NON-TECHNICAL

ASPECTS OF INSPECTION

The collected papers from the Civil Service College
presented at a
Seminar held in Oxford (United Kingdom)
from 8 to 10 September 1999

Published by the Secretariat
to the Pharmaceutical Inspection Convention (PIC) and
the Pharmaceutical Inspection Co-operation Scheme (PIC/S)

The secretariat services are provided by
the EFTA Secretariat
9-11 rue de Varembé, CH-1211 Geneva 20
http://www.picscheme.org

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FOREWORD

At the invitation of the British authorities, a Seminar on "Non-Technical Aspects of Inspection" was held in Oxford from 8 to 10 September 1999. It was organised by the Medicines Control Agency, United Kingdom, on behalf of the Joint Committee set up under the Pharmaceutical Inspection Convention and the Pharmaceutical Inspection Co-operation Scheme (PIC/S)*. It was attended by some hundred and twenty participants from thirty-four countries including invited inspectors and health officials from a number of non-PIC/S countries such as Bulgaria, Estonia, Indonesia, Latvia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Poland, Singapore, Slovenia, Taiwan, Turkey and the United States.

This volume contains the papers presented at the Seminar.

Acknowledgements are expressed to the authors for their contributions and thanks to the Medicines Control Agency for the efficient organisation and for making this Seminar possible.

* In 1999 the PIC/S comprised 23 Inspectorates from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

NON-TECHNICAL ASPECTS OF INSPECTION

Seminar Objectives

The Pharmaceutical Industry makes a huge contribution to increasing standards of health throughout the world. It is central to the prevention and containment of physical and mental illness. In such an important industry, which operates throughout the world, maintaining confidence in the Convention is an important role for the Inspectorate.

The work of the Pharmaceutical Inspectors demands, not only expert knowledge, but considerable interpersonal and political skill. While carrying out their duties they have to deal with a wide range of reactions.

Any type of inspection can be threatening to an organisation but the stakes with these inspections are very high. Co-operation cannot be guaranteed just because parties are signatories to the Convention. For example, the pharmaceutical market is very competitive and commercial security will be strongly protected.

Relationships between inspector and inspected can be complex. In addition, the fact that inspectors are dealing with different cultures means that the opportunities for misinterpretation and misunderstanding are considerably magnified.

This very practical seminar will look at essential non-technical skills which inspectors need to do their job effectively.

More specifically, by the end of the seminar, inspectors will:

1. Appreciate the key skills of communicating effectively across cultural boundaries.

2. Review the sources of power available to them and identify the appropriate style to suit the circumstances.

3. Understand the process underpinning negotiations and the importance of effective preparation.

4. Be aware of the pitfalls which can arise when conducting an investigation or inspection and learn how to avoid them.

5. Develop strategies to deal with difficult behaviour from the people they encounter. This could include anger, aggression and deception.

COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Inspections, themselves, can be complex and difficult. Excellent communication skills are essential if we are to effectively communicate our requirements and develop effective working relationships at all levels of site management. A further complication can arise when we are operating outside our own country and across cultural boundaries.

This section will look at effective communication across cultures and also identify the behaviours which increase credibility.

Communicating across boundaries

In order to do the job well, inspectors have to develop a clear understanding of how the site is operating. This means establishing rapport with those we meet. In international inspections we can be face two important problems.

The first is understanding the cultural context in which other people are operating. Culture defines meaning and they may attribute a very different meaning to particular behaviours. Taking this into account necessitates sensitivity and understanding.

The second problem is escaping from our own cultural framework. We have been brought up in a particular culture which has shown us the appropriate way to behave towards others. It has also educated us to understand what others in the same culture mean. It is hard to realise that not everyone sees the world the same way. We can easily become offended and, unintentionally, give offence. Sensitivity and good manners will help us get over most of these issues.

Research has shown that different cultures view authority and organisation in different ways. This is extremely important for inspectors who have to know how far their authority goes and how to use it effectively. It will also help to make sense of some of the differences in management practices.

There are four dimensions which researchers have identified as underpinning the behaviour of different cultures. It is useful to place our own culture on these dimensions as well as the culture of those with whom we are dealing.

1. Individualism/Collectivism

Individualist cultures reward independence and personal assertiveness. They encourage self reliance and call on the individual to work out their own way to success. Examples are Britain, United States and Australia.

Collectivist cultures emphasise belonging to groups. The identification is with the family and social organisations. Loyalty and mutual support, for example, are highly regarded in collectivist cultures. Examples of collectivist cultures would be Pakistan, South America, Japan and Singapore.

2. Power Distance

High Power Distance cultures will respect the authority of the boss. They will expect this authority to be respected and not bypassed. These cultures will find badges of office and status to be very important. They expect those in authority to have the answers. South American countries, Japan, France and the Philippines are examples of high power distance cultures.

Low Power Distance cultures do not have the same distance. They will tend to be more familiar and openly less respectful of authority. Austria, Denmark, Sweden and Ireland are examples.

3. Uncertainty Avoidance

Cultures vary in the amount of uncertainty they can tolerate. High uncertainty avoidance cultures make elaborate arrangements to safeguard their people. Holding the same job for life is more common in high uncertainty avoidance cultures. Also the organisations will be very structured and reporting arrangements will be clearly understood by everyone. Greece, Portugal and Japan are examples of high uncertainty avoidance cultures. Denmark, Sweden and Britain are examples of low uncertainty avoidance.

