CHAPTER VII

EXECUTIVE COUNSELLING IN HRM PROCESS
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A little fire has the potentiality to consume a gigantic sky-scaper, a small hole can cause to sink a big ship, and a weak link can weaken a very strong chain. Many organisations face difficulties just because of one problem employee. If a problem employee can be brought down to a counselling session and a capable counsellor deals with him, he may become a potential contributor again.

HRM is basically a process of dealing with people. A manager has to deal with various types of people; subordinates, supervisors, strong temperaments, weak temperaments, contented employees, disgruntled employees, problem makers and problem solvers etc. In fact in one weak moment every strong person may become a weak person or a problem solver may become a problem maker himself. HRM approach is not only concerned with converting the strengths of individuals into achievements, but with enabling the individuals to over some their weaknesses to solve their problems and to make the best use of their strength. Counselling by executives has a conspicuous role to play in this respect.

Meaning of Counselling

Counselling is the process of helping an individual with a problem/problems or problem emotions to regain confidence that he would be able to overcome his problem situation, face life again, and make the best use of his strengths. Counselling is not mere consultation or advice. It is much more than an advice or consultation though
counselling includes both. It represents a one to one relationship: a counsellor and a counsellee; (or a small group of counsellees) the former tries to identify with the latter to understand him and his situation fully by enabling him to open up his heart and mind (the closed areas of his personality) so that he would be able to make some valuable way open for him to face the hard realities of life by overcoming his weaknesses effectively, and to make the best use of his strength in the given situation. Counselling helps a weak and inferiority-complex bound (or superiority-complex bound) individual to gain a positive self-image, self-confidence, self-esteem and self acceptance.

According to B.J. Prasantham, “Counselling is a relationship between the counsellor and the counsellee characterised by trust and openness, in a one to one, or a small group relationship, whereby the counsellee is helped to work through his interpersonal and or intra-personal problems and crises. He is also helped to mobilise his inner and outer resources and to find new options in facing life. Along with this, counselling also helps the client to discover and develop his God-given potentialities and lead an integrated life and make his contribution for the welfare of his fellow men”.

Counselling is not just advising. It is a sincere effort on the part of the counsellor to identify himself with a problem individual, understanding his problem situation and acknowledging his strengths and weakness, in order to help him affectionately by consoling, comforting, caring, consulting, cooperating and confidence building, so that the problem individual would be able to get a way out of his “behaviour trap” and to place himself on a proper track. In this process, the counsellor establishes a cordial relationship with the counsellee, and instil confidence, self-respect and direction in him. A lot of skillful moves and determination would be necessary on the part of the counsellor in
this respect. Particularly, when there is resistance from the part of the counsellor, a considerable amount of patience, tolerance, determination and skill must be revealed by the counsellor. If the counsellor is a manager, and the counsellor his subordinate or an employee, the task of the counsellor is all the more fluid, and the counsellor must be extra cautious to handle the situation.

Many employees, even good workers, become problem employees due to their emotional excesses. It is always advisable to deal with such people positively so as to improve the emotional competence. Hence, a counsellor must reveal a positive emotional competence.

Many employees turn themselves to be problem employees due to various emotional maladjustments like fear, anxiety, hospitality, worry, etc. The term fear represents a response to a specific danger, while anxiety stands for a response to danger or threat which is less clearly perceived. An anxious individual senses danger, and a frightened person usually knows what he is afraid of. Very often both fear and anxiety go together. Worry, at the same time, is a state of mental pressure or uneasiness, which can be in the form of fear or anxiety in which the individual is emotionally involved with troublesome situation and visualises no immediate answer, and hence he is overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness. Hostility is the expressed reaction or repulsion against the causes of fear, anxiety and worry.

