

# **Counseling Skills In Economic Consultancy**

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## ***ABSTRACT***

The process of economic consulting is examined, concentrating on the interview stage of a study where a single consultant interviews many people then provides a written report for a client organization. The process is looked at from the perspective of the micro-skills of the Human Relations Development approach and from the perspective of persuasion.

The steps of the process are examined from the first interviews where the “contract” is negotiated through to the final interviews which collect information. The interviews collect information for use in economic analysis, but also information organizational and individual objectives, on politics, micro-politics etc. which may affect the final recommendations and which will probably affect the presentation of the report.

The degree to which it is possible to use persuasion before the results have been formulated is examined.

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# **COUNSELING SKILLS IN ECONOMIC CONSULTANCY**

**“Economics is a very serious subject when the economist assumes the role of counsellor to nations”** A.F. Burns, *The Frontiers of Economic Knowledge*

## PART I

### INTRODUCTION

I am a consultant who advises firms and governments economic matters. In even a short consultancy, I react with dozens of individuals, and this human relationship determines whether I receive the cooperation I need to collect the necessary information, whether my report is accepted and whether it is acted on. There is a lot of hostility and mistrust in the environment. As a general rule, the more important the work I do, the more conflict is aroused, the more people are threatened and the more important are the people whose interests are threatened. In this monograph, I wish to examine the use of counseling skills in consultancy, both as a means of achieving my objectives and as a means of avoiding or handling conflict.

The objective is to analyse the system of consultancy and its component processes, and to determine the skills used in each. If this can be done, it should be possible to improve consultants' performance by

- training them to proceed in a systematic way so that all necessary parts of the process are carried out, and they are carried out in a logical sequence,
- teaching them skills that they not already know,
- teaching them to improve other skills that are identified as important.

I shall concentrate on one particular type of consultancy. In this, I am employed by a client organization to solve a problem defined in its Terms of Reference for the study. I spend two or three months interviewing people to obtain information. I then analyse the data and write a report on the economics, giving results and possibly making recommendations, and this is posted to the client organization. This means that I do not know what my results or recommendations will be until after the interviews have been completed. I am working by myself and not in a team. In order to keep the discussion within manageable limits, I assume away group relations within the client organization and between it and other organizations,

though they are important. I also confine the discussion to the period between first arrival in the host country and the time I start the analysis.

In the course of the discussion, I shall be contrasting this model of a consultancy process with the situation that may apply in a one-to-one therapeutic counseling relationship. This contrast can only be illustrative, as there are many types of consultancy and many types of counseling, and these overlap to various degrees - indeed the type of consultancy described here fits the Oxford English Dictionary's definition of counseling exactly, while Rogers' (1951) in its non-directional form, does not!

## **THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this monograph, the consultancy relationship will be examined using theory from two approaches. First the counseling skills used in consultancy processes will be identified using the taxonomy of micro-counseling. Second, the persuasion skills will be identified.

### ***The Microskills Approach***

The microskills or Human Resources Development approach is particularly linked with the work of Carkhuff and his collaborators (e.g. Carkhuff, 1968, 1969a, 1969b; Carkhuff and Pierce, 1977; Carkhuff, Pierce and Cannon, 1980; Carkhuff and Berenson, 1966, 1977; Truax and Carkhuff, 1967), and in the work of followers like Egan (1975) and Ivey and Authier (1978). Carkhuff is the most cited social scientist (Shilling, 1984).

Initial attempts by Carkhuff and others to compare the effectiveness of different counseling therapies showed that there was more variance in results within one system than between the different systems. Some counselors were consistently making clients worse, while others had consistently good results. Accordingly, he observed what counselors did, and related the actions to the results. He was able to identify the specific skills used, and to devise a scale for measuring the level of skill used. He found that

“Clients of counselors who offer high levels of core, facilitative and action oriented conditions improve while those of counselors who offer low levels of these conditions deteriorate.” (Carkhuff 1969b p7.) “The helpers’ effectiveness may largely be accounted for independent of his orientation and technique by assessing the level of core conditions he offers . . . Thus the helpees of psychoanalytic or client-centred or existential or trait and factor or behaviouristic helpers who are functioning at high levels improve in function on a variety of change indexes with perhaps little regard for the helper’s cognitive map of what is taking place and where it is going” (Carkhuff 1969b pp12-13)

He then found that (a) it is possible to select people who are naturally skilled in these ways, and (b) it is possible to train people, both counselors and helpes in these skills, and raise their level of performance.

Carkhuff and his followers felt that many of the concepts in use in counseling were difficult to pin down: “We use words like *empathic*, *warm*, *genuine* and *flexible*, but we are not able to operationalize these terms with any real measure of accuracy.” (Shilling, 1984 p5.) In particular, Rogers’ necessary and sufficient conditions of empathy, unconditional positive regard and congruence were felt to be too loose and subjective to be useful. Accordingly, there was an attempt to redefine these in terms of the micro-skills that were used (e.g. Carkhuff, 1967, 1969a; Carkhuff and Berenson, 1967; Ivey and Authier, 1978). While the names used, like accurate empathy, respect, genuineness and concreteness are similar, the concepts are very different in some respects. For instance, Rogers’ concept of empathy is subjective, and one could speculate at length about whether one is talking of the counselor’s perception that he is empathic, the client’s perception that the counselor is empathic, the counselor’s perception that the client perceives him as empathic, or a third party’s perception of these and so on. While these distinctions are important, they are seldom made, and it is difficult to see how they could be used in practice. Ivey and Authier (1978 pp128-31) discuss the proposition that where attending behaviour is used (e.g. eye contact, trunk lean and appropriate distance) and the attending skills are used (e.g. minimal encourage, open question, paraphrase and reflection of feeling) the counselor is doing something which may be called showing empathy. They argue that these alone give primary empathy (Egan) or basic empathy (Rogers). If, in addition, influencing skills are used (e.g. direction, expression of content, expression of feeling, influencing summary and interpretation) a higher level of empathy is achieved. In this formulation “empathy” is word indicating that the exercise of a rather arbitrary range of skills has been observed by a third party.

Table 1 sets out a taxonomy of the micro-skills used in counseling, using Ivey and Authier’s (1978) formulation. This is the one that will be used in this monograph.

## ***Persuasion***

In my type of consultancy, where I am giving advice based on hard economic analysis, there is a reluctance to recognize the role of persuasion; practitioners often assume that if they set out the facts as clearly and simply as possible, they have done their job.

In the literature on counseling, persuasion and manipulation are often considered to be unethical (e.g. Masson, 1990), and non-directive, client-centred approaches play down the persuasive and manipulative aspects. There is a tendency instead to talk in terms of “influencing skills” (Ivey and Authier, 1978), “Upward or outward phase of emergent directionality or action” (Carkhuff 1969b), or to just talk of “helping” as though there was no persuasion or manipulation. I find it difficult to accept the view of Ivey and Authier (1978), Rogers (1951), etc that the influencing skills are empathy or an expression of empathy in the sense of understanding. It is certainly easier to persuade people if one understands how they feel, but that is using one’s empathy (gained from an information gathering process) to make

manipulation easier. Influencing is not increasing the level of understanding (except in the trivial sense that the more one influences someone, the more one has in common with them) and it is not increasing the expression of understanding.

It would be possible to describe even a non-directional counseling process in terms of persuading the clients that the counselor is competent; persuading them that the therapeutic approach used is a good one; persuading them to co-operate; persuading them to change their behaviour; and persuading them that they have benefited from the counseling (an important factor if the counselor is to build up a practice). Like the most skillful salesmen, skillful counselors try to get clients to persuade themselves:

“Much recent research has centered on situations in which the roles of the persuader and persuadee are defined quite differently. Rather than encoding messages to relatively passive persuaders, the persuader induces them to encode the message themselves: in a sense, persuasion occurs because the persuadee acts upon himself, instead of being acted on by the persuader. It is this active involvement in formulating arguments and constructing messages that causes some writers to label this process *self-persuasion*.” (Miller and Burgoon, 1973 pp 6-7)

In this monograph, the persuasion processes in consultancy will be looked at. To keep it within manageable limits, the last phases of the system will be excluded, the preparation of a persuasive report, persuading people to read, accept and act on it, persuading them that they were right to do so, and persuading them that they chose the right consultant. Instead, it will concentrate on the earlier stages.

The following types of persuasion will be looked at:

1. Persuading people to take part in the study,
2. Persuading people to disclose information,
3. Collecting information in the earlier stages of the study which will not be used until the writing of the final report,
4. Persuading the recipients that the consultant is the sort of person whose report, when it is written, will be acceptable,
5. Persuading the recipients that some change is needed (or its converse: not building up their resistance to change in general or certain changes in particular).

Some other types of persuasion will not be looked at:

1. Persuading people during the course of the study, so that they are half convinced before the report is written - in the type of consultancy described the consultant does not know the results until he does the analysis.
2. The persuasive report, persuading the recipient on the consultant's view of the situation, on the conclusions he draws and on the recommendations he makes.
3. Persuading the clients to accept the report.
4. Persuading the clients to act on it.
5. Persuading them that they were right to act on it.
6. Persuading them that they were right to use this consultant (reinforcement of this kind is important in marketing: many advertising campaigns attempt to do this. It makes

customers feel good, and tell other people how good their purchase is - which may be a more potent form of advertising to get new customers).

7. Persuading them to employ the same consultant again.

Much of the literature is concerned with the processes 6 to 12, and covers the communication skills and methods of persuasion after the message has been formulated. Even when the pre-message persuasive processes are recognized, they are often mixed up with other processes, though they are logically different and use different techniques. However, Simons (1976) treats them as a separate chapter, while Cialdini (1988) devotes much of his book to them.

## **CONSULTANCY**

### ***Types of Consultancy***

Consultancy, like counseling, takes many forms, and it is instructive to look at three types, similar in form to counseling's non-directive, coping skills training, and medical approaches, before looking at the type to be examined here. As a rule, but not always, consultants advise organizations, while counselors deal with individuals.