4. Materialism and Relationships

The final dimension was the extent to which cultures valued individual effort and production of results as opposed to relationships between people and concern for others. High at the results end of the dimension were Japan, and Australia. Whereas at the relationship end we have Sweden, Norway and Spain.

Implications

1. The implications of these dimensions lie mainly in the possibility of misunderstanding and misinterpretation of signals. For example, with dimension 1, a person from the individual culture may see a person from a collective culture as dependent and lacking in drive and motivation. The person from the collective culture may see the person from the individual culture as selfish. Similarly with dimension 2, one culture may see the other as authoritarian and be seen by the other as disrespectful and too casual.

2. The important point to note is that we are all different. We must suspend our judgement until we are sure what the other party really means by their behaviour.

3. The negotiating model will compensate for cultural misunderstandings. It is about building trust so that agreements can be reached which will benefit both sides and in which both sides can rely on the other delivering on promises.

4. In terms of negotiation, different cultures will work through the negotiation model at different speeds. The signals sought and given will vary but the end result will be agreement. For example, a person from a high uncertainty avoidance culture may be looking for reassurance and some evidence of good intentions. This may mean spending more time in the opening stages. The person from the material culture will be looking for signs that a deal will be made and may want to hurry to the bargaining stage. If they are from the other side of the dimension, they will be looking for respect and reassurance that they will be treated well.

5. The dimensions described above are important in the planning stage of an inspection. Some thought will allow the inspection to get off to a better start. It will also help to eliminate unintentional misunderstandings.

Managing the Relationship

There is a simple model that describes a process for managing relationships between inspectors and the organisations which they are visiting. It is sequential and each stage must be completed before the next starts. It is known as the EDICT model.

E - Entry

This is the earliest phase. It concerns introducing ourselves, establishing our role and setting the agenda for the inspection.

D - Diagnosis

This phase is about picking up relevant information about the organisation. The key skills are listening and asking questions. If we have not established an effective relationship at entry, the information is not likely to be of good quality. People may still be defensive and unwilling to share information.

I - Influencing

Once we understand what is going on, we can then move to getting improvements and recommendations implemented with

minimum resistance. It may be that we have to use our influencing skills to gain wider access to people or materials - this will be easier if we are operating on good quality information.

C - Contracting

This phase allows us to make clear the understanding between ourselves and the organisation being inspected. If the previous stages are effective, we can have some confidence that our agreements reached over processes or technical issues will be implemented.

T - Transition

The final phase which allows for the inspector and the organisation to finish the inspection on a positive note. The organisation is left with a clear understanding of what will happen next and the inspector has an equally clear understanding that all the relevant factors were examined. As each inspection determines how the next will be received, paying attention to leaving well will facilitate the next inspection.

Building Credibility

Being well prepared is an important aspect of credibility. Without adequate preparation, the inspector has no plan or direction and will feel less secure. This may lead to mistakes in disclosing information inappropriately - because the inspector is unprepared, it is difficult to define what appropriate might be.

Preparation, alone, is not enough to perform with credibility. This requires interpersonal skill. If we wish to be seen as credible there are two issues which we must manage. These are anxiety and trust. Further, they apply to both parties in the inspection situation.

By paying attention to preparation and credibility, we will control both the content as well as the process of the inspection. It is important to keep both these aspects in mind and combine them. The content is what the inspection is about, the process is how the inspection is being carried out. Unless both are managed, one can easily get in the way of the other.

Anxiety Issues for Inspector

Will I perform well?

Will I achieve my objectives?

Will there be unexpected reactions and will I cope with them?

Can I tell if I am being misled?

Most of these issues can be resolved by effective preparation. Fitting in the information with what you already know and focusing on what the other is saying will minimise the risk of being misled. There are more thoughts on deception in a following section.

Trust Issues for the Inspector

Can I rely on what this person is saying?

If I disclose information will this person abuse it?

Is the information accurate?

Again, having an open mind and focusing on building the truth from evidence will help.

While some sources suggest that disclosure of information, including personal information, builds rapport, experience suggests that all disclosure should be thought out before and clear reasons defined for making the information available. For example, we should ask how will this disclosure help me achieve my objectives.

Anxiety Issues for the Inspected

Who is this person?

Why are they prying into my affairs?

Will I or someone else get into trouble?

What will happen now and as a consequence of this visit?

The problem is that anxiety can lead to defensiveness and unwillingness to share information. This can be alleviated by a clear introduction by the inspector including who they are, what the inspection is about and how it will be conducted.

Reducing anxiety at the beginning can also give a useful baseline should anxiety increase later. This can highlight areas to probe further.

Trust Issues for the Inspected

Can I tell this person anything?

What will they do with it?

Will they represent my information accurately?

Will they do what they promised?

Are they giving me the truth about the situation?