A counselling executive should be able to analyse the background of all such factors and to deal with them effectively. If the executive is able to identify the actual problem areas, he may be able to help the concerned person to choose an appropriate solution so that he would be able to mobilise his inner and outer resources and to find new options in facing life. Then such a problem employee would be revitalised to make his contribution further to the organisational goals.
It means that a counsellor must deal with the problems and problem emotions of his client effectively. Such problems must be primarily recognised as normal aspects of human condition. Then a distinction may be made between realistic and unrealistic fear, anxiety, etc. Counselling must be done, taking into account the realistic situations. Many individuals are subjected to stresses, strains, fear, anxiety, worry, etc., due to psychological factors and unrealistic causes. In such cases efforts should be made to convince the individual of the non-existence of any such reason. Distinguishing between realistic and unrealistic problems facilitates to deal with the realistic problems effectively. If the individual is making a mountain out of a molehill, he can be enlightened of the real situation and enabled to approach the situation in the real perspective.

On many occasions, some sort of assurance, promise, or protection would help the individual to get rid of his tensions and worries. When burdens grow heavy and life's path becomes steep, and when the weight of life's load makes one unsteady, one needs a strong and dependable assurance. He may need a person on whom he can relieve of all his burdens, who can give a trustworthy assurance. There is great limitation for the human beings to give that sort of assurance, though some magnitude of confidence can be created by human beings also.

At times anger and hostility take destructive turns resulting in strainful interpersonal relationships. Hence, it is better to arrive at mutual and amicable agreements before distortions and irritating situations take place. A quotation from the Holy Bible is relevant in this context. "Do not retain your anger until the sun sets". Strong anger may lead to ill-considered and costly action which may result in irreparable consequences. Later regrets and even repentance may not produce expected results. There are many instances in one's work life to get
oneself overwhelmed by such strong anger which may adversely affect not only the individual's efficiency, but the organisational efficiency. A manager or a supervisor, who acts as a counsellor in the nick of the moment, will be able to avert great consequences.

A normal individual has to accept and tolerate some amount of hostility. Everything cannot be a bed of roses in the day to day work life, nor even in family life. Perhaps the most essential aspect of dealing with overt hostility is to be prepared for it and to give up the notion of wanting everyone to love, respect, praise, appreciate and obey you at all times. There can be ups and downs in everybody's behaviour. Hence, just because one is a little hostile to you, he should not be branded as a problem employee. Try to recognise his positive points and reckon with his overall behaviour over a period of time, rather than magnifying a couple of weak points. The manager in an HRM organisation or an HR manager must give proper weightage to his positive behavioural points, and then deal with him. A moderate effort to offer counselling and affectionate guidance on the part of the manager will make tremendous effect in the behaviour of such people.

According to the Coleman, "Severe depressive reactions, however, are more serious especially when there is a strong component of guilt-tinged depression is often part of a neurotic or psychotic reaction". The manager can help the dejected employee through motivation, ensuring greater involvement, stimulating self-confidence, counselling, rectification of mistakes if any, etc., to get rid or normal depressions, Counselling is of great value, perhaps more than anything else at times.

Perversion, criminal tendencies and dishonesty of individual employees very often result in problem emotions. The problem will aggravate when they are protected by militant trade unions, as we see in the Indian Industry today. In normal cases of perversion, counselling, compassion, revitalisation, education, redemption, rehabilitation, etc., would be possible. However, in chronic cases of criminal tendencies, character and behavioural problems, dishonesty, etc., ordinary counselling or normal methods may not be useful. In certain cases psychotherapy may be useful. In extreme cases, however, extreme steps may become necessary. When the methods of Sama, Dama and Bheda become ineffective, “Dhand” alone would become useful. In severe cases of cancer, ointment application is bound to be useless; then an operation becomes necessary. Though a manager is benevolent, humanist or human relations practitioner, he must bear in mind that “no cobra should be retained being hurt”. Irreparable cases of individuals are exceptional who can not be retained in the larger interest of the organisation. In such cases abrupt and brisk action will prove to be better.

An executive who considers his subordinates as human resources, or a human resources manager is supposed to do his best to mobilise the human resources available to him for the maximum benefit of the organisation as well as for the welfare and satisfaction of the people concerned. Executive counselling is much importance in this respect.

