's satisfaction or he quits. Time lost between jobs comes out of the worker's pocket. Material wasted and production lost during the breaking-in period on a new job come out of the employer's pocket. The cost of labour turnover was frequently demonstrated in meeting and solving war production problems.

Turn-over cost is high in itself, but the *slow-down* of workers can be more costly. A poorly adjusted worker who hangs on not knowing what to do about his situation can create a greater financial burden than the individual who quits and must be replaced. Counselling can prevent many

such problems from arising. It is also a solution for worker dissatisfaction resulting from a multiplicity of other situations that demand satisfactory answers.³

Job satisfaction and worker satisfaction are also closely linked with occupational therapy. It is fairly obvious that worker satisfaction is rather closely related to problems that might arise at work. Counsellors can be of great help in this connection. By promoting better occupational adjustment of workers to their immediate job problems, the counsellors can assist management in wisely using one of the most valuable assets in employment—the employee.

What we have to evaluate at this point is that wages alone do not form the basis for all "job pleasure and motivation." Job satisfaction is actually the feeling that comes to an employee when he has the satisfaction that his job is ready-made for him. The feelings of security and "belonging" are also strong motivation factors contributing to worker satisfaction. Where these are lacking, counselling is necessary in meeting the requirements of the employee.

However, the main aim of the counsellor is to help the employee help himself to adjust to any problem that might interfere with his efficiency at work. As Nathaniel Nator interprets it,

the consultant has one job only to help the employee find the solution to his own emotional problem in his own way and at his own tempo. The consultant's function is, thus, limited. He in no way touches problems directly concerned with wages, hours, conditions of work, transfers or the other innumerable problems that arise. . . . The consultant's aim is to help the worker adjust to his particular job, which is being

²Helen Baker, *Employee Counselling: A Survey of a new development in Personnel Relations* (New Jersey, 1944), p. 15.

³Earl M. Bowler & Frances Trigg Dawson, *Counselling Employees* (New York, 1948), p. 6.

performed less efficiently than it might be because of some kind of *psychological* disturbance.⁴

Thus, the aim or objective of counselling of a non-directive type is to help the employee to get rid of his emotional complexes so that he might be able to work under less tension and, thus, contribute to the efficiency of the job.

In this connection it is appropriate to introduce the Hawthorne experiment. The research programme in industrial relations was undertaken by the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Co., U.S.A. in 1927 as an investigation of the physical factors in the working environment which affected the morale and productivity of the employees. The basic observation that some tangible factors were the strongest influences towards increased productivity guided the course of research to a programme of employee interviewing. The favourable reaction of employees and supervisors to the initial interviewing programme encouraged management to continue it. The term "personnel counselling" was first used in connection with a revised interviewing programme resumed at the Hawthorne Works in 1936.

The Western Electric counselling programme serves to control and to direct those human processes within the industrial structure which are not adequately controlled by other agencies of management. The interviewing plan undertaken at the Hawthorne Plant is viewed as a "new method of human control." Some of the important facts to be considered in this experiment are that the counsellors seek out the clients: this makes everyone feel that the counsellor's services are waiting for him; the counsellors try to

become part of the work-a-day atmosphere; and the employees are paid average earnings for all the time spent on interviews.

What is important for our study is that the Hawthorne counsellors use a kind of non-directive technique. They are told not to advise, probe or judge. Employees talk about everything, from problems at work to hobbies. A kind of "permissiveness" is one of the rules of the game, we notice. The employee assumes new proportions; he receives approval, prestige and recognition. He is important. Consequently, his attitude improves; he feels happier and works better. To conclude with Nathaniel Cantor, this important consideration, that the co-operation of employees depends in great part on the "way they feel about their jobs, their fellow workers, and their supervisors, and on the meaning of the whole work situation to them, was supported by subsequent experiments with other groups of Hawthorne employees."⁵

The theory involved in the non-directive counselling technique is the outgrowth of the Hawthorne experiments in productivity and human relations and the clinical work of Dr. Rogers. The joint-study of W. J. Duchy, H. M. Leland, and C. Notty bases itself on the discovery that while the clinical uses of the non-directive counselling method have been widespread during the past twenty-six years, there has not been a corresponding increase in its application in the industrial situation, although one company, the Western Electric, has had a non-directive counselling programme for many years at its Hawthorne Plant.⁸ Further, this programme yielded such good results that the company expanded it to seven different installations, and it is probably the only company whose

⁴Nathaniel Canter, *Employee Counselling* (New York, 1945), p. 66.