Suggestions to help build credibility

- Remember that the objective of an initial meeting is to get in and to arrive at some sort of mutual understanding.
- Try to anticipate their likely concerns and plan how to handle them and how to present yourself.
- You cannot resolve anxiety over the eventual outcome at this stage, but you can make a competent start by handling the meeting in a professional way.
    - Behaving with common politeness is a good start.
    - Introducing yourself and establishing how they like to be addressed gets the inspection off to a positive start.
    - Setting the climate in a positive and easy manner will relax the other party.
    - Informing them of the purpose of the inspection and the areas of information of interest to you helps orient both parties.

- If this produces any hostility or overt anxiety, accept that this must be dealt with before you can expect to get any further
  - Agreeing the structure of the inspection and checking that they are feeling all right about how things are going is also useful.
  - This behaviour allows the other party to have some control over proceedings and will encourage their commitment rather than forced compliance.
  - It is only through our behaviour that we build trust. Verbal messages are not enough. Showing respect for the other person will build trust. Listening carefully and responding appropriately will let them know that you are taking them seriously.

Note: It is important to remember that forming an effective relationship with different people will be necessary throughout the inspection.

Do not make the mistake of believing that developing a good working relationship with senior management will mean that you will be accepted by other important groups or individuals or vice versa.

POWER AND INFLUENCING SKILLS

Power

Power is a central element in inspection and each party has its own strengths and weaknesses.

Much of our power comes from the Convention and legislation. However, our own skill at using what power we have can make a big difference.

Research has shown that people who are good at influencing others have the ability to assess and use power effectively. They are also good at using a variety of power sources.

We will look at sources of power and how we access them and later at which influencing style is more appropriate depending on the circumstances.

Power Bases

Reward Power is based on the ability to provide rewards for other people. They believe that their compliance will lead to their eventually gaining incentives such as money, promotion or recognition. The pharmaceutical industry is very competitive and the rewards are considerable. A good inspection report is well worth having.

Coercive Power is based on fear. Scoring high in coercive power is seen as inducing compliance because failure to comply will lead to punishments such as losses or, in the work environment, undesirable work assignments, reprimands, or dismissals. These might be the concerns of management. On the inspector's side it could mean closing down the plant.

Information Power is based on the possession of or access to information that is perceived as valuable to others. Inspectors have, by the nature of their work, considerable information about best practices across the industry.

Connection Power is based on "connections" with influential or important persons inside or outside the organisation. A person scoring high in connection power induces compliance because others aim at gaining the favour or avoiding the disfavour of the powerful connection.

Legitimate Power is based on the role/position or statutory power possessed. Inspectors have a great deal of this type of power. Scoring high in legitimate power induces compliance from or influences others because they feel that this person has the right, by virtue of position to expect that requests will be respected and suggestions followed.

Expert Power is based on the possession of expertise, skill and knowledge, which gain the respect of others. Again, by virtue of their training and background, inspectors have considerable expertise.

Referent Power is based on personal traits. Someone scoring high in referent power is generally liked and admired by others because of personality. This liking for, admiration for, and identification with them influences others.

It is important to note that:

- The power source chosen must have relevance to the person you are trying to influence. For example, they must see your expertise as relevant if you hope to persuade them using that power source.

- Power sources are cumulative. If you are short of one type of power, you might be able to compensate with another source.

- Depending on the amount of power we have, there are a range of styles which can be used to get our own way - we can tell, sell, consult, negotiate or persuade.

Influencing Styles

Having assessed how much power we have, it is now necessary to decide on the influencing style with which to access that power.

Research over several years into the behaviour of effective influencers has revealed two basic styles of influencing called PUSH and PULL. The research has also indicated when it would be most advantageous to use each of these styles.

Push Style

The Push Style is characterised by extensive use of three types of behaviour. The influencer spends 70 per cent or more of his time in these activities:

- Proposing
- Giving information
- Shutting out

The rationale of the Push Style is that people are influenced by convincing proposals which are well supported.

The keys to successful use of the push style are:

- The quality of the proposals

- The information given

- The ability to get those proposals heard by shutting contrary arguments out.

The Push Style tends to be most effective under one or more of these conditions:

1. The recipient has little experience or understanding of the issue and recognises the need for help or guidance.

2. There is no vested interest in the status quo and the recipient does not feel threatened by accepting your proposal.

3. The recipient recognises the legitimacy of the influencer's power base (e.g., expert, position, physical).

4. The recipient trusts the influencer's motives.

Pull Style

The Pull Style is characterised by concentration upon three different behaviours. The influencer spends 35 per cent or more of their time in these activities:

- Testing understanding

- Seeking information

- Building

The rationale of the Pull Style is that people are influenced more readily by uncovering their needs, motives, aspirations and concerns.

The keys to effective use of the Pull Style are:

- The quality of questions used to test understanding and to seek information.
- The ability to build upon ideas and proposals.

The Pull Style tends to be effective in most situations, but is particularly useful under these conditions:

1. The recipient of the influence attempt has strong opinions and views.
2. The recipient has a vested interest in the status quo and could find difficulty in accepting your proposals.
3. We do not know what the recipient will find acceptable.
4. The influences has no recognised power base, or wishes not to use an established power base.
5. It is important that the influence attempt has a long-lasting effect, i.e. the influencer wishes to obtain more than compliance from the recipient.
6. The relationship between the two parties is new or there is a history of mistrust.
7. Previous attempts using a Push Style have failed.

Research evidence suggests that when Push and Pull styles are mixed during an influence attempt the result is a decrease in effectiveness.