Generally speaking, executive counselling must fulfil atleast the following three conditions:

(i) The counsellor must establish a close relationship with the counselee so that the latter may gain full confidence in the former.
(ii) The counsellee must fully trust and depend on the counsellor so that he may open his heart and mind before the counsellor. He must believe that the counsellor is able to help him.

(iii) The counsellor must use the methods, techniques and skills to suit the respective situation and the counsellee's temperament.

Let us examine these three aspects viz., counsellor-counselee relationship, counsellee's trust in the counsellor, and the methods and techniques used by the counsellor. The success of counselling primarily depends on these three factors, among other important aspects.

**Counsellor Relation with the Counsellee**

A counsellor, who succeeds in establishing a good and unbiased relation with the counsellee, alone would succeed in his mission of renewing and revitalising him. As already stated, a counsellee may be a problem employee, a fear of grief-sticken person or any angry or moody personality. In any of such cases, it is natural that the counsellee looks at the counsellor primarily with suspicion.

As long as the counsellee's suspicion continues, the counsellor's job is bound to be unsuccessful. Hence, a counselling executive must do all what is necessary to establish a congruous relationship with his counsellee, as a primary step of his counselling effort. Any such relationship may not develop abruptly or overnight. A good relationship may be the result of a constant effort, conducive attitudes and congruous understanding. A counselling relationship between a counselling
executive and a counselled employee may pass through the following stages:

(i) The executive reveals an interest in the problem employee, makes a personal contact with him, expresses a sympathy on him, and shows a willingness to help him.

(ii) The counselling executive builds a rapport with the counsellee.

(iii) The executive initiates a heart-to-heart conversation, which develops into a confidence-building exercise. The executive expressed sympathy for him, and allows the employee to pour out his mind. Some open-ended questions can be asked, guiding the employee to take the cue to reveal further. (The employee may not reveal fully all the areas of his problem in one or two meetings).

(iv) The executive forms a tentative opinion on the nature of the problem of the employee, and moves further to elicit response from the employee further so that the causes, effects and alternative solutions are identified.

(v) If possible, views of the consellee himself may be drawn from him, and compare them with the views which the counsellor has formed, so that a final realistic view of the problem, the problem employee and the problem situation can be drawn. This would enable the counsellor to ensure more accuracy in his counselling.
(vi) At this stage the counsellor is ready with his counselling. The counsellee is now ready to receive the views, suggestions and advises of the counsellor.

(vii) Every counselling has a feedback, which need not be immediate. However, some reactions of the counsellee can be elicited immediately, and he may be given time for feedback.

(viii) Follow up is an essential step of counselling because the effort may not yield expected result within one or two sessions. Very often a disgruntled employee takes time before he starts showing improvement.

In the normal counselling relationship between a counsellor and a counsellee, there is a point of termination. But in respect of the counselling relationship between an executive and his subordinates, it is a continuing relationship. Hence, a counselling executive must act as a benevolent leader, while his subordinates foster an affection, respect and obligation for their counselling executive. As the executive reveals affection and concern for his counsellee, the counsellee reciprocates, developing their relationship into a mutually regarding working relationship. It, not only establishes cordial relationship in the workplace, but increases job satisfaction and a sense of belonging in the minds of the people. Obviously, the group will work sincerely for the common goal.

Methods, Techniques and Skills for Counselling

As observed earlier, effectiveness of counselling largely depends on the methods and techniques as well as the skills used by the counsellor.
Methods and techniques change from person to person and from situation to situation.

Methods like desensitization, catharsis, insight, developing new patterns, etc., are generally useful for improving the situation of emotional “weak spots”. According to Desensitisation, once an animal has been shocked in a particular situation, it will continue to avoid it indefinitely. This is quite true in respect of human beings also. Once an individual is shocked in a particular situation, he gives himself no chance for the situation to recur (except the habitual criminals and hardcores). Perhaps after a substantial opportunity for exposing himself to the same situation, he would discover that the anticipated pain did not materialise, and his conditioned fear would be extinguished. He can be motivated for the same, if he can experience the dreaded situation first in a very mild form and in the pleasant company or with other sources of reassurance and pleasant emotions close by, it will lose its power to trigger a fear reaction in him. This method can be used to overcome avoidance reactions, so as to improve the emotional weak-spots.