### **Non Directive**

One form of consultancy is helping the organization understand itself and, by implication, helping individuals in the organization understand themselves. The rationale is that the organization, like the individual, has a strong instinct for survival and growth, and will use the understanding to develop. The consultant is essentially a facilitator. His output is a series of learning activities, or a report which feeds back to the organization the information it has given (and this monograph assumes away the relationships between the organization and the individuals of which it is composed.)

A rather different, but still non-directive approach is one where the consultant is a facilitator, helping the client make his own decisions more efficiently. Wallace, Horan, Baker and Hudson (1975) ran a training programme for counseling graduate students in decision-making counseling.

“Their focus was on counseling aimed at facilitating client decision making. They selected counselor behaviours that operationally defined the process of helping clients arrive at wise decisions. These behaviours were as follows (a) define the problem as one of choice; (b) explain the decision-making paradigm; (c) identify possible alternatives; (d) gather relevant information from the client; (f) request that the client identify advantages and disadvantages for each alternative; (g) present any additional advantages and disadvantages for each alternative to the client; (h) request that the client select the most promising alternative; (i) verbally cue and reinforce the client for

gathering additional information about the most promising alternative; (j) help the client implement the alternative; and (k) maintain neutrality concerning what the client ought to do” (Ivey and Authier 1978 p241)

This type of consultancy would normally be classified as management consultancy, and the consultant would consider himself as a change agent.

## **Teaching Coping Skills**

A second form of consultancy is teaching coping skills. A consultant is brought into the organization to teach skills like computer use, extension techniques or quality assurance. The consultant is seen as being an expert having special skills that nobody in the organization has or can teach. The output of the consultancy is the changed ability of the organization and its changed willingness to perform.

This type of consultancy has parallels to the view that a counselor should be teaching life skills and coping skills like assertive behaviour and symptom behaviour.

## **Medical**

The medical model is based on the situation where people who know that they are sick go to the doctor for diagnosis and treatment, and then accept the doctor’s advice on the grounds that the doctor has had many years of training in medicine. In consultancy, it implies that an organization employs a consultant who is an expert to carry out a job that nobody in the organization can do.

## **MY TYPE OF CONSULTANCY**

In this monograph I discuss one type of consultancy I do, which closely follows the medical model. In a typical consultancy project I am employed by an organization (a government department or a firm) to do an economic analysis of a sector, a market or a firm. and write a report on it producing conclusions and producing recommendations. During the consultancy I make courtesy visits to senior officials in the client organization and other interested organizations. I interview perhaps a hundred people inside and outside the client organization over a three month consultancy to obtain information.

I then analyse the information and write a report describing the situation, drawing conclusions and making recommendations. This usually requires a level of specialized economic analysis beyond the capacity of the client organization, as well as a wide experience. In the type of consultancy examined here, there is no inception report, interim report, draft report or other feedback.

It is important to me financially that the report is accepted, that it is paid for, and that I get further consultancy contracts. I get job satisfaction if the client acts on my recommendations or if it changes his way of thinking in the future.

Often my client is a government department. In this case, I am usually directly responsible to the Director, the senior professional in the Ministry. The contract is administered by an official in the rank below, and my day to day contact is with a junior professional, designated a "counterpart". The Minister and the Permanent Secretary also have a role. Sometimes the decision to employ a consultant appears to have been made by a single powerful individual with organization, or the decision may have been imposed by a powerful outside organization like the World Bank.

## **Right, Role, and Responsibility**

Carkhuff (1969a pxi) emphasizes that the first issues a would-be helper must consider are his right to intervene, his responsibilities once he has intervened, and the role he must adopt (including role conflicts)

### *Right to intervene*

I believe that I do have the competence to do the job, in the form of an unusually wide experience and an unusual analytical ability in a specialized field. I believe that outsiders have the right to intervene in Third World countries to improve the lives of the inhabitants, though I think that the types of intervention that are permissible are limited. I accept that others may not share my belief, and that individuals in the client organization may see it as patronizing.

### *Responsibility*

I have a personal belief in my responsibility to use my skills effectively, and especially to help people in the Third World. The question of who I have a responsibility to in any particular job is not easily answered. Do I have a responsibility to the Director, the Minister, my counterpart, the Department, the Ministry, the Government of the day or the nation? The question becomes even more complex when I am employed by one or two donor organizations to give advice to the Department.

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I would like to think that when I have done the analysis and set out my procedures clearly, the client does not just act on my recommendations ("action without understanding" (Carkhuff, 1969a p54)) but uses my analysis as a framework for its own future analysis. This is similar to the counselor's hope that "Initially the helpee may act at the behest of the helper" and "Ultimately he must develop the capacity to act with autonomy" (Carkhuff 1969a p54). More often than not, however, the result is in conformity with the medical model, and the patient is no wiser after the cure than before.



*Role*

I believe that my adoption of the medical role rather than the non-directive or coping skills roles is justified by several factors.

The analysis I do is not one that can be done by a non-specialist, and it is dangerous to leave it to a specialist with a low competence. The problem is too important to ignore. I like to think that even if the client is not capable of doing the analysis or even of understanding the logic of the report, he is capable of “acting out” the recommendations (Carkhuff, 1969).

I accept that in the long term it might be better for the client organization to develop its own competence, through a process such as a coping skills programme. However, there are problems that must be tackled urgently, and the client is not willing to wait years for competent economists to be trained. Experience of coping skills programmes in my field has been bad: in most countries the level of competence is well below what it was twenty years ago (partly because of institutional factors like low civil service pay which means that morale is low, and experienced economists leave for the private sector.)

There is frequently a conflict of roles, when, for instance, I am paid by an organization like the World Bank, with one agenda, to advise a government department with another agenda. The different roles may mean that I react differently with the individuals I deal with, and with the organization as a whole. The ethical problems are a constant worry.

## **The Consultancy System**

Figure 1 shows the phases of the consultancy project. Once I arrive on the job, I conduct introductory interviews, primarily to negotiate how the job is to be carried out and what the client’s objectives are. I then do further interviews, primarily to collect information. I then process the information and report on the results. The action then passes to the client organization and individuals in it, who decide whether to accept or reject the conclusions and recommendations, and whether to act on them.

Within this framework I carry out several different tasks, and I may be addressing all of them within a single interview. The main tasks are:

1. Collecting the purely economic facts and figures,
2. Identifying political and other constraints. These are fed into the economic analysis to determine what is practical. At a rather later stage they may be used to determine what sort of recommendations are likely to be politically acceptable.
3. Identifying the political, micro-political and other constraints, and determining the opinions of the people who will be reading the report. The report can then be presented in such a way that its recommendations and conclusions are most likely to be accepted. Formally, this is very different from (2) above, but in practice the same information is collected in the same interviews, and they will be examined together.

4. Establishing a predisposition to accept any report by me. Long before I have any idea what his conclusions are going to be, I can work on establishing his credibility and establishing that I am a likable person.
5. Establishing a predisposition to accept change. Even if I am not sure what my results are going to be, I can get the people I talk to (I call them respondents, to distinguish them from the client organization. They may or may not be employed by the client organization.) to start examining problem areas closely, and to start to accept that there are real problems.
6. If the I know what my conclusion is going to be, I can start manipulating opinion. For the purposes of this monograph it is assumed that in this type of consultancy this is not possible.

The project may be terminated if the consultant does not accept the offer, if the consultant and client cannot agree on a working relationship and objectives, or if the client organization rejects the report. If individuals or the client organization points out errors and omissions, the consultant may have to return to an earlier part of the process, even to the initial negotiation when, as is often the case, the client's objectives have changed during the course of the study. This monograph does not cover what happens after the interview stage.

## **HOW CONSULTANCY DIFFERS FROM COUNSELING**

There are many types of counseling and many types of consultancy, and it is possible to find examples of counseling and consultancy which are virtually indistinguishable. The definitions also overlap. In this section, some differences in approach which may exist between one-to-one client centred counseling and my consultancy approach are identified. Applying the theory or taxonomy developed for one process to another process is valuable in determining how general the theory is and in identifying processes which may have been overlooked.

### **The Organization or the Individual?**

Consultancy tends to deal with the organization, counseling with the individual.

Consultants usually owe responsibility to the organization, counseling to the individual. To the consultant the individual may be expendable in order to achieve the organization's objectives.

Consultancy concentrates on individual and group relations with the outside world (people and things), with the individual's mental state being only a means to an end, while counseling often concentrates on the individual's mental state to the exclusion of everything else.

Consultancy devotes a lot of time to a problem but very little to any individual. Counseling devotes a small time to any problem, but a lot to the individual.

Most of the people the consultant speaks to are not part of the client organization and will not get the final report. On the other hand, he may not speak to all the key decision makers in the client organization. The counselor's contact is nearly all with his client.

The consultant may have several objectives and several clients with conflicting objectives in a single study.

### **Time Constraints and Degree of Involvement**

Consultancy has strict time constraints, as a report has to be submitted to a deadline, and any time spent beyond this is not paid for. There is seldom enough time available for me to do the job as thoroughly as I would wish. I have to compromise and produce the best report possible in the time available.

In a short project (say two months) I may be allocated ten or fifteen minutes at the beginning or end of the project with the Minister and Permanent Secretary, though this may stretch to an hour if I can keep them interested that long. I may meet the Director two or three times for an hour at a time, and the responsible officer four or five times for an hour at a time. The junior professional may be allocated to me full time as a guide and counterpart. Within the client organization, therefore, I have a limited time available for communication and the time available is in inverse proportion to the decision-making power of the individual. I meet perhaps a hundred other people for up to an hour. There may be a meeting to discuss the final report.

The time constraint limits the degree of involvement that is possible. It would be foolish to expect more than a shallow formal involvement, though I often build up a close relationship with the person allocated as guide.

In spite of these time constraints, it is possible to do the purely economic part of my consultancy very well in this way. I am trying to gain a great deal of information about a market or sector, and short interviews with individuals who have different perspectives, especially if supplemented by statistics, may be more valuable than an in-depth interview with someone who does not really understand what is going on.