The two styles appear to cancel each other out. It is therefore important to consciously choose a particular style before attempting to influence another and to stick to that style throughout the meeting.

It is, of course, possible for an influencer to use a different style with the same recipient on another occasion or after an adjournment. Sometimes the two styles can be used together if a pair of influencers, acting as a team, each employ one of the styles.

NEGOTIATION SKILLS

This section will explore a sub set of influencing skills - negotiation. This is a key skill for inspectors and it could be suggested that each inspection is the sum of a lot of small negotiations.

We will also review research on effective behaviour in negotiation.

Negotiation

Negotiation is a behaviour which we practice everyday, often without consciously thinking about it. It is a process we go through when we find that we want something which is at least partly within the control of another party and they may have an interest in not giving it to us when we ask. It then becomes necessary for both parties to move towards each other to resolve the problem.

These situations can range from domestic (getting the children to bed), to the more obvious negotiations we get involved in at work.

At work, especially when under pressure, negotiation can become an important element in our dealings with others.

Some negotiations may be informal. Some may not be recognised as negotiations by both parties. The subjects covered can range from accommodation on the site while doing the inspection to access to areas or people.

The model of the process which this note describes is helpful in keeping track of the situation and giving us more control of it. It will help us whether both parties recognise the situation as a negotiation or not. In some cases it may be better not to formalise the encounter as a negotiation.

The model sees the process in terms of phases which match the development of the negotiation. These phases are sequential and follow logically as the relationship builds. The phases are: planning; setting a positive and businesslike agenda; putting your point; clarifying their position; identifying areas of agreement and difference; proposing solutions; bargaining and agreeing.

The Process

Step 1 Planning

1. When negotiating, it is essential to know what you want and also give yourself room for movement.
2. This is achieved by formulating a clear objective and deciding on the issues which are necessary to discuss to help you achieve it.
3. The more issues you have, the more flexibility this gives you to approach the objective on a number of fronts. These issues must be worked out in consultation with your constituency (those whose interests you represent).
4. Having worked out the issues, we can then structure them to help us keep track of progress. Traditionally this is done by defining three positions; Ideal (the best we can realistically hope for); Realistic (we would still be happy to accept) and Fallback (the point beyond which we cannot go).
5. Setting these positions means that we must have a realistic view of what is possible. This question is closely related to how much power (see above) we have in the situation.
6. Setting our positions too high can make the other party give up or become entrenched. Too low, and we lose out on what we may have been able to achieve.
7. It is also important to give thought to what the other party's positions are.
8. If there is an overlap, settlement is likely, if not you are in for some hard bargaining and it is essential that you work out the implications of non-agreement - which may include revising your positions and strategy.

Step 2 Setting a positive and businesslike agenda

1. The initial phases of a negotiation can be tense. Both parties are uncertain of the outcome and may feel they have a lot to lose.

2. Generating a fairly relaxed but businesslike manner lowers the temperature and allows both parties to get to know each other a bit better.
3. Very often discussion at this stage is about neutral topics such as the weather or the location.
4. After the pleasantries, both parties can then move into discussing the issue in outline.
5. It is important that you do not let yourself be distracted by aggressive behaviour. It maybe how they intend to deal with the matter but is more likely to be a defensive reaction. Ignore the remarks and persist with setting the positive climate.

Step 3 Explain your position

1. Having established the climate, it is then easier to give an outline of your position.
2. This will be your ideal position.
3. Remember to seek the best deal possible. It is easier to aim high and bargain down than to ask for less and try to trade up.

Step 4 Clarify their position

1. Negotiation is about trying to reach a useful compromise which satisfies both parties as far as possible.
2. This means that you have to find out what they really want/what are their real concerns.
3. They may not be willing to share that initially because they do not know what your reaction might be and whether they can trust you.
4. You may have a good idea of what their position is, however, get them to express it clearly.

5. This avoids the possibility of mistaken assumptions on your part.

6. The other party will be reassured that you are listening to them. This builds trust and confidence.

Step 5 Identify areas of agreement and difference

1. When you are sure that both parties fully understand the situation it will be possible to clearly define where you agree and where there are important differences.

2. It is better to get these differences surfaced as quickly as possible. Pretending they do not exist simply wastes time.

3. It is also important to confirm areas of agreement. This reinforces progress and the intention to agree. Do not focus only on the difficulties although these are of concern.

4. This discussion will let you know how far apart both parties are.

Step 6 Propose solutions and get their suggestions

1. Adopt a co-operative problem solving approach. This will focus the discussion on solutions rather than obstacles.

2. As well as suggesting possible ways forward, ask the other party for suggestions.

3. Make it clear that this is an issue which both parties have an interest in resolving.

4. Getting them involved helps to create movement and prevents deadlock.

Step 7 Propose packages

1. From the discussion, several issues will have emerged. Some of these will be more important to one side than the other.

2. Combining these issues into packages which meet both sets of needs will allow some trading.

3. The "If you would...,Then I might..." formula makes balancing of needs possible.

4. Remember to keep offers conditional until you are ready to settle the whole deal. Otherwise you could lose some flexibility.

Step 8 Bargain

1. Once all the issues are provisionally agreed, both sides are ready to bargain.

2. The "If you would...,Then I might..." becomes "If you win ...Then I will..." The links become much more solid.

3. Value concessions in terms of their value to the other party, not to you. For example, we might believe that a concession is of little value because it costs us nothing. However, that particular issue may be of considerable value to the other side.

4. Remember to get something in return for each concession.

Step 9 Agree

1. Summarise the agreements and check that the other party agrees.

2. It may be necessary on some occasions to formalise the agreement in writing.

3. It is important to highlight the areas on which you did not agree.

Behaviour of Effective Negotiators

Research by Rackham and Carlisle using negotiators, rated as effective by those with whom they negotiated, showed that these negotiators avoided the following behaviours:

1. ***The use of irritators***. Average negotiators are about 5 times more likely to use irritators (eg "fair", "reasonable", "generous offer").

2. ***The use of counter proposals***. Average negotiators are twice as likely to make counter proposals which are frequently received as disagreement and "cloud" negotiation.

3. ***The use of defend-attack spirals***. Average negotiators are three times more likely to respond with emotional value loaded statements which escalate reactions from both sides.

4. ***The use of argument dilution*** by using too many reasons to support a statement. This exposes a flank and gives the other party a choice of reason to dispute.

The research also highlighted certain behaviours that effective negotiators used:

1. Use behaviour signals to
    - force a response
    - slow the negotiation down
    - reduce the 'cut and thrust'
    - communicate clearly

   Average negotiators are five times less likely to use behaviour signals. However, when disagreeing, skilled negotiators are more likely to build up to a statement of disagreement with reason and explanation. Average negotiators disagree and give reasons afterwards.

2. Test understanding and summarise to prevent misunderstanding. The skilled negotiator does this more than twice as much as the average negotiator.

3. Seek information and use twice as many questions as the average negotiator.

   Questions
    - obtain information with which to bargain
    - give control over discussion
    - are more acceptable than disagreement
    - keep the other party active
    - afford a breathing space.

4. Express feelings about what is going on in their minds more than twice as often as average negotiators. Note: feelings not facts.

Other important differences between average and skilled negotiators were shown to be:

1. ***Time*** - the skilled negotiator does not plan for any longer than the average negotiator.

2. ***Exploration of options*** - the skilled negotiator considers a spectrum of twice as many possibilities than does the average negotiator.

3. ***Looking for common ground*** - although both skilled and average consider deeply areas of conflict, the skilled negotiator gives three times more thought to areas of anticipated agreement or common ground.

4. ***Long term implications*** - both skilled and average direct less than 10 per cent of their comments to long term considerations but the skilled negotiator reveals twice as much concern.

5. ***Setting limits*** - skilled negotiators plan upper and lower limits. Average negotiators plan fixed point objectives.

6. ***Sequence planning*** - average negotiators plan a negotiation in sequence. Skilled negotiators retain flexibility by thinking in terms of "issues".

INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING

Getting accurate information as efficiently as possible from a wide variety of sources is a key skill for inspectors. In some cases the interviewee will not be very forthcoming or may even attempt to mislead.

Investigative interviewing is a structured approach which allows a logical and methodical examination of the issues. We will look first at the key communication skills - listening and questioning skills.

Listening Skills

Listening is more than just hearing. It is the skill of getting the meaning in what someone is saying. Active listening is not easy and requires effort. It usually happens at three levels. The further down the levels we go, the more information we get but the harder we have to work.

Level A Words

If we do not understand the words the other person is using, we will not get very far in understanding the meaning of what they say. Despite the pressure we can sometimes feel, do not be afraid to ask for explanation or to say you do not understand. Often in these situations, the interviewee is not being clear.

Level B Patterns

When we have been listening to someone for a while, we can become aware of themes coming up time and again. If we can find a way of checking out these patterns, we will arrive at a much deeper understanding of what they are really talking about.

Level C Seeing the world the way they do

This does not mean agreeing with their view but it gives us much more access to their picture of their situation.

The easiest way to develop this level of understanding is to get into the habit of summarising what they have said and checking it out. This has two main payoffs. Firstly, we are sure that we have followed the other person's point of view. Secondly, they feel that we have paid attention and are pushed on to develop their thinking. If we are not in the habit of summarising, we may feel a bit awkward and artificial doing it consciously. The other person will not even notice because their attention is fully on what they are saying themselves. To get into the habit it is sometimes useful to develop a form of words with which we are comfortable. For example, we might say something like "If I understand you right, what you are saying is....." and repeat the gist of what they said.

This level of listening does take a lot of effort but the payoff in understanding is well worth it.

Remember - it is very important to make the effort to let people know you are listening. Being able to repeat what someone has just said very seldom convinces them that you have been paying attention if you spent the whole time looking out of a window.

Very often we are unaware of how our listening behaviour looks to others. It is an important area and the following acronym will help us to monitor our behaviour.

S - **Smile**. This lets the other person know that we are relaxed and pleased to see them. It allows them to relax also.

O - **Open**. Posture conveys an image of control and competence.

F - Lean **Forward**. This shows interest. Even a slight inclination of the head indicates attention to the other person.

T - **Touch**. This is usually in the form of a handshake. A firm handshake conveys assertiveness and establishes rapport.

E - **Eye** Contact is a very powerful means of communication. Appropriate eye contact keeps the other person involved and part of the discussion.