If an employee is once shocked by the behaviour, approach or action of his superior, he would continue to avoid that superior. It is difficult for such superiors to be effective counsellors, unless such superiors prove otherwise through their behaviour or action on the contrary. Similarly, once an employee is shocked by a particular situation, he can be brought back to that situation only if he will be convinced through desensitisation that the shock will not take place further. Counsellor can make use of desensitisation in such situations.

Discharge of emotional tensions can be called catharsis. Emotional tensions can be discharged by talking them out of by relieving of the painful experience which engendered them. Catharsis is the process of
getting things of your chest, which is particularly helpful in overcoming the embarrassment or shame associated with some sort of social failure. It is an important technique as a means of reducing the tensions associated with anxiety, fear, hostility or guilt. Catharsis helps to gain insight into the ways an emotional trauma has been affecting the behaviour. When the emotion associated with a past experience is discharged, the experience can be seen more objectively, and the insight helps to overcome the weak spots. With the help of insight one may find that he has devalued himself unnecessarily, or his aspirations were unrealistic, or that his childish interpretation of an event was inaccurate. Then he can overcome his weakness.

Developing new patterns becomes very often necessary when other methods to deal with weak spots remain ineffective. In a typical counselling pattern the counsellor has to produce more satisfying emotional reactions, the individual needs to expose himself to situations where he can experience positive feelings. The manager who deals with such individuals may motivate or instigate them to put themselves into such situations, so that their self-confidence may increase. Drug therapy is now generally used for emotional tension. For example, tranquilizers are now widely used. Of course dosage, frequency, prescriptions, etc., must be adopted only in accordance with the instructions of a qualified physician.

Every counsellor must concentrate his full attention on two aspects viz., using of assessment tools, and utilizing counselling methods, choice of which differs from person to person, situation to situation, and from case to case. Some of the assessment tools are psychological testing, statistical methods, Attitude measurement, Caring
relationship inventory, Interpersonal Behaviour Survey, observation, Taylor-Johnson Temperament Analysis, etc.

Psychological techniques are designed to probe deeper, and reach to the subconscious mind. The respondent may be unaware of the reasons which result in certain expressed patterns of behaviour. A partially structured depth interview is an example of psychological measurement. Psychological techniques have limitations which require great care in their execution and interpretation. Its results are qualitative and hence it is subject to its own limitation. Unstructured depth interviews are also useful for psychological testing. Interviewer and the respondent talk about a specific subject for a fairly long time. The respondent is kept talking about the same methods so that some of his unconscious attitudes will emerge. Some other methods like thematic apperception tests, picture probes, narrative probes, sentence completion tests and word association tests also come under psychological measurement.

Statistical methods are quantitative in nature, which are applicable with the help of statistical data. Coefficient of correlation, regression models, statistical averages, etc., are useful if sufficient statistical data can be collected.

Attitude surveys evaluate favourable (or unfavourable) attitude to the given situation, incident of person. An attitude measurement is restricted to a general assessment of various dimensions of specific incident, person or a situation. Though it is useful to determine a person’s attitude, it is difficult to construct a true measure of person’s attitudes in different situations, to different persons or to a person in different situations. After having asked a direct question to the counsellee, the counsellor waits for yes or no answer. Then he is asked to
explain further or questions from a check list with rating scales are asked. This enables the counsellor to evaluate the attitude of the counsellee.

Caring relationship inventory is a study of caring relationship with the help of survey forms, about seven scores of love viz., nurturing love, peer love, romantic love, altruistic love, self-love, being love, and deficiency love. This is generally useful for premarital counselling. Interpersonal behaviour survey is also more useful for premarital counselling. It studies both assertive and aggressive behaviours. Eighteen scales are studied which include the test-takers tendencies to show physical aggressiveness, verbal aggressiveness, disregard for the rights of others, frankness, willingness to request help, shyness, and conflict avoidance.