By analogy, one might hope that a lot of short interviews might permit the consultant to get an idea of a set of "institutional beliefs and objectives" as well as the politics and micro-politics. The question is whether this is possible, given the time constraints, the need to

collect economic information from the same interview (and the economics is the prime justification for the study) and the attitudes of the consultant and respondent.

The question becomes more pointed when the time available is compared with the time available in counseling:

“In one to one counseling, the HRD [Carkhuff’s Human Resources Development approach] helper would meet the helpee once a week for 50 to 60 minutes. The sessions would continue as long as the helpee’s need demanded, but rarely would go beyond ten or fifteen sessions.” (Carkhuff and Pierce, 1977, cited by Shilling, 1984)

“In many counseling situations, the counseling process will involve three or four interviews of approximately 25 to 50 minutes duration . . . Other interviews, for purposes of evaluating progress and monitoring client progress, are usually of 5 - 15 minutes duration” (Stewart *et al.* 1978 p101.)

## **Voluntary Participation**

In counseling, it is usual that the client is a volunteer, which makes the process easier, and which may be the first step in a self-persuasion process. In consultancy, the client organization may have been pressed into employing the consultant by an outside organization like the World Bank, the Ministry of Finance or the parent Ministry. It may have been pressed into employing him by a powerful individual within that organization, or the powerful individual may have entered the contract without consulting his colleagues. In all these cases the client organization will be less than fully committed to the study and may even want it to fail.

Even if the organization wants the study, individuals may not.

## **Warmth and Respect**

A degree of warmth and respect between counselor and client is considered necessary if there is to be a successful counseling relationship. There is no reason to expect that this will exist with economic consultancy, and indeed, the situation often makes this unlikely.

For example, consultants are a threat to the self esteem of the officials. The fact that an outsider has to be called in to look at their work means that someone is not satisfied with what they do. The fact that a foreign consultant is employed at a vast salary to do a job that should be done by the local official implies not only that the local official is perceived to be incompetent, but that others in his nation, race or region are. Any criticisms that a consultant makes about the present system are necessarily a criticism of the officials who run it.

The officials mistrust the consultants’ competence, believing that most of them are totally useless and few have the academic qualifications of the people that they are advising. They

think that foreign consultants are sent out by their governments only to reduce unemployment at home. Their lack of competence is seen to be accompanied by an overbearing self esteem.

The foreign consultants often have a perception of their superiority based on their qualifications, experience, country of origin and salary which makes them consider the local officials to be inferior. They often perceive the officials as being idle, incompetent, untrustworthy, corrupt and coming from a country that cannot run anything properly. Even if their perception of their superiority is confined to their education and experience, it is likely that local officials will believe that they have all the above perceptions.

Under these circumstances it cannot be expected that there will be any warmth or respect at the start of the consultancy relationship, and there is little scope for developing it over a one-hour relationship.

## **Empathy**

Rogers, in particular, places great emphasis on empathy as a necessary condition for counseling.

It is possible for there to be mistrust and antipathy, but for there still to be a great deal of empathy, as when a policeman is interviewing a suspect: each empathises with the other's circumstances.

It is, perhaps, relatively easy to project empathy in relation to the economic aspects: the consultant understands the respondent's views, and communicates this by the use of the basic micro-skills. However, when he arrives, the foreign consultant has little idea of how the official perceives him or his project, he has little idea of the official's personal or professional objectives, and he has little idea of the official's place in society. Given the time constraints, not least the fact that most of an interview must be devoted to the economics, he is not likely to find out very much in an hour. If he has no real understanding, the consultant's attempt to communicate empathy may vary from the patronising to the insulting. It is argued here that the consultants' perceptions of these matters develops slowly over the period of the consultancy, so he is not in a position to express empathy in any one interview. When he does feel he understands what is going on, he will probably think it most unwise to say what he thinks.

Similarly, the official's empathy is limited: he does not understand the consultant's personal or professional objectives, he does not understand the basis for his self-esteem and he does not understand the logic of the project. Again, he may feel that he empathises, but his attempts to communicate that empathy may arouse hostility.

## **Genuineness**

The local officials mistrust the consultant and his project. They mistrust his motives, feeling that he has a hidden agenda of his own or dictated by the donor agencies. They fear that even if he sticks to the official Terms of Reference, they will suffer financially, perhaps from a loss in promotion or a reduction in income from corruption. They fear that he will expose their incompetence or bring the wrath of politicians on their heads. At the same time they have a wide ranging antipathy towards consultants in general.

Similarly, many consultants mistrust the officials they are going to meet. They fear that their personal and financial objectives are so different to those of the Terms of Reference that they will try and subvert or sabotage the study.

There is little or no genuineness in communicating these feelings. If there was, open conflict could be expected.

## **Inter-Cultural Communication**

There are also purely cultural human relations problems. I avoid discussing these because they are culture specific, because it is better to explain conflict by more generally applicable factors if possible (Occam's Razor), and because it is always comforting to explain away problems by saying they are culturally determined.

## **Core Conditions**

The question arises: in view of the human relations situation at the outset of a consultancy, a situation which many would think rules out successful therapeutic counseling, is there any possibility of successful consultancy?

## **PART II: THE INTERVIEWS**

### **ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT WITH THE CLIENT ORGANIZATION**

The consultant's first meetings generally include negotiating how the project will run. In my work the formal contract and terms of reference are negotiated by others (a consultancy firm rather than the consultant who will do the job). I must still spend the first days of the contract establishing the ground rules, perhaps implicitly rather than explicitly. I do this in a series of courtesy visits to key people in the client organization and perhaps other ministries and, where appropriate, to the representatives or the organization financing the study.

There is a similar negotiation of contract in counseling. Rogers (1951) argues that a more natural relationship builds up if the contract is implicit but Loughary (1961) believes that the contracting process helps the client gain realistic expectations and gives some idea of the process. In Transactional Analysis "A contract is one of the most important aspects of TA treatment. A contract is an agreement between counselor and client which specifies the goals, stages and conditions of treatment" (Wollams and Brown, 1977). Stewart *et al* (1978, p96) actually argue that it is the civil right of all new clients to know what is to be expected. One development in micro-counseling or HRD is that clients can benefit from being taught how to use counselors. Similarly, during the contract period, the client can be shown how best to use the consultant.

#### **MY ROLE**

One purpose of the preliminary visits is to clarify my role. Some conflicts can arise if the consultant and client do not clarify their roles, as the following examples show:

The clients and consultant may have different perceptions of the type of consultancy to be carried out. The consultant may think that non-directive consultancy is required, while the clients wants expert diagnosis and treatment, with the result that the clients are infuriated to get their own ideas fed back to him.

The consultant may perceive the client organization as being quite incapable of doing the job and as recognizing this, while the client has a different perception. The client may think that it has experts in the subject who could easily do the job if they were not fully occupied elsewhere. It may think that its experts do not have the necessary teaching or personal skills to teach. It may feel that the skill is like that of the jobbing gardener “I could do it better myself if I had the time”. In this case the consultant will appear patronizing. The regular staff who believe that they could do the job quite easily will strongly resent the fact that the consultant is being paid many times more than them to do the same job.

The client organization may believe that its role is to have a few brief meetings with the consultant and then wait for the report to arrive, while the consultant believes that it is going to provide a great deal of data, staff and services like transport.

This implies the need to clarify what type of consultancy is required and offered and what the consultant’s level of competence is. It also has implications with regard to the building up of self-esteem in the client organization, the tone of the report, etc.

## ***MODE OF DISCUSSION***

An important part of the initial negotiations is negotiating a mode of discussion. This is normally carried out implicitly.

Most of my work is on subjects which are very sensitive politically, and which are emotionally loaded. Much of it concerns situations that would get headlines in the Sunday papers if generally known. The discussion could easily become an angry exchange of opinions with little factual content. Alternatively, in avoiding this, we could revert to a situation where I produce the World Bank’s politically correct solution, and they produce their Government’s politically correct facts, neither having much relation to the truth.

It is important, therefore, to establish a mode of discussion, both for interviews and for the presentation and evaluation of the report.

“The customary advice [for effective persuasion] is that of reason, civility and decorum, of never threatening, harassing, cajoling, embarrassing, coercing and so on, since threats to persons or property only makes things worse” (Simons, 1976, p163)<sup>1</sup>

My experience is that formal politeness by itself is almost invariably met by politeness from the respondent, and that one rapidly sets up a mode of discussion which steps carefully around the hot issues and the emotions. The more important political issues are identified, either formally or in a very roundabout way (which means that a consultant who is not attuned to this method of discourse may miss them.)

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<sup>1</sup> Simons (1976, p165) admits that this approach does have the effect of denying communication to both parties.



This approach, used in the early stages of the study, may set the tone for all future interviews. It may also reassure the client organization that the consultant is not threatening. I am not aware of any consultant deliberately trying to get expression of emotion, as a counselor might, or even of picking up an issue identified in a roundabout way and clarifying it. This may be a weakness in the consultancy approach, but the dangers of the other approach are considerable: if a counselor loses a client after the first interview, he loses perhaps ten hours' work, but if the consultant does, he loses three or four month's income.

The initial discussions may also cover presentation of the report - interim reporting, length of report, level of analysis, analytical or descriptive content, and the audience for whom it should be written. It may also cover what the report should or should not cover.

The criteria for evaluating the report can also be covered here. In *Getting to Yes*, Fisher and Ury (1991) argue that negotiation is much pleasanter and easier if the criteria are set first, so that any deal can be subjected to the test of how they match the criteria for fairness rather than what is in it for each party to the negotiation. I would like to establish the primary criterion for the report as being that it should be technically good, and that it should not be judged on whether it is politically correct.

As a consultant, I am in a very weak bargaining position. If I do not produce an acceptable report, I have failed. If I do not get the co-operation I need, and I raise a fuss, I can expect that I will be strongly criticised by the client for incompetence, and this will affect my future employability. Often neither the client nor the employees want the project to succeed and they may take a certain pleasure in watching a highly paid foreign consultant fail (Bowbrick, 1992). This helps explain the very poor quality of a lot of consultancy reports.