⁵Cantor, p. 21.

⁶W. J. Duchy, H. M. Leland, & H. M. Notty, "Non-Directive Counselling in Industry" *Journal of Personnel Administration and Industrial Relations*, I (1954), pp. 110-123.

counselling programme is based completely on the non-directive method.

The non-directive counselling is important, our study reveals, because it leads to highly beneficial results for both the individual and the organization. What we see in action here is a release of emotions on the part of the individual, which in turn leads to an understanding of himself. As the individual is going through this process, he realizes for himself how he can best fit into the immediate organizational set-up.

II

The major contribution of non-directive counselling can be classified under three parts:

1. Non-directive counselling aids the management. This is done through improved personnel relationships. Happy, satisfied employees are an asset to an organization. Their high morale is recognized as a good incentive to better productivity. Those activities that contribute most toward improved job and worker satisfaction, and the morale of the employee are of the greatest help to the employer and the management. Hence, the degree to which employees accept or reject the assistance offered to him by the counsellor may affect management directly to the quantity and quality of goods produced and the services rendered.

The exit interview is another factor that contributes to the management improvement. This method is widely used as a means of pin-pointing the shortcomings in the policies of the firm. Through this process, the management is able to discover its weak and strong points in order to stabilize the organization. But chances are that the existing employee may not be willing to divulge any information affecting the weak points of the organization. Firms are usually

confronted with this non-committal attitude on the part of the departing employee. One reason for failing to get the desired information from the employee is the use of the traditional directive interviewing technique. Non-directive methods, on the other hand, offer the subtle key in opening the heart and in discovering deeply hidden resentment or approval on the part of the departing employee.

As individuals differ, some employees find it easy to speak about anything; others are more reticent. The second group do not want to commit themselves in anyway. It is in dealing with this category that the non-directive method proves most useful. It is quite possible that the reticent characters have more valuable information to offer than those who constantly voice their opinions. Although they might hate "to burn the bridges behind them," or might hate to air their feelings which have been repressed for years, a counsellor, who is able to use the non-directive technique effectively, can usually help in breaking the barriers down.

We have already analyzed that the primary requisite of non-directive interview is an atmosphere of ease and response on the part of the counsellor. The employee feels reassured and relaxes the moment he finds out that the counsellor is in no way compelling him to divulge any of his deep rooted complexes or criticism of the organization. The employee slowly unwinds. The free and permissive atmosphere that has been so effortlessly prepared for the interview aids the employee to ridding himself of his inhibitions. The counsellor does not offer any excuses, defenses and apologies for the shortcomings of the firm.

To an organization that is not biased, such information can be very valuable. The counsellor, previous to the interview, has made himself familiar with the particular

employee's background. In this manner the interviewer is in a position to judge and evaluate the comments of the "exiting" employee. These comments, by and large, are channelled by a clever counsellor, clever in dealing with such crucial questions as: the working conditions, duties of the job, compensation, advancement, supervision, training, grievances, employee benefits and special departmental problems.

2. The second contribution made by non-directive counselling is in the direction of work adjustment.

The first few weeks at work are usually critical for a new employee. It is a period of tremendous adjustments. The worker tries hard to get his new bearings. If supervision is of high calibre, the worker will be developing good work habits that are later to become valuable work assets. Because the individual develops attitudes along with work habits and skills, his morale should be kept at a high level during the adjustment periods. And here the non-directive counselling helps the worker to build up confidence in order to make the necessary adjustment. The non-directive counsellor bridges the gap without seeming to intrude between the new worker and his surroundings. He aids the worker in developing feelings of security, the feeling that he is wanted at his new job, and that he can tackle the strange and foreign elements without too much tension. Slowly communication is established between the new employee and the firm. The counsellor is someone to whom he can turn with his problems; the counsellor is responsive; he is not rushed for time as his co-workers are.