N - **Nod** will encourage the other person to keep talking. It also shows interest in what is being said.

1. All these signals will encourage the other party to participate positively. They will feel able to express themselves and you will generate much useful information.

2. However, we will come across the person who speaks too readily and sometimes is difficult to control in conversation. If they are allowed to go on, they will wander off the point and waste a considerable amount of time.

3. Rather than interrupt or cut across them, it would be worth trying to remove the positive signals described above. Most people find it difficult to keep talking in a vacuum.

4. Should they manage to keep going, it might be appropriate to wonder whether they are trying to divert us by volume rather than quality of information.

Questioning Skills

Listening alone will not, of course, always give you all the information you require. To make sure you get useful information, it is important to think about how to guide and direct the conversation using questions.

There are two important considerations: type of questions and level. The type of question we habitually use can determine the sort of response we get. Also, the level at which we probe will determine the insight we gain into the other person. Our use of questions can influence the quality as well as the quantity of information we gather.

Types of Question

1. Closed Questions

So called because the number of possible answers is very small and often predictable.

Q: Did you think the last staff meeting was successful?

A: Yes or No.

The probability is that a closed question will not yield very much information. If you are attempting to obtain a quantity of information, or tease out attitudes, this is the least appropriate techniques.

Closed questions, when properly controlled, have a valid use. They provide an economical way of verifying what the other person has done, said or thinks.

2. Open questions

So called because the number of possible responses is great and it is open to the interviewee to choose his response - thereby giving you the opportunity to judge him by this response. Its most basic form is "Tell me about .....".

The probability of getting a greater volume of information from an open question is much greater than a closed question. Consider the following example where the respondent cannot answer "Yes" or "No" and must therefore give greater information.

Q: What did you think of the last staff meeting?

A: Well, a bit heavy as usual, but I got what I wanted out of it.

or

A: A waste of time, frankly. If you didn't insist on my being there, I could start clearing this backlog.

A crude rule of thumb is: the more open questions you ask the greater the quantity and quality of information you will get. Typically such questions start with: who, what, where, why, when and how.

3. Probing Questions

Are a natural follow-up to open questions. Having stimulated the interviewee to talk, you may wish to pursue a particular point he touched on. The probe questions cause him to focus on the point which interests you and yields more information. Its most basic form is: "Tell me more about.....?". More fluent versions again begin with: who, what, where, why, when and how.

Q: What did you think of the last staff meeting?

A: Well, a bit heavy as usual, but I got what I wanted out of it.

Q: Well, I am glad you found it useful. How did it help you?

4. Leading Questions

A leading question is one which pre-disposes the respondent to respond in a particular way. I think we tend to use these too often, don't you? (!) Because leading questions are an integral part of normal conversation there is a danger we might use them unconsciously in interview situations and thereby contaminate the interviewee's genuine response. This type of question generally emerges in two forms:

a. The questioner gives away his/her own values or attitudes in the prelude to the question and thus indicates the safest response, e.g.:

   Boss to subordinate:

   "I do like John's style of chairing meetings; What do you think of it?",

   or

   Interviewer to interviewee:

   "Don't you think that tolerance to stress is a very important characteristic in this job you're aiming for?" (Here, a better question would be: "What qualities do you think are important in this job?")

b. The second way in which the questioner can exert unwanted influence on the interviewee's answers is by using those mini-questions that are tagged on to many statements in normal conversation, such as:

   ".....isn't it?"

   ".....wouldn't they?"

   ".....don't they?"

I'm sure that you'll make a conscious effort to avoid these won't you?

Skilled interviewers can make use of leading questions to test the interviewee's attitudes in depth, or the strength of his convictions. But beware of introducing this stress element unless you are capable of rescuing a potential "freeze-up" on the part of the interviewee.

One other valid use of leading questions is where the questioner wishes to move on to the next point in the agenda, e.g.:

> "Well, I think we're more or less agreed on that, aren't we? So let's take a look at the next point."

5. Multiple Questions

"Which is the biggest problem at the moment? The work scheduling? The planned maintenance programme? Or the administrative load?"

Most people can only handle one question at a time. Multiple questions only make things difficult for them - except the crafty ones. They will only answer the question it suits them to answer.

An unskilled interviewer will use multiple questions particularly when an interviewee is slow to respond to an initial question. The interviewer, acutely conscious of the silence, will fill it by trying to help the respondent with alternative questions. Resist the temptation. Pose one question at a time, preferably an open one; probe if it is in your interest to do so, and then move on to the next question.

Level of Questioning

If we can discover what is important to the individual, we are well on our way to understanding their behaviour, priorities and possibly their motivation. This can be particularly important when we are interviewing someone who is central to our inspection.

We can do this by focusing our questions on what they want, what they value. This information is often less accessible and can be said to be on deeper level than factual information.

It may be necessary to build an atmosphere of trust before someone is prepared to disclose at this level. This can take some time especially if the person is worried about the interview and its possible consequences for themselves or someone else.

There is a useful technique which speeds up this process. It is known as Levels of Questioning. There are three levels.

Level 1 Knowledge

These are "What is it?" questions. Usually very non threatening topics. An example would be "What does your present job entail?"

Level 2 Feelings

These are a little more probing and relate to how the subject feels. For example, "That must have been difficult?" or "You seem pleased about that?".

Level 3 Values

These questions relate to the importance to the individual. They may often cause the interviewee to think out responses for the first time. Be prepared for silence and allow them time to answer.

Method

The technique consists of working at the level with which the interviewee is comfortable. We then drop a level to explore their feelings about the topic. When they are comfortable about this we can then start to explore the value elements of their approach to the topic.

It is important to remain close to the interviewee and to back off to a higher level if they seem to be becoming defensive. You can always find another route to this level by repeating the process.

Planning the Interview

Effective preparation is essential.

1. The first stage is to assess the information or evidence which you already have.

2. Having assessed the information already to hand, specify an objective for the interview.

3. Then ask yourself

   "In order to achieve my objective

   What do I have to tell the interviewee?

   What do they have to tell me?

   What do I have to demonstrate?"

   The last question might involve a procedure or test. In which case make sure you have it ready and accessible.

4. The answers to these questions will give you the topics for the interview. They are then prioritised to give an agenda or interview plan.

5. This will give the interviewer structure with enough flexibility to respond to new information.

6. Work out how you are going to introduce yourself, the interview and its purpose. Do not wait till you are sitting down and try to muddle through.

During the Interview

1. Establish appropriate rapport - introduce the interview. The introduction should explain who people are, why the interview is taking place and how it will be conducted. This will lead to building appropriate rapport with the interviewee and lessening the chance of unconsciously provoking resistance.

2. Describe the agenda you want to follow. Check it out with the interviewee.

3. Introduce the first topic.

a) The introduction locates the topic. It can explain why it has been raised and the relevance. It can also explain to the interviewee what information is being sought.

b) Use a closed question to open up:

> "I would like to ask you about.....That is an area you know about, isn't it?"
>
> Not
>
> "Is that all right?"

as this sounds like seeking permission.

c) When the topic has been opened use open questions - "the W questions" -What, Where, How.

d) When they have finished responding, use probing questions - "Tell me more about that."

e) Summarise - checks common understanding, allows correction and ties the account down.

f) Pause - look interested and as if you are waiting for them to speak. Do not be afraid of silence.

g) Link - to next topic. Think out links in advance so you can observe them - anticipatory stress. Now I'd like to turn to.....

4. Introduce next topic - the link is not enough.

5. Consolidate the Interview - the consolidation may be a summary.

DEALING WITH DIFFICULT BEHAVIOUR

Given all we have said before about the impact of authority, power relationships and perceptions, it is not surprising that we will encounter defensive behaviour. This will occur even in people who, we might think, have no reason to be wary.

The important skill is to recognise the behaviour and identify the real reasons behind it. This note identifies some of the more common deliberate defensive reactions and their effects. It also suggests some strategies for dealing with them.

Low Reaction

Research has identified a type of behaviour which even the most experienced interviewer fears. This behaviour is called "Low Reaction" and it can be particularly difficult to deal with.

A Low Reactor spends less than 10 per cent of their time supporting; disagreeing and defending or attacking. These behaviours show reaction to the topic. The characteristic of the Low Reactor is to give little information about how they feel about the issue under discussion. They may actually say quite a lot, but none of it sheds light on their own opinions.

It is important to distinguish between this behaviour and the way quiet people behave. Quiet people simply speak less. The quality and content of what they say is no problem. We must also remember that this is not a personality type. We can all be Low Reactors when we are thinking about the issue or are not yet ready to commit ourselves.

Normal Responses

We tend to have a predictable response to Low Reaction, especially if the issue is important to us:

- Distinct feelings of discomfort.
- Concern about how to get through to the individual.
- Feelings of hostility which gradually increase.
- Lessening self confidence.

Traps

Because of the effect on us, we have a tendency to fall into one or more of the following traps:

- Talking faster or drying up completely.
- Tendency to jump about and take our arguments out of sequence.
- Repeating ourselves.
- Asking fewer questions because we are inhibited.
- Exaggerating or making things up to get a response.

All of these could be fatal to an effective inspection.

Dealing with Low Reactors

- Recognise what is happening - identify lack of useful responses or perhaps falling into traps.
- Maintain sense of perspective - do not imagine objections or, perhaps, resistance which is not there.
- Ask questions. These force a response though you may have to persist and rephrase questions till you get a useful response.

  "What do you think?"

  "What is your reaction so far?"

- Avoid repetition. If you are sure they have heard, leave the silence as they may be considering the point.

Anger

Anger is quite a common defensive response. In order to cope effectively with it we have to understand what part it plays in behaviour, and, most importantly, distinguish it from aggression. Aggression is a way of controlling the behaviours of others. Sometimes it is direct but more often it is disguised as something else.

Understanding Anger

Anger is a natural psychological and physical experience. The function of anger, it has been suggested, is to warn us that we or our circle of concern are under threat. The reaction then gives us energy and power to defend ourselves.

Our circle of concern can include our family, friends, office or job. That is, whatever we believe is our territory.

The difficulty with this natural emotion is how we are taught from our childhood to deal with it. Some of us are told that it is undesirable and therefore we should not be angry. This can lead to frustration and silent resentment. We have no way to express the way we feel and it builds up inside our bodies as well as our minds. Interviews can become extremely tense.