## **OPENNESS**

In these meetings there is usually an explicit statement that the client will cooperate fully and give me any information I need, as it is a project that the client organization holds dear to its heart. In practice there may be little or no cooperation from the organization or the individuals in it, or even active sabotage, and the exercise becomes one of producing an acceptable report on little or no data. The person who negotiated the formal contract, the people I see in the courtesy visits and those whose cooperation I need may be three different sets of people, who do not feel bound by anyone else's commitment to openness. The person agreeing to openness when agreeing a formal contract may feel very differently about it when he has to produce the data or use his authority to get others to do so.

One approach would be to list the degree of cooperation required and to ask at the courtesy visit for a formal commitment to supply it. This might have some effect, reminding people of the commitment, and getting a new commitment.

While a client might accept that I need economic information to write a report, he may not understand or agree with my request for political and micro-political information. Indeed, he might think it presumptuous or even professionally wrong to ask for it. Because of this, I do not negotiate for openness on this. I wait until a degree of rapport has been achieved and the respondent is talking and slip in a question.

Accordingly, I cannot rely on the core conditions of openness and concreteness, much less on the client giving me the full information or correct information. I can usually produce a moderate economic report even without this, or a technically excellent report that is not accepted or acted on because of human relations problems.

What about my own openness and concreteness? I believe that if my report tells the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, my report will be rejected, and I will be on the next plane out of the country. The client may well be restricting openness because a fear of exposure, and this fear increases the more information I ask for. A case might be made for negotiating the degree of disclosure that the report will contain in the early meetings - for instance, I can often ignore major inefficiencies and corruption without affecting my conclusions. It is quite normal for a consultant to promise not to identify sources or to quote informants. However, in this respect a reputation for integrity and openness may be a definite handicap to a consultant.

## **Openness and the ability to learn**

In most counseling situations it would be understood that if a client is not willing to be open, it will seriously limit his ability to learn from the project. In consultancy this may be so, but it is not necessarily so. It is *possible* that a client will not be open, but the consultant will get the information from other sources and that the client will act on the results. While this is a possible outcome, one would not expect it, for several reasons.

The client organization may know at some level the facts about corruption, say, but chose to ignore them, to believe that they are of minor importance or that they are integral to the culture or system. It may be extremely dangerous for individuals to disclose them. Because the organization is not open about these facts to the consultant, it misses the chance to become aware of them at a higher level of consciousness by its own efforts and to solve the problem itself. If the consultant presents the facts in his report, the client may be prevented by this self deception from accepting the results.

The client may not be aware of the nature and extent of the problem and may be quite willing to act on it if it is exposed, but the lack of openness prevents it from being exposed.

The client organization may have political or emotional reasons for its policies which it may not wish to discuss with an outside consultant, particularly a foreigner (e.g. in Kenya an important factor in policy was a worry about Indians taking over the grain trade.) At one level this may mean that the consultant may produce an unacceptable report because he does not realize the existence of key constraints. At another level, because no one in the client

organization discusses these reasons even in private, nobody knows how important each constraint is and what trade offs are possible. Lack of discussion may mean that everyone in the Ministry believes that the Minister is firmly opposed to a course of action, even when he has no views on it.

## ***AUTHORITY***

In consultancy, truly voluntary participation is rare. Third World officials cannot be expected to be participating voluntarily or enthusiastically. The client may not want the study at all, but may have accepted it because donor organizations forced it to.

I may have some authority with the client organization, arising from the fact that I represent a powerful donor organization, especially if I am working in an area that it considers a priority, or if I am approving a large sum of aid. This can increase the cooperation of the client organization, but possibly at the cost of increased resentment and a suspicion that I am biased.

Accordingly, the client organization may be asked to give the consultant some authority to demand cooperation and openness from respondents, but, again, this may cause resentment.

## ***COMPETENCE***

In these initial negotiations, it is important for the consultant to establish his competence. This will be discussed in Part III as part of the persuasive process.

## ***ENTERING A CONTRACT WITH EACH INDIVIDUAL***

For each interview I hold, there is a contract different in form from that with the organization. During the study I may have to talk with perhaps 100 people, most of them for less than an hour. Probably a third of them will see my report at some stage, so the contract extends to this. Some other people will read my report even though they have not met me. Each has his own reasons for feeling threatened by the study and feeling antipathetic to the consultant.

The initial greetings and politenesses are in fact a negotiation, ensuring that the conversation will be polite and the respondent will be helpful rather than unhelpful, truthful rather than untruthful, whenever it does not matter for him. The importance of going through the greetings and ceremonies is clearly seen in a market place for instance, where a foreigner who uses them changes himself from a foreigner who may be harassed and fleeced into a person with whom the market vendors will bargain politely.

The consultant has to introduce himself and say why he is there. This can be used as a way to communicate his competence and experience, and at the same time his authority:

“Hello, I am Peter Bowbrick. Your Ministry of Agriculture and the World Bank [Authority] have asked me to do a price policy study for them covering . . . [Coverage]. What we are looking at is . . . [Role]. What it will achieve is . . . [Incentive to cooperate]. I am a price policy economist and I have worked on similar problems in fifteen countries around the world for organizations like the World Bank and FAO [Competence].”

The respondent may respond because the consultant has been given the authority by the Ministry or the World Bank, because he does not want to offend the donor community in case he loses an aid project, out of politeness, or because he likes the consultant’s face.

The core condition of openness does not obviously help the respondent to solve his own problems, and it may be safer for him to be silent, or to talk at length about something harmless. In practice, most people will give any information that does not harm them if they are approached politely: social researchers have found people perfectly ready to talk about anything from their sex life to their brand of soap powder, and I find it very rare that someone flatly refuses to talk to me. The degree of openness varies of course: people often think that it is quite safe to talk to me as long as they do not give me any hard figures, and they are usually willing to let me see published data and consultants’ reports. Very few people realize how much can be learned from a qualitative model, how much can be learned from comparing their information with other people’s, or the limited value of the inaccurate figures they are keeping secret. I believe that most people tell me a lot of things that they had meant to keep quiet about when they started to talk. It is for these reasons that the army trains its men to give only name, rank and number when they are taken prisoner. It is important, therefore, to negotiate that the respondent will talk, rather than to discuss with him how open he will be, or whether he will discuss such issues as micro-politics or political pressures.

## **Respect**

Respect is widely believed to be a core condition for counselling, though the word is used in very different senses in the counselling literature: Carkhuff (1969 p36) for instance seems to accept a fairly basic level as being respect “Nevertheless, we must emphasise that we are not speaking of ‘unconditional positive regards’, ‘non possessive warmth’ or ‘non retaliatory permissiveness’”

I establish a degree of respect for the respondent just by asking his advice and writing down what he says. I do try and communicate a respect for his office, his local knowledge etc., but this may be interpreted as nothing more than mere politeness. The basic attending and self expression skills, “culturally appropriate patterns of eye contact, body language, and verbal following behaviour . . . vocal tone, speech loudness and rate and proxemic variables” (Ivey and Authier, 1978 p 66) could be called basic politeness, just as showing a certain degree of respect is basic politeness. A definition of respect like “Our definition of respect is that

different perceptions of the same event must be honoured and appreciated” (Ivey and Gluckstern 1976 p37) may require no more than that I listen to an obviously wrong perception, because I am interested in finding out why the respondent came to such a conclusion, so that I can persuade him later.

In the purely information gathering phase of the work, respect from the respondent may not be necessary, as long as there is politeness. I have found from an interpreter after a very successful interview that the respondents had been very rude to him in Pushtu; they were openly critical of foreign consultants and thought that the study was a waste of time. They did, however, give me the ceremonial tea and the information I required, as a matter of politeness. Equally, my quiet, unthreatening, interview style is very effective in getting data (though it may not be so effective the persuasive part of the study).

### **Accuracy of Response**

I believe that I can find out most lies by cross-checking information obtained from different people and statistics. If these are used in a complex economic model, discrepancies are shown up. When people lie about a subject or they refuse to answer questions about it, it is usually an indication that it is worth investigating further.

The respondents may lie to serve their own ends or to sabotage the project. At one level there are the formal lies that nobody takes seriously or challenges: the farmer’s crops have failed and prices are low; the trader is losing money to provide high prices to the farmer and low prices to the consumer; the moneylender charges very low interest and has a high level of bad debts; the civil servant works in the only honest and efficient department in the government. Politeness requires that the consultant nods his head and writes down the lie. This harms nobody.

There are many cases of suppression of information, or of errors which could be due to the respondent’s misperception. I have a good idea that people will lie about certain things, such as income or profit levels, and I do not push them on this, but concentrate on other areas where I think they will feel less threatened. In general anything concrete is extremely threatening to the respondent.

Respondents do lie to hide the fact that they are stealing money or have made a mistake. I believe that the lie is usually confined to areas immediately surrounding the fact they are trying to hide, and it shows up quite easily as it conflicts with other lies (though it may be that I do not spot the good liars). Sometimes, as with politically sensitive matters, the lie appears to be told deliberately badly to communicate to the consultant the fact that they have been told to lie.

I believe, though, that farmers and small businessmen habitually lie to government officials on the grounds that anything the government wants to do could not be in their interest. They

also lie to social and economic researchers in areas in areas that are over-surveyed. This may be giving random misinformation, or it may be done as a joke. Dublin fruit and vegetable wholesalers, for example, held a competition to see who could get the government price reporter to accept the most unlikely story, a competition won by a wholesaler who got him to report the price of Hong Kong apples. Consultants get similar treatment if they ask stupid questions, asking the village herdboyer if all those cattle are his, or asking the man driving the Mercedes if it is his car. The consultant may be protected from consistent lying by the fact that he is clearly not a government official, but a visitor and a stranger. For some types of information, like criticisms of the political system, the fact that the consultant is clearly a foreigner, a Westerner, rather than a government official appears to mean that he is considered a safe person to hear the criticisms.

The location and environment of the interview situation is important in consultancy just as it is in counseling (Carkhuff, 1969). The consultant hears one story from an official in his office, another when he is travelling in remote country areas with him.