Observation is an important and most convenient assessment tool. Observation can either be unaided visual observation or guided and controlled observation. It can either be participant or guided and controlled observation. It can either be participant observation, non participant observation, controlled observation or uncontrolled observation. Very often counselling executive makes casual observation which is of tremendous help for assessment.

Taylor Johnson Temperament analysis is a study designed to measure nine personality traits, including dominant-submissive, hostile-tolerant, and self-disciplined-impulsive. This study helps people to compare themselves. Counsellors can study either with the help of a schedule or some structured questions.

These are some of the tools used for making assessment of the personality traits, behavioural patterns, attitudes, etc., of the counsellee.
for gathering adequate information. This enables the counsellor to help the problem employees or individual executives to correct themselves. Counselling becomes meaningful with the help of these tools.

The most important aspect of dealing with a counselling case is the counselling skill of a counsellor. Particularly in an organisational situation, a superior counselling his subordinates or a human resources executive counselling a functional executive, a supervisor or a worker, requires a special type of skill. An executive, is supposed to take care of the interest of the organisation and its management. He represents the interests, directions, and policies of the organisation and its management, while he has to handle the grievances, complaints, problems, deprivation, disappointments and so on of an employee. This is a very difficult task; and not like the task of a professional counsellor who deals with client. This is, especially, because of the reason that an executive's counselling job involves a considerable amount of role of conflict. Hence, executive counselling skill is of great importance.

We have already seen that prior to holding counselling sessions, a counselling relationship must be established between the counsellor and the counsellee. However, in order to make the counselling sessions effective. Certain principles may be taken care of. From the findings of Carkhufl and Kramer, we can deduct the principles viz., respect, authenticity and congruence, empathy, availability, concreteness and specificity, avoiding assumptions, recognising the client's potential, immediacy, confrontation, no exploitation, work with no agenda and consultation.

Based on the observations of various experts and investigations, the principles of executive counselling can be presented as shoulds and shouldnots for executive counselling.
A counselling executive is a busy person. He has many things to do not only on his job but in his private life. Hence, it is difficult for him to take time for disgruntled employee. However, a human resources manager or an executive who has a human resources approach will have to make time for his employees, particularly an employee in difficulties. For him every employee is valuable, and he takes time to go in search of the one who is in difficulty. The story of the shepherd who went in search of one lost sheep, and that of the woman who went in search of the lost silver coin which Christ narrated (Holly-Bible) are relevant here. For a good executive, his one employee who is in trouble is a valuable resource for whose sake he finds time even at the cost of his conveniences and interests. Hence, he makes himself available for his subordinate who is in trouble.

But availability is not only the executive’s responsibility, it is more the responsibility of the problem employee himself. He must value the efforts made by his boss to help him, and make himself available for the counselling exercises. There may be some militant trade unions or union leaders who would not relish the idea of a superior solving the problem of a subordinate. Such trade union leaders may be more interested in fishing in the muddy water. Obviously they may instigate the aggrieved employee not to take part in the counselling sessions. The concerned employee must have the wisdom to understand the situation, regard the efforts of his superior executive, and make himself available to solve his problem.

Thus, both the counsellor and the counsellee must make themselves available, and make sincere efforts to find out solutions.

Counselling sessions must be kept as simple as possible. A person in difficulty may have weak temperament. By virtue of his being
agrieved, his perception can get biased, and his understanding ability affected. The counsellor must consider these facts when he initiates his communication with his counsellee, and maintain simplicity, as much as possible, in the counselling session. Simplicity and clarity go together.

Types of Problems for Managerial Counselling

A manager has to deal with various types of problems in dealing with his subordinates, employees and particularly problem employees. Basically no employee is a problem employee, except hereditary and inborn perversions, criminal tendencies, addictions, and nervous and psychological breakