

ACTIVE LISTENING IN THE NONDIRECTIVE INTERVIEW

Diana ILIȘOI*, Magdalena SCAFARU*

*“Henri Coandă” Air Force Academy, Brașov

Abstract: *The nondirective (clinic) interview was proposed as a technique of psychotherapeutic intervention by the American psychologist Carl Ranson Rogers (1902-1987). A psychology teacher at various universities in USA, C. Rogers set up the counseling center only to promote the client-centred therapeutic method. Active listening or the art of listening has therapeutic effects upon the one who gets things off his chest, relates something about himself or tries to solve a problem.*

Keywords: *nondirective interview, active listening.*

Motto: *“When you really want to lead a person to a certain place, first you have to discover him where he is and start from there. The real secret of helping the others resides in this. Anyone who is not able to do this, only imagines he helps the others. If I sincerely want to help another person, then I understand more about him- but first I have to understand what he truly understands. If I cannot achieve this then my more elevated understanding will not be of any help to him.”*

(Sören Kierkegaard)

1. THE NONDIRECTIVE INTERVIEW

The interview is the technique by which we elicit verbal information from individuals and groups of people by means of questions and answers.

The term derives from English- “interview” and means “formal discussion”, “meeting” and it is suggested by the etymology of the word, the fundamental technique of the interview is discussion which implies the relationship of communication between the person who administers the interview and the person(s) interviewed.

The double objective of these discussions is the appraisal of some assumptions or the scientific description of some socio-human phenomena.

According to the degree of intervention of the interviewer in the discourse of the interviewee, the interview can be classified as: *nondirective, guided and directive.*

The nondirective interview is the one which distinguishes among these types of interviews and which enjoys special interest for counseling. The nondirective (clinic) interview was proposed as a technique of psychotherapeutic intervention by the American psychologist Carl Ranson Rogers (1902-1987). A psychology teacher at various universities in USA, C. Rogers set up the counseling center only to promote the client-centered therapeutic method. In this paper “Client-centered psychotherapy” (1951) he proposes this nondirective method, which implies the achievement of authentic communication between patients and therapists, which is communication based on trust and mutual understanding.

C. Rogers is not in favor of cognitive and behavioral therapies, nor psychoanalysis, which as a matter of fact he thoroughly criticized. C. Rogers claims that the patient approach should be based on empathy, that is on benevolent and comprehensive relationship between doctor and patient which turns to account the autonomy tendency towards complete achievement of the individual (the need of self-fulfillment). Initially used for therapeutic purposes, the method extended its competences to psycho diagnosis, in the action of vocational guidance and social assistance.

The highlight of the nondirective interview is the very attitude of the administer of the interview- which is *the nondirective attitude*

based on the interviewer's empathy versus the interviewee (individual or group of people) who pursues to gather information which heavily relies on the subjectivity of the interviewed persons (interviewees).

On the other hand, the nondirective attitude grants the interviewee the liberty to answer the addressed questions according to his own will and understanding. Under these conditions the efficiency of the method is conditioned by the appropriate mastering of interpersonal communicative techniques and nonverbal methods characteristic of the person who conducts the interview/ talk. Among these eliciting, awakening methods of self-expression there can be mentioned others like: active listening, attentive silence, voiceless encouraging or understanding paralanguage (attitudes, mimicking, tones, eye contact with the interlocutor in the effort to grasp the meaning of his message) all of these being sustained with empathy.

Consequently, if in the case of the nondirective interview the basic technique is discussion, the latter implies active listening.

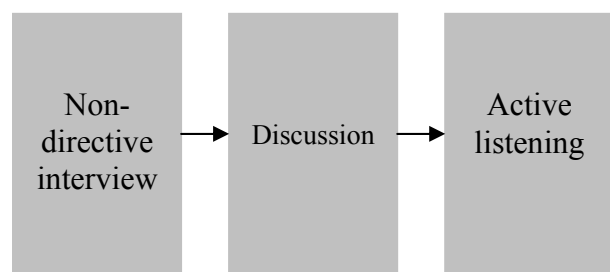


Fig.1 The causality chain of active listening

2. ACTIVE LISTENING

During *active listening* both verbal and nonverbal (body language) techniques are used in order to stimulate and encourage the speaker. Though at first sight it seems to be extremely simple, the process is very difficult. Active listening is a very strenuous activity, which requires a lot of attention and concentration.

Rephrases (paraphrases) recommended when applying this technique, are a living proof of the intense intellectual effort made by the promoter of the discussion. It is wrong to consider that nondirectiveness upon content

fails in *laissez-faire*.

Roger and Zinger (1966) substantiated that the positive inductions of rephrasing achieved according to rules, offer the interlocutor the conviction/ certitude of being correctly understood, while the interviewer enjoys genuine comprehension of what he intends to convey to his interlocutor or a clear view of his inner universe and feelings.

Furthermore, these rephrases have a strong consciousness raising impact on the interlocutor and help him understand better the organization and logic of what he says. Thus, the counselor constantly assists his interlocutor in his attempt to reflect things. He never delays the understanding of what he has been communicated but he analyses and synthesizes all the important parts transmitted by his interlocutor during the discourse. In addition to the understanding of the content, the counselor must conduct the process of understanding the message of the interlocutor in respect of the objective of the discussion. "There are analyses to be done and restored to the interlocutor during the discussion" [2].

Active listening or the art of listening has therapeutic effects upon the one who gets things off his chest, relates something about himself or tries to solve a problem.

Therefore, it is a recommended technique in the counseling process, during discussions. If the counselor uses it properly, he may derive great benefits both during discussions with the students and their parents and his conversation with his peers. Active listening requires a lot of effort on the listener's (counselor) side, as he has to be very active and imagine himself in his interlocutor's position.

The purpose of the active listening is to offer the possibility to a person to be able to help oneself through creative thinking and embark on different ways other than the already known ones. The American psychologist Carl Rogers noticed he obtained better results with the people he treated on condition certain requirements were observed both by counselor and patient:

- sincerity during the process of listening;
- an unconditional positive attitude towards the person he is listening to;
- a sensitive and intuitive understanding.

Afterwards, active listening was taken over in schools by Thomas Gordon "What we do to get class on a good track". The basic technique in active listening is quite simple: tell as little as possible and let the other one speak.

In order to help the speaker, the active listener will stimulate him in this way:

- through an amiable and sincere body language
- through exclamations such as: really? and? is that so?
- through the so called "open doors"- "It sounds difficult" "It is interesting", "will you tell me more about this thing?"
- through a reassuring tone but always encouraging, urging to repeat the previous sentence: "Do you reckon it was a difficult situation?"
- pausing frequently for the speaker to have time to express his thought
- by placing the "mirror" in front of the speaker and making use of short phrases such as: "Are you happy/sad/annoyed?/ It seems you find it difficult to discuss in detail about this subject/ I am not quite sure I understand what you are saying./ Do you have to understand that...?."

All these succinct interventions create an auspicious atmosphere for the speaker so that he may have the time and the place to live through the problem which bothers him, or he finds difficult or boring, etc.

However, there is a series of reactions, also called "brake shoes" that are forbidden to the counselor while he is actively listening:

- to command;
- to threaten, to warn;
- to moralize, to give a lecture;
- to give good advice, to come forth with good solutions;
- to formulate logical arguments pretending to be knowledgeable;
- to praise, to speak highly of;
- to mock at people, to speak ironically or to tease;
- to analyze and diagnose;
- to console and to encourage;
- to interrogate;
- to be amusing or sarcastic.

These are the actions the active listener may or may not take. Though it seems quite simple it has been proved over the years that it

is not at all like this. To take as an example teachers find it hard to listen actively as they are used to talk a lot by the nature of their work. Moreover, the great majority of teachers concentrate on the message of the communication and not on the emotional aspects or profoundness of the communication. While actively listening, the speaker is able to learn something about himself and his activity, about his personal problems, without experiencing the feeling that he is being pushed or conducted by someone else or even feel obliged to live up to other people's expectations.

The person who delivers a speech in a discussion where active listening is required, is the only authority concerning the thoughts and feelings in a discussion situation. Under the circumstances he will have the freedom to impose limits on the action and also to renounce the active listener. The latter, though genuinely interested, should not put pressure on his partner but only help him utter his thoughts concerning a certain problem.

It is no secret for anyone that these discussions sound at the beginning very artificial and tiresome. But once this conversation technique is exercised and is well mastered, it enables us to create a different perception of conversation other than the one we have been accustomed to.

This is how we can help other people to help themselves. Being respectful and considerate to people we will achieve sincere communication and deep understanding of ourselves and of other people.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Ivey, A., Gluckstern, N., Bradford, M.I., *The Abilities of the Counsellor. An Approach from a Microcounselling Perspective*, RisoPrint Printing House, Cluj-Napoca, 1999;
2. Micchieli, A., *The Art of Influencing*, Polirom Printing House, Iași, 2002;
3. Vlăsceanu, L., Zamfir, C., *Dictionary of Sociology*, Babel Printing House, 1998;
4. * * * *Dictionary of the qualitative methods in human and social sciences*, Polirom Printing House, Iași, 2002.