It is not clear that self-disclosure in the therapeutic counseling sense would be desirable for several reasons:

- It breaks down the very powerful bond of formal politeness, which appears to be a sufficient condition for the economic part of the consultancy at least.
- It may remove any constraints on displaying emotion, and the underlying hostility which he has kept suppressed will burst out uncontrollably.
- A respondent who burst into tears or showed his emotions powerfully would lose face.
- A respondent who shows his emotions in this way might feel that he has been tricked into disclosing something that was not in the implicit contract.
- In the absence of any contract, neither the consultant nor the respondent know how to handle the display of emotion.

## ***TRUST***

I do not believe that there is any large measure of trust in the consultancy relationship. The individuals the consultant communicates with may mistrust the consultant for a wide variety of reasons. Individuals recognize that their objectives clash with the ostensible and real objectives of the organization, so any report that helps the organization may harm them. Both individuals and the organization fear that the consultant may be pushing his own personal objectives or those of the donor organization financing the study.

Equally, consultants generally mistrust respondents for a wide variety of valid and invalid reasons. Experienced consultants exchange stories of being let down or cheated by clients, and they are careful to protect themselves.

## **OBJECTIVES**

In the initial interviews nearly all the time is spent on clarifying the terms of engagement and the objectives of the respondent and the organization, and in later interviews data collection may be the first priority, but clarification of the objectives is still important. Ranking the objectives, so that adequate attention is given to the primary objectives, is also important. The process of clarifying objectives continues throughout the study because the true objectives may be hidden, because they may not have been thought out or because they change in the course of the study.<sup>2</sup> The final report should not clash with either the formally agreed objectives of the Terms of Reference, or the true objectives as revealed by the study.

The initial contract and the clarification of objectives are separate in logic and they tend to be separate in time. One starts a study with the Terms of Reference of the formal contract. These are usually negotiated between a junior Ministry official and a consultant/salesman in the consultancy firm who does not know much about the subject. Even when the Terms of Reference were drawn up by a high level committee in the Ministry, they are only an overt agenda, not what they really want. Throughout the study the consultant is trying to determine the real agenda of the client organization, of other organizations and of key individuals. This may be a matter of finding a known, but concealed, agenda, or a teaching/learning process with respondents only becoming aware of their real interests as they discuss the subject.

In practice it is almost impossible for a report to meet all the client's objectives. If a report produces recommendations that, if implemented, would help achieve an objective, it may be said to meet that objective. If the report shows that two primary objectives are incompatible (which is often the case) the client may not feel that it has met an objective. If the report shows that the secondary and tertiary objectives (i.e. the means to the end) are not compatible with the primary objectives, which is normally the case, the client may not feel that the report has met its objectives. If the report shows a set of facts which does not conform to the client's beliefs, but still meets the primary and secondary objectives, the client may not believe that the study has met its objectives. If the report confirms the client's beliefs about the facts, but analysis shows that a different series of policy measures are needed to achieve the primary objectives, the client is likely to complain about the consultant's competence rather than his failure to meet his objectives.

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<sup>2</sup> Carkhuff (1969 p52) believes that 'Helpee set expectancies and motivation change over time and with counselling' with the corollary that 'Usually the helper does not meet either the helpee's original or changed expectancies'.

It is even less likely that the study will meet the objectives of the other organizations and of interested individuals.

As well as the overt agenda there is a hidden agenda which may include objectives like empire building by one person or department, a challenge to the power of one ministry, building up a marketing board that is a source of income to officials, replacing an incompetent but powerful person, providing a justification for aid which the international official has to disburse before the end of the financial year, or getting a bribe for allocation of the consultancy.

There may be a perfectly open subsidiary agenda. If the contact official is asked what he personally wants from the project, he may mention aid funding for a project, scholarships for staff training, vehicles and computers, or the establishment of a specialist professional unit to tackle the problem in future.

At the start of the study, neither the client organization nor the respondents may have really formulated their objectives, especially if the study was set up by a single person within the organization without consultation. The objectives come to the surface, change and then set during the course of the study. The consultant's presence, his interviews and his inception and interim reports affect this.

Sometimes the client keeps changing his objectives and the consultant can find that he is criticised at the end for performing the task originally agreed, rather than what the client now wants. A particularly difficult situation arises when one person sets the organization's original objectives, but, for one reason or another, another person with entirely different objectives is responsible for accepting the report. The respondents, and even the person with responsibility within the organization, may not share the organization's goals.

The fact that the respondent's objectives are hidden, not fully formulated, or in conflict with those of the organization makes it difficult to clarify them in interviews. One technique is to ask respondents what the views of other organizations and departments are, what pressures they are under, and what the politics are. They may be more forthcoming about this than they would be about themselves.

## **COVERAGE**

One key point to clarify is what is to be covered. Sometimes a client wants the report to cover a much wider area than is necessary to achieve the objectives or than is feasible, given the time and resource constraints. It may be possible to re-negotiate this at the courtesy call stage or at the inception report stage. If not, the consultant tries to cover himself in his report by putting in at least one sentence covering each point in the written Terms of Reference.

More difficult is the situation where there is an area which someone does not want covered, such as over-manning, corruption or foreign exchange policy. The consultant has to identify



the fact that he is being asked to ignore something, which is not easy when the request is made in veiled hints. He then has to determine whether the request indicates the objective of the individual, a pressure group or an organization. He may be told by a junior official that powerful interests want the subject left out, and it is not clear whether he is expressing his personal interest, his personal perception (possibly wrong) or the stated objective of the Minister.

Once the issue has been clarified, the consultant has to make the difficult ethical decision of whether to withdraw, to do as asked or or to salve his conscious by putting it in so obscurely that nobody will notice.

## ***THE RESULTS AS AN OBJECTIVE***

Quite often the individuals or the organization specify the results or recommendations expected, either in the Terms of Reference or in the initial discussions. There is a confusion between ends and means.

Some consultants are pleased when the Terms of Reference specify the results. It makes it easy for them to write an acceptable report. They may rationalize it as meaning that the client has reached the conclusion that one course of action is necessary, and that the consultant's role is to advise on the implementation of that course of action, rather than to question whether it is really necessary. There is plenty of scope for self deception here.

Some consultants go further. Even when the Terms of Reference do not specify the answer, just the objectives, the consultant negotiates what answer and recommendations will be acceptable to the client. I have ethical objections to this.

The consultant may choose to challenge, at the initial interview stage, at the inception report stage or at the final report stage, pointing out the difference between a primary objective, a secondary objective and the means of achieving them, and showing that there may be conflicts between secondary objectives in particular, and that there may be several ways of achieving the desired objectives. The consultant has to decide at which stage to challenge. He must also decide on whether to do a head-on challenge pointing out the errors in the Terms of Reference, or to do it more obliquely, setting out first the primary objectives that everyone will accept, then showing that others are secondary objectives which may conflict, and finally setting out one or more policies that may achieve these. This may make it logically possible to ignore objectives or policies that do not derive from the primary objectives, but it may not satisfy people whose pet policies are ignored. There are some beliefs that are held so passionately by a large number of people that it is not feasible to change them in the course of a consultancy study, for instance that all wholesalers are useless parasites who do not help anyone or that it is a Good Thing for government to enforce minimum grading standards on fruit and vegetables. Wherever possible I prefer to avoid challenging these beliefs.

It is a temptation to avoid confrontation as long as possible, in the hope that either the conclusions reached by the client will prove to be acceptably close to the truth, or that they are largely irrelevant and can be accepted or ignored without altering the recommendations of the report. This may mean, though, that when the confrontation comes the reaction is stronger.

When the results wanted by the client are diametrically opposed to the truth, and the consultant knows it from the first few interviews, he can

- withdraw from the contract on the grounds that he is wasting his time, and he may not get paid anyway.
- renegotiate as early as possible.
- present the truth in a mild and obscure way, to satisfy his conscience, and hope that he gets paid.
- lie.

Some consultants also have the results as an objective. For personal political reasons or to please one set of masters like the World Bank they might push one set of policies like Reganite economics.

## ***THE CONSULTANT'S OBJECTIVES***

The consultant has financial objectives like getting the report accepted, getting it paid for and getting follow-up employment, which may imply pleasing potential employers who are not party to the contract. He may not wish to discuss these with clients in case he sows the seeds of doubt. I have personal objectives which may conflict with my financial objectives. These include personal and professional objectives, ethical objectives, objectives with relation to freedom from hunger, income distribution and so on, and job satisfaction objectives like getting my report accepted and acted on. I feel that I have wider responsibilities than my responsibility to the Department which hires me or to the contact person in that department: I have responsibilities to the nation, to farmers and to consumers.

These personal objectives certainly colour my report, and they may conflict with the client organization's objectives, and those of individual officials.

## **COLLECTING THE INFORMATION**

Interviews at the beginning of the study are for the purpose of establishing the terms of engagement, for clarifying the objectives and for establishing some sort of personal rapport with the people who will be making the decisions. As the study progresses, information gathering becomes more important, whether new information, information to cross-check information already gathered, information to test hypotheses, or statistics to fit into the model. However, the consultant continues to collect information throughout the study, on objectives, politics, micro-politics and on what the respondent thinks important, even though other information is now relatively more important.

These later interviews are also different in character because one has more time, typically up to an hour, because the respondents know more about what is happening than senior officials do and because they do not have the same policy-making and decision-making role. At the same time, the focus is different, because the objectives should be clearer.

The consultant does not want an interview to cover all aspects, and may have to confine it to one or two. He wants the Permanent Secretary and Minister to give authority, to clarify the political constraints and give formal statements of Government objectives. If they spend the ten minutes available describing the industry or diagnosing its problems, the interview will be wasted. Similarly, in most interviews he wants facts. If the respondent instead gives his low-grade analysis and conclusions, the limited time available is wasted. Worse, once a respondent has made these explicit, he may feel committed to an analysis and conclusions which conflict with the consultant's.

In the initial stages I prefer to do non-directive interviewing. I set out the general area I want to investigate and ask the respondent for his views. I then concentrate on encouraging him to talk. This involves using the basic attending skills of eye contact, body language, and politeness (even though these may not always be culturally appropriate) and the attending skills, notably the minimal encouragement of pause, "uh huh", and "What else?". The questions asked are as open as possible: "Can you tell me more about that?" or "You said earlier that wholesalers' margins were high?"

The rationale is that I start with no knowledge at all, and if I asked questions I would elicit replies that fitted into my preconceived notions of what was happening and what was wrong. A formal questionnaire would be even more restricting, forcing the answers into a mould. Open questions, on the other hand, may elicit information I did not realize existed, and may identify problems I had not thought of. Towards the end of the study my interviews may have different objectives, such as cross checking data or checking my model's predictions, in which case I would ask closed questions.

As I listen, I build up my own model in my head, making use of my grasp of economic theory and my knowledge of similar systems elsewhere. I can absorb a lot of knowledge quickly in this way, fitting each bit into its place, and observing where some information clashes with other information or does not fit into my first simple model. At the end of such an interview I may have very little idea of how the respondent thinks about the situation,

about his objectives or about the micro-politics, but I may still leave with a very much better economic model.

This information on objectives, micro-politics and whether the Ministry of Finance is in favour of privatization for instance, is important in the persuasion process, so it should be collected if possible. After the first few information visits, I am not so occupied with the economics and I can spend more time on this. I may also have time to ask explicit questions: “What are the political constraints?”, “What is your Ministry’s view”, “What do other Ministries believe?” Sometimes there are two or more consultants in the interviewing team and one of them can sit in the background and listen for these overtones. However, as Ivey and Authier emphasize, helpes talk about what helpers listen to, so if the lead interviewer is listening intently to the economics, the respondent may not talk about anything else.

In market research one might move from this type of exploratory interview through, say, group discussions and open ended questions to the tightly closed questions of a formal questionnaire. The time and money constraints of consultancy do not permit this. Furthermore, there is only one Minister of Agriculture, only one Managing Director of the cotton monopoly, so it is not feasible to do several stages of the study without talking to the same person several times.

## **PART III**

### **PERSUASION**

A vital part of consultancy is persuasion. There is little point in producing a perfect economic model if you cannot persuade people to read it, accept its conclusions, act on it and, of course, pay for the report. It is necessary to persuade the client organization to do the study, persuade it to employ the consultant, persuade the client organization and individuals to cooperate in the study, persuade them that the conclusions and recommendations are correct, and then persuade them that they have made the right decisions.

In this last part of the monograph, therefore, I am going to look at consultancy as a persuasive process. This does not mean that there will be no mention of micro-skills, rather that they are discussed in a different context.

Miller and Burgoon (1973 p.13) contrast two types of persuasion. First there is

“A conscious attempt by one individual to change the behaviour of another individual or group of individuals through the transmission of some message”  
(Bettinghaus, 1968)

and then there is

“The conscious attempt to modify thought and action by manipulating the motives of men towards predetermined ends. (Brembeck and Howell, 1952)

Both talk of conscious intent, but one talks of behaviour and one of motives. In an ideal world, consultancy would indeed be a matter of clarifying motives and persuading the client that certain behaviour would result in the objectives being achieved. Clarifying motives and objectives usually changes them, and is certainly a form of manipulation, and so is agreeing on a set of objectives sufficiently respectable to be put in writing. It is possible, though, to change people’s attitudes, objectives and motives without changing the organization’s behaviour. It is possible, too, to change behaviour without changing attitudes, motives, etc, most obviously by showing them that other actions are more likely to achieve objectives.

Several aspects of persuasion have been discussed in the previous chapter from a different point of view. Persuading people to take part in the study, and persuading them to give information have been discussed already, but will be discussed here in the context of persuasion. The process of collecting information on attitudes, opinions, politics in the previous chapter, but the actual use of the information in the final report is beyond the scope of this monograph. The persuasive processes that will be discussed are

1. Creating a willingness to believe the consultant, independent of his credibility, when, at some stage in the future, he presents his results.
  - a. Creating a liking for the consultant.
  - b. Creating an obligation which must be reciprocated.
2. Creating credibility.
3. Creating a willingness to accept the report when it finally appears, independent of its content.

These persuasive processes are basically the consultant persuading an individual, while the final report is aimed at an organization containing many individuals with diverse views.

The persuasive processes will be discussed here according to their function. There are however alternative ways of classifying them. Cialdini (1968) for instance believes that the thousands of persuasive tactics used can be classified under six headings: reciprocation, consistency, social proof, liking, authority and scarcity. Others, like Simons (1976) are primarily concerned with persuasion as communication - the report stage in fact. These classifications necessarily overlap, and the distinctions used here are not generally made. Simons (1976), for instance, treats the establishment of common ground as the same process whether it is used to improve communication by setting up a common language, or used to create a liking for the persuader, while here these are treated as different processes for different objectives.

## ***MICRO-SKILLS AS PERSUASION***

All the micro-skills listed in Table 1 can be used persuasively. It is argued here in fact that they are necessarily persuasive, even if the user is unaware that he is persuading, or if he is trying not to persuade.

The “basic attending and self expression” skills of eye contact, body language, tone of voice, etc. are part of the consultant’s bedside manner.<sup>3</sup> They help determine how the respondent perceives the consultant, including liking and perception of competence. They can also be used to direct a discussion: if the interviewer leans forward keenly or writes notes when one subject is discussed, but sits back and closes his book when another is, the respondent is given a very clear indication of what he is expected to talk about. If the interviewer nods his head or smiles at some statements, this may be taken as approval, and the respondent may say what the interviewer seems to want him to say. This process is usually quite unconscious, and neither party may notice the persuasion.

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<sup>3</sup> Grindler and Bandler (1976) talk about “paramessages”, both those that can be heard, like tone of voice, tempo, volume, words and sentences used, and those which can be seen, like eye movements, facial expression, and head/shoulder/neck relationships (Ivey and Authier, 1978)

Similarly, in giving encouragement to carry on talking, some interviewers say “Yes?” , “Is that so?” or even “How shocking?”, statements which encourage not just more talking but certain kinds of response. Careful training is needed to get “minimal encouragement” like the use of silence, “Uh huh” and “What else?”. In market research this can cause serious biases, so interviewers are trained to avoid physical or verbal encouragement beyond the “minimal encouragement”. (Belson, 1978)

The use of “open questions” is intended to minimize the influencing effect, but it does influence the direction of an interview, what the respondent talks about, and how much weight he gives to different subjects. It is also used to stop a flow of talk, and stop someone from talking about a subject. Again, interviewer training and selection is done in market research, as some interviewers are incapable of reading questions tonelessly, and some appear to be incapable of reading the question in exactly the words of the paper, and put in words like “Do you really . . . .?” or “Surely you don’t . . . .?” These tones and changes can invalidate a survey (Belson, 1978). It is not suggested that the toneless reading of prepared questions which is required for mass market research would be at all productive in consultancy or counseling, but it must be recognized that the more relaxed approach does produce biases. “Closed questions”, however carefully asked, direct the interview, and to a large extent determine what is said and what emphasis is based on different aspects.

“Paraphrase” and “Summarization” are, again, very effective in telling the respondent what among all he said in the interview the interviewer considers important and in giving the interviewer one view of how it may be important. The consultant’s paraphrases may each be slightly wrong, each leading the respondent in one direction. This may be unintentional, as the consultant is fitting what he hears into his own mode, and may not realize that the respondent does not always understand the implications of what he is saying. Ivey and Authier (1978 p86) show how easy it is to influence people in this way. “Reflection of feeling” can be persuasive, though I have strong reservations about the use of this micro-skill in a consultancy situation.

Table 1 **THE TAXONOMY OF MICROTRAINING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE SKILLS**

**Basic attending and self-expression skills.** *underlying all attending and influencing skills are culturally appropriate patterns of eye contact, body language and verbal following behaviour. vocal tone, speech loudness and rate.*

**The Microtraining skills.**

**Attending skills:**

**CLOSED QUESTIONS.** *Most often begin with “do”, “is”, “are” and can be answered by the helpee with only a few words.*

**OPEN QUESTIONS.** *Typically begin with “what”, “how”, “why”, or “could” and allow the helpee more room for self exploration.*

**MINIMAL ENCOURAGE.** *Selective attention to and repetition back to the helpee of exact words or phrases. May also be represented by “Tell me more . . .” or “Uh huh”.*

**PARAPHRASE.** *Gives back to the helpee the essence of past verbal statements. Selective attention to key content of helpee verbalizations.*

**REFLECTION OF FEELING.** *Selective attention to key affective or emotional aspects of helpee behaviour.*

**SUMMARIZATION.** *Similar to paraphrase and reflection of feeling, but represents a longer time period and gives back to client several strands of thinking.*

**Influencing Skills**

**DIRECTIONS.** *Telling the helpee or helpees what to do.*

**EXPRESSION OF CONTENT.** *Giving advice, sharing information, making suggestions, giving opinions.*

**EXPRESSION OF FEELING.** *Sharing personal or other people’s affective state in the interview.*

**INFLUENCING SUMMARY.** *Stating the main themes of the helper’s statements over a period of time.*

**INTERPRETATION.** *Renaming or relabelling the helpee’s behaviours or verbalizations with new words from a new frame of reference.*

**SOURCE:** *Adapted from Ivey and Authier (1978) pp66-67.*



“Summarization”, even if done accurately and dispassionately, will leave the client feeling differently.

“ . . . by using a summarization skill, the interviewer seeks to attend and selectively reinforce client comments and behaviour in such a way that an overall picture of the client’s feelings and experience is obtained.” (Ivey and Authier, 1978 p87)

New connections between ideas and facts will have been established. Facts previously ignored will be given a new importance.

Those skills which are called “influencing” in the micro-skills approach are clearly persuasive. These include “directions”, “giving advice”, the “influencing summary”, and “interpretation of the respondents’ behaviour in a new framework”. In the type of consultancy discussed, these would be saved until the final report.

“Focusing” is another micro-skill which is necessarily persuasive. If the consultant can keep the interview focused on what he believes to be the problem, the respondent may be persuaded that this is a problem, or at least that it bears looking at in more detail (with the possibility of a self-persuading process). Focusing on a problem near to the respondent will probably be perceived as a threat.

## ***CREATING A WILLINGNESS TO BELIEVE THE CONSULTANT***

A consultant who creates antagonism in his interviews, or who gives the impression that he is biased against the respondent can expect to have difficulty in getting information from an interview, and to find that any report he produces is treated very critically.

The consultant has to create a willingness on the part of the respondent to take part in the study, to the extent of giving some information. At the same time, he may use the interview as an opportunity to create a propensity to believe the consultant’s report when it comes out, perhaps by establishing his professional competence. These two processes are carried out at the same time, but they may conflict - people may find it difficult to open up to someone who proclaims himself the world expert - but they use many of the same techniques, and will be taken together.

### **Liking**

People are more likely to listen to someone and to accept what he says if they like him (Cialdini, 1988; Simons 1976). Cialdini quotes the powerful effect of Tupperware parties, where people buy a product they do not want at a high price because friends ask them to. He quotes another marketing approach, the Shakalee sales manual

“It would be impossible to overestimate its value. Phoning or calling on a prospect and being able to say that Mr So and So, a friend of his, felt he would benefit by giving you a few moments of his time is virtually as good as a sale 50% made before you enter” (1988 p160)

Put another way, there is evidence that hostility may decrease the respondent’s receptivity:

“Other writers interested in inducing resistance to persuasion have suggested that the persuadee’s level of hostility may effect resistance to persuasive appeals. They have reasoned that raising a person’s level of hostility by annoying or abusive behaviour may result in increased resistance to social behaviour, because of a persuader’s general dislike for mankind. A classic study by Weiss and Fine (1956) found that when a person is subjected to abusive treatment prior to a persuasive appeal, he becomes more resistant to persuasive appeals arguing benignly, but more susceptible to appeals arguing for harsh actions.” (Miller and Burgoon, 1973)

There is evidence that people are more likely to be liked if they are physically attractive, if they pay compliments, if there is a degree of similarity between both parties and if there is a measure of contact and cooperation between the two (Cialdini, 1988).

## **Common Background**

It is often argued that it is possible to make oneself liked by identifying common ground with the person to be persuaded, by references to shared beliefs, values, attitudes, “similarity or identity in origin and parentage; schooling and upbringing; religious training; work experiences, economic classes or condition . . .” (Minnik, 1957), on the grounds that we like people similar to ourselves (e.g. Simons, 1976; Cialdini 1988). The effect of this may not be powerful:

“In general, there seems to be a weak but positive relationship between attitudinal similarity and the factors of respect and trust, and a still less dependable relationship between membership group similarities and these same factors” (Simons, 1976 p159)

Simons also points out that this is simplistic: for example this technique may indeed create liking, but it reduces source credibility - why should we listen to someone exactly like ourselves? Indeed, if the clients are not confident in their own ability, the common ground approach may reduce their confidence in the consultant:

“The common ground doctrine is predicated on the assumption that receivers will have a reasonably high estimate of themselves and the groups with which they are affiliated.” (Simons, 1976, p163)

In my form of consultancy it would be foolish to attempt to establish bonds in this way, when it is obvious that we are not similar in most of them. Where there are major differences, and where these can be expected to cause mistrust and hostility, it is risky to pretend that they do not exist.

Sharing a common cause is usually lumped together with sharing a common background (e.g. Simons, 1976), but it is possible for people with different backgrounds to share a common cause and work towards the same goal. However, because of these differences in background and motive, an assertion of common cause is not instantly credible, and must be explained. It would seem that this comes under the heading of increasing the consultant's credibility, rather than under the heading of increasing liking for the consultant.

## **Compliments**

Paying compliments does make one more liked (Cialdini, 1988, pp166-7).<sup>4</sup> Certainly too much flattery can be counter productive, but there are many cultures, several of them English speaking, where a great deal of flattery is the norm, and the failure to pay insincere compliments is taken as harsh criticism. Millions of salesmen pay compliments because they believe that it makes them liked and that, as a result, customers are more likely to believe whatever sales pitch they put forward.

Paying compliments also raises the self-esteem of the recipients. There is some evidence that raising self-esteem reduces persuadability, as the individual becomes more confident and less likely to be influenced by others, but

“When the persuasive appeal consists of a complex message, awareness and comprehension assume importance, since increasing self-esteem also increases message receptivity. Thus, increases in self esteem are offset by increased comprehension of the persuasive message, which in turn lowers resistance to persuasion in complex message situations, on the part of persuaders who are high in self esteem.” (Miller and Burgoon, 1973, p22)

McGuire (1969) suggests that those with low self esteem may be easily persuadable for propositions that do not threaten their egos, but not at all for ego threatening propositions.

## **Cooperation**

If the consultant and the respondent can appear to be cooperating and working together, their liking for each other will increase (Cialdini, 1988 pp160-175). In many forms of consultancy, working together is an accepted way of increasing acceptance of the results, though it is usually thought that it is because the client then thinks of the recommendations and conclusions as his own, rather than as being imposed on him from outside. It might therefore be more appropriate to think of this as a tactic making the client more likely to accept new results, rather than purely as a tactic likely to increase liking. There are limited opportunities for this in my form of consultancy, but often a very close relationship develops between the consultant and his contact person in the client organization (which may mean

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<sup>4</sup> Ivey and Authier (1978 p 105) classify paying compliments under the micro-skill of expression of content. They also talk of them as “enhancing statements” to represent respect.

that the consultant totally misunderstands his relationship with the client organization as a whole.)

## **Micro-skills**

One may hypothesize that after a consultant has sat through an interview for an hour, using his full range of counseling skills, such as “basic attending and self expression skills”, “open questions”, “paraphrase” and “summarization”, the respondent will like him more. The respondent will see him as having some empathy, and probably, by extension, some sympathy too (“If he understands the facts, he must agree that I am right”). He will see the consultant as having respect for his views, certainly to the extent of asking for them, listening to them and writing them down.

If this is so, a skilled interviewer will make himself liked, or at least not disliked, and respondents will be more likely to accept his results when they are at last presented. This does raise the question of how far the same applies in counseling: the counselor is to some extent using the earlier sessions to make himself liked in order that the respondent should be more receptive to later suggestions - a purely persuasive effect?

## **Obligation and Reciprocation**

Salesmen often give a free gift to a prospective client, or do him a favour, in order to create a sense of obligation. They feel that this makes the prospective client predisposed to listen to his sales pitch and to be convinced by it. As with making the client like you, this does not improve your credibility, but it can still increase the probability of acceptance. Cialdini (1988) considers this to be one of the six key strategies of persuasion.

I do not use it, partly because it can degenerate into an uncontrollable bribery situation, with bribes needed to get the interviews, to get figures, to get the report printed and to get the report accepted.

A variant that is likely to be more workable is to make a big demand, and then, as a favour for which you want reciprocation, reduce it to a small demand. The small demand may then be accepted, even though it would have been rejected out of hand if it had been the first demand:

“Well, if it is your feeling that a fine set of encyclopedias is not right for you at this time, perhaps you could help me by giving me the names of some others who might be willing to take advantage of our company’s great offer.”  
(Quoted by Cialdini, 1988 p44)

The reciprocation may work against the consultant. Respondents sometimes feel that they have done the consultant a favour by giving him information, and it is up to him to reciprocate - even though they are paying the consultant to do a job for them. If the

consultant accepts this, it may alter the way he presents his conclusions and recommendations.

The consultant is also put at a disadvantage when local officials who are very badly paid persist in buying him meals, and refuse to accept his assurance that he is given a very big expense allowance precisely so that he can cover their costs when he travels with them - a problem that is particularly serious in Muslim countries. Since Watergate, many reporters go to enormous lengths not to accept any gift, in case it imposed an obligation - after a game of squash with a reporter who was my regular partner, it was the rule that we did not buy each other a drink, but that we each bought our own, even though I was not newsworthy.<sup>5</sup>

## **CREDIBILITY**

The consultant's report is more likely to be read, accepted and acted on if he is taken to be a credible source. The interview stage can be used to establish that credibility. The credibility can be established, or destroyed, before the consultant starts work on his report, and it may be more effective to do it at this stage:

“If a defense attorney can successfully derogate a prosecution witness before the witness has given his damaging testimony, the jury can be made resistant to the prosecution's persuasive appeals” (Miller and Burgoon, 1973 p35)

Establishing one's experience seems to be most important in Third World consultancy; both one's knowledge of the product one is dealing with, and one's experience of using economic theory in similar situations. It is probably true that one cannot be a first class consultant without this, but there are a large number of people who do have years of experience, but have learned nothing from them. This sort of credibility is non-threatening to respondents who believe that if only they were older or if only they had the chance to travel, they would be quite as well qualified.

Establishing that one has worked for well known organizations in many countries is also effective. It suggests that one's competence is well recognized by people who are competent to judge. Cialdini (1988) considers the social proof form of validation to be extremely effective in persuasion, even when it is illogical - “Fifty thousand Frenchmen can't be wrong”.

Academic qualifications are not generally seen as evidence of competence by practical men, possibly because of a conscious or unconscious attempt to preserve the self image of someone who has not got them. However, they may be influenced by stories of highly

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<sup>5</sup> “Interestingly enough, a cross cultural study has shown that those who break the reciprocity rule in the reverse direction - by giving without allowing the recipient the opportunity to repay - are also disliked for it. This result was found to hold for each of the three nationalities investigated - Americans, Swedes and Japanese” (Gergen, Ellsworth, Maslack and Siepel, 1975, cited in Cialdini 1988)

qualified but inexperienced people coming to ridiculous conclusions. Whatever the truth of the matter, it appears to mean that a consultant should have a master's degree, as most of the people he meets will have one. A PhD may be seen as threatening, and a list of publications definitely is. Consultancy firms often remove academic qualifications from a CV when they propose a consultant for a job.