3. The non-directive counselling is an aid to union welfare activities.

It is seen that legalistic phraseology has been stressed in many firms at the expense

of human values. This has given rise to much mistrust between the production worker and the personnel department of a firm. Lawyers have frequently been called upon to interpret labour-management agreements and disputes. And we have also observed instances in which legal approach has merely given rise to bitterness. The employees tend to believe that the personnel department, since it represents management, can only work for the good of the employer, barring the good of themselves. Suspicion and animosity are the outcome under the circumstances. It is here that the counsellor steps in. He has to work diligently to overcome the suspicion of the employees; he has to impress upon the employee that he is on the employees' side, or at least that he stands for the good interests of both the employee and the employer. It is not uncommon, however, that the counsellor is completely ignored by those in key union positions. According to the argument of Bowler and Dawson:

It appears that where labour and management are genuinely interested in the welfare of workers and constituents, company-sponsored counselling can help those in need. A willingness to work co-operatively must exist between employer and employee if management-sponsored counselling is to be successful upon inception. Where good worker-management relationships do not exist, there must of necessity be a period of sparring until trust and mutual understanding can be built up. Only the strong counselling can rebuild from a position of distrust and suspicion⁷

Conclusion.—The definition and operation of non-directive counselling are briefly outlined here. And in the process, we have also studied the aims and objectives and, finally, the contribution of the new method. The

⁷Bowler & Dawson, p. 143.

objectives and the contributions are, to a large extent, closely allied so that the margin between them is narrow.

To the student of non-directive counselling what becomes obvious is that good morale of the employees is an important asset. This has to be developed and maintained. The morale stems from a feeling of mutual respect among workers and all levels of supervision. The worker's sense of integrity is great when he believes that management has a warm, friendly attitude towards him. Morale reaches its lowest point when the employee senses an over-zealous paternalism on the part of management. In the past, management has only too frequently manifested a tremendous concern over materials, machinery, and the production of the plant, while it has ignored human values and emotions of the employees. An effective counselling programme strengthens the feeling among employees that management has finally acquired a genuine interest in his welfare, and that he is not merely a unit in the whole organizational machinery.

Emotional problems precipitated by job tensions have become very important since World War II. Industry has discovered that "psychiatry" is becoming more aggressive in order to produce an efficient work-group with sound mental hygiene. The custom was that management tended to shy away from the personal problems of the people at work. Now the time has come for a complete reevaluation. The average of the people developing mental illness at work has gone

up. This is not surprising as a considerable part of a man's life is spent at his work. If the individual is sick, the environment has to be considered; may be it had something to do with the break-down of the individual. Pressure at work, imaginary as well as real, can subscribe to the emotional complexity of the employee. The farther up he goes, the lonelier he tends to become; there is so little communication between an employee who has been promoted and the rest.

The position of a "non-directive counsellor is via-media. He is happily situated between the employer and the employee. He is the buffer. From his vantage point he can release the tension of the employee and the pressure upon the employer. The benefits are two-fold: the employee who has found a new inner self through the approach of non-directive techniques works better; this, very naturally, lessens the pressure imposed upon management. Better relations ensue between the employer and the employee; this in turn leads to better production. It will not be inappropriate to divert the attention of the reader to the story of man caught between the sun and the wind. The more forceful the wind, the closer the man draws the coat over him; the more hot the rays of the sun, the sooner he discards the coat.

Directive counselling forces that heart to shut itself. This leads to pressure and mental ill health; but non-directive counselling makes the employee to open his heart and reveal his problems. In view of the rapid expansion of our industrial organization, more and more non-directive counselling programmes are to be initiated and encouraged.