Others are encouraged to express their anger and find out that it works to help them get their own way. These people can then become aggressive rather than angry.

Dealing with Anger

Someone who is very angry is unlikely to be rational. They are also unlikely to be able to listen well. These guidelines will help.

1. Listen well - this may not be easy.
2. Clarify what the other person is saying.
3. Do not argue back.
4. Do not try to be too rational.
5. Acknowledge the anger - "Yes, I can see that you are angry."

   Do not, however accept responsibility for their anger or agree that you have caused it.

6. Recognise if you are getting angry yourself. One of you has to stay calm.

7. State your points assertively.

8. Try to problem solve. If possible involve the other person.

9. Do not say something which will make matters worse. "You know, I can't see what you are upset about."

Anger and Aggression

The main difference between anger and aggression is that anger is a natural emotion while aggression is a style of behaviour. As such, aggression is directed at control and defending territory. It is a learned behaviour which helps the individual get their own way. In some cases, it is the only style of behaviour that some individuals have learned.

There are payoffs for individuals in treating others aggressively:

- Winning at the expense of someone else - possibly the inspector
- Controlling others
- Creating an image of power
- Devaluing the competence of others especially the inspector
- Reducing the number and direction of questions

All of these have implications for the aggressor's self esteem. They will feel stronger as the other person feels weaker. Aggression can be linked with lack of self esteem. Some clues for managing the interview may emerge depending on whether the individual is suffering from low self esteem or trying to project an image of power.

Expression of Aggression

We are all familiar with the overtly aggressive behaviour pattern. It relies on strength and volume as well as controlling body language such as standing too close or pointing fingers, etc. which are all attempts to take up as much space as possible.

Indirect aggression can be much harder to deal with as we may not recognise it for what it is - an equally strong bid to control others.

Indirect Aggression

Sometimes we will meet people who find it difficult to cope with conflict and their response gives us a problem. They may cope by becoming manipulative or playing games.

Manipulation

People who do not like what we are saying may try an indirect manipulative response. They may, for instance, trivialise us or our case. They turn it into a joke and invite us to join them.

Guilt can be a formidable weapon in experienced hands. We are, in this case, encouraged to believe that we are making life unnecessarily difficult for someone or, perhaps, that we are not treating them well.

Irrelevant logic will also distract us from our objective. The other party introduces arguments which sound convincing but are, in fact, totally irrelevant.

It is important that we recognise what is happening. The best defence is to ignore feelings and return to the content of what they are saying.

Effective Verbal Strategies

When dealing with difficult attitudes, our first response is to react. When attacked, we bite back or retreat. Both of these reactions will reinforce the other person's behaviour. We must learn to control our initial reaction and respond appropriately. This means making some effort to get behind and understand the other person's behaviour:

- Why are they behaving like that
- Why they hold those opinions
- Why they feel they have to defend themselves
- What are they defending themselves against

Developing Objectivity

Ury, in his excellent book (Getting Past No; William Ury; Business Books Limited ISBN 0-7126-5086-5) suggests a strategy called "going to the balcony". We see ourselves as acting out a play on the stage and when we start to get into difficulties we move our perspective to the balcony where we become part of the audience. We then are more detached and can see more clearly what is happening.

Defusing Defensiveness

These are some pointers for getting behind the other person's defensiveness.

- Acknowledge their feelings
- Paraphrase what they say and check you have understood
- Agree where you can. Seek out the areas where you can agree. It is natural to concentrate on differences.
- Do not say "But" say, "Yes, and.....". Build on the discussion. "Buts" close ears.
- Make "I" statements rather than "You" statements. It is difficult to dispute an "I" opinion. "You" puts the responsibility on them. This may encourage defensiveness.
- Stand up for yourself. Put your view clearly and directly. Use assertive rather than aggressive non verbal behaviour.

Expressing Your View

Sometimes we have to clarify for the other person how the interaction is affecting us. The style of communication may be inhibiting useful discussion. Scripting is a useful way to express these difficulties (also useful way to reinforce positive behaviours).

Scripting is also a way of preparing yourself for an encounter which may be difficult -perhaps it is a repeat of a difficult situation or you suspect it may have elements which will make it difficult. With a little practice, scripting takes very little time and the discipline of writing it out has two important advantages:

a) Writing it out clarifies the issues involved.

b) It gives an easy form of reference and support if you encounter resistance.

ELEMENTS OF A DESC SCRIPT

1. Describe the behaviour, not the person.
2. Express your feelings about the behaviour. How it affects you.
3. Specify the change you want.
4. Consequences should be planned though it may not be necessary to spell them out. Positive consequences are usually more acceptable than negative.

TIMING OF DELIVERY

1. Should be as near the offending behaviour as possible.
2. Should be when you have the other person's attention.
3. Do not "Wait till the next time"!!

TUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

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Ashridge he published widely, including co-authoring "The Way We Work", a book on white-collar job design. Following a four year spell in the academic sector, setting up a Department of Industrial Psychology, he turned to full-time consulting, firstly with the American Proudfoot Group of Companies where he was for three years manager of management training for Northern Europe, based in Brussels, and then with Hay-MSL in London. He currently runs TFR Limited, the human resources consulting company, of which he was one of the founding Directors in 1984.