It may even be argued that a consultant should not be too good technically. Often the client needs to develop a very basic comprehension of the economics, and will be put off by any deep analysis. Carkhuff (1969 p60) argues that

“(1) With persons functioning at the lowest level, those who have lost contact with reality, the preferred goals and treatment procedures involve re-establishing effective communications and interaction with the world; (2) the outpatient neurotic's errors in his assumptive world require, in turn, a process and outcome that will help him in establishing or re-establishing an effective working cosmology; (3) with relatively well-functioning but situationally distressed clients, often a viable communication process may be assumed, and more cognitive decision-making and problem solving processes may be incorporated into the helping process.”

I have a wide experience and deep analytical skills and I can rapidly build up a complex model of a market in my mind as I have tackled many of the problems before. As a result, I can do an analysis far more quickly than the local staff, who may see this as an aspersion on their competence or as an indication that I am an incompetent who is making rapid judgments on insufficient data and analysis. The complex analysis is difficult to communicate to an organization which lacks a foundation of economic understanding. There are people who are keen to boost their professional image by attacking someone with an established reputation.

Status symbols like good suits, fancy computers and expensive hotels are likely to make the consultant at least marginally more credible (Cialdini, 1988), but on the other hand they may arouse hostility from well-qualified respondents who cannot afford them.

A consultant's credibility also depends on his perceived bias. If he is seen to be financed by the World Bank or to have worked for the World Bank in the past, there will be a suspicion that he will toe the World Bank line, so his report will be looked at suspiciously - but if his report does not support the World Bank policy, it will be given added credibility. On the other hand, he may be such a sympathetic listener that every respondent thinks that he agrees with them wholeheartedly, with the result that they get a nasty shock when they read his report, and they react violently (another example of a skill that is very effective in meeting one of the consultant's objectives, being counter-productive in meeting another.)

## **Credibility and Interviewing Skills**

The pattern of behaviour which establishes the consultant's credibility is fairly active, even assertive. When interviewing purely for information, a more passive, non-directive, style may be appropriate. The passive style may also conflict with the strong statements and hard analysis of the final report, forcing respondents to re-evaluate their perception of the

consultant, which they may find difficult to do. It is necessary to compromise, certainly when there is only one person in the team.

## ***CREATING A WILLINGNESS TO LOOK AT NEW APPROACHES***

If someone is reasonably content with the status quo, it is unlikely that he will go out of his way to read a report on it - either it confirms what he knows already, in which case it is redundant, or it threatens his present beliefs, and should be avoided. It may be argued that the first steps in persuasion are, therefore, making him aware that there is a problem and making him aware what the problem is. Only then is there any point in presenting him with possible solutions and presenting the advantages and disadvantages of each.

This section asks how the consultant can go about creating the sense of unease with the status quo and making respondents aware of the problems in the interview stage. At the same time, it asks how the consultant can avoid getting respondents to dig their heels in.

The consultant usually has a very good idea that something is wrong from the start of the study; indeed he is usually called in because important people recognize this. He may or may not put his finger on exactly what is wrong during the course of the interviews, and he does not expect to produce conclusions or recommendations in the interview stage.

### **Micro-skills**

The role of micro-skills as persuasion has been discussed above. In this context, they can be used, consciously or unconsciously, to steer the interview towards the issues that the consultant considers most important. At the least this may start the respondent thinking seriously about these issues. Concentrating on perceived problems also gets the respondent aware that there are problems.

### **Commitment**

There is evidence that once people commit themselves to a point of view they are more reluctant to change their minds afterwards (Cialdini, 1988 pp61-80)

In general, prior commitment to a belief increases resistance to subsequent persuasive appeals. In particular, the evidence clearly demonstrates that forcing a person to publicly commit himself to a belief is an effective way of increasing resistance to subsequent persuasive appeals" (Miller and Burgoon, 1973 p28)

As a consultant I encourage people to talk about the facts, but I go to a lot of trouble to avoid letting them talk about their conclusions and recommendations. I am afraid that they will commit themselves to a position which is not tenable.

On the positive side, it is to the consultant's advantage if he can get the client to commit himself firmly to the objectives of the study, to the method of presentation and to the help and support they will give.

## **Inoculation**

McGuire's (1964) inoculation theory is that if someone is given an argument in a weakened form, together with a strong refutation, he will be inoculated against it. If he is then presented with the argument in its strong form, he will be less likely to accept it. The evidence suggests that this sometimes, but not always, appears to be the case. The implication for the consultant is that it is dangerous to give the client a weakened version of his conclusions and recommendations early in the study, as it will give him time to build up a resistance. This does suggest, too, that a controversial report may be considerably less persuasive if it has an abstract and executive summary which are not completely convincing in themselves, though I have seen no evidence on the effect of inoculation in such a short time space.

A very similar conclusion arises from the belief that if someone is presented with an argument which threatens his own beliefs, he will, consciously or unconsciously, take action to preserve the integrity of his own beliefs. He may collect the information and arguments that support his own beliefs. He may start to whip up support for his own beliefs, so that when the consultant presents his report, he is met with a fierce counter attack. The shorter the period between the threat and the report, the less time there is for this counter attack to develop.

Once it is realized that there is a problem and action is needed, everyone in the organization may start working on their own solution. The result is that when the consultant's carefully analysed proposal appears, it faces competition from a dozen half baked alternatives, each with its fervent supporters. This is one reason why the Civil Service is so keen on secrecy until a decision has been made.

There are strong arguments against premature disclosure of information on the recommendations and conclusions, and even on the fact that there is a problem. These have to be set against the advantages set out above. The result of secrecy may be that nobody is prepared for the news, and nobody is predisposed to accept it. The result is a nasty shock which may make people reluctant to accept the report. In some types of consultancy, it would preclude the use of one of the most effective persuasive devices, making the client a co-worker in analysing the problem and developing solutions.

## **Anchoring and Resistance to Persuasion**

People want to remain consistent in their beliefs. If they believe that if A, then B, then C, then D, it is very difficult to change their beliefs about D, unless they can be persuaded that



either A, B and C are not what they believed them to be, or that different relationships hold. This phenomenon is called anchoring (McGuire, 1969). The more firmly one belief is anchored to another, the harder it is to change it. McGuire suggests that the anchoring is likely to be strong if beliefs are linked to accepted attitudes or goals, related beliefs on other issues and liked individuals or issues.

The consultant may be able to sow the seeds of doubt about these linkages during the interviews, or at least refrain from establishing a linkage where none exists.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has shown that there is an important role for micro-skills in economic consultancy. The “basic attending and self-expression skills” and the more specific “attending skills” (Table I) are used throughout the interview stage (though they should be used with caution). The “influencing skills” are used after the interview stage in the type of consulting described. Some persuasive techniques are also used, but these are not easily reformulated in terms of micro-skills.

These micro-skills and persuasive techniques should only be used where appropriate. The study has shown that different skills and techniques are appropriate at each stage of the consultancy process. For example, using the “influencing skills” during interviews aimed at information collecting would largely invalidate the study, and even the ordinary “attending skills” must be used with care. The use of persuasive techniques again depends on the stage of the study and the objective: it is quite in order for the consultant to persuade the client in the first meeting that he is competent, but quite wrong to persuade him that the solution to his problem is a certain course of action. Particularly important in this respect is the identification of some persuasive techniques which can be used in the interview stages without altering the information obtained, but which will increase the probability of the report’s being accepted at a later stage.

This suggests that training in the micro-skills and persuasive techniques would give consultants the potential to be extremely effective. However, if this training is not accompanied by a training in the consultancy process, including the stages it goes through and the changing objectives, it may reduce the quality of the output.

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**CONTENTS**

**PART I**

INTRODUCTION ..... 5

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK ..... 7

THE MICROSILLS APPROACH ..... 7

PERSUASION ..... 10

CONSULTANCY ..... 13

TYPES OF CONSULTANCY ..... 13

        Non Directive ..... 13

        Teaching Coping Skills ..... 15

        Medical ..... 15

MY TYPE OF CONSULTANCY ..... 16

        Right, Role, and Responsibility ..... 17

            Right to intervene ..... 17

            Responsibility ..... 18

            Role 18

        The Consultancy System ..... 19

HOW CONSULTANCY DIFFERS FROM COUNSELING ..... 21

    The Organization or the Individual? ..... 22

    Time Constraints and Degree of Involvement ..... 23

    Voluntary Participation ..... 25

    Warmth and Respect ..... 26

    Empathy ..... 27

    Genuineness ..... 28

    Inter-Cultural Communication ..... 29

    Core Conditions ..... 29

**PART II**

ENTERING INTO A CONTRACT WITH THE CLIENT ORGANIZATION ..... 30

MY ROLE ..... 31

MODE OF DISCUSSION ..... 32

        Openness and the ability to learn ..... 37

AUTHORITY ..... 38

COMPETENCE ..... 39

ENTERING A CONTRACT WITH EACH INDIVIDUAL ..... 39

    Accuracy of Response ..... 42

TRUST ..... 45

<b><u>OBJECTIVES</u></b> .....	46
COVERAGE .....	49
THE RESULTS AS AN OBJECTIVE .....	50
THE CONSULTANT'S OBJECTIVES .....	52
<b><u>COLLECTING THE INFORMATION</u></b> .....	53
<b><u>PART III</u></b>	
<b><u>PERSUASION</u></b> .....	57
MICRO-SKILLS AS PERSUASION .....	59
CREATING A WILLINGNESS TO BELIEVE THE CONSULTANT .....	62
Liking 63	
Common Background .....	64
Compliments .....	66
Cooperation .....	67
Micro-skills .....	67
Obligation and Reciprocation .....	68
CREDIBILITY .....	70
Credibility and Interviewing Skills .....	73
CREATING A WILLINGNESS TO LOOK AT NEW APPROACHES .....	74
Micro-skills .....	74
Commitment .....	75
Inoculation .....	76
Anchoring and Resistance to Persuasion .....	77
<b><u>CONCLUSION</u></b> .....	79
<b><u>REFERENCES</u></b> .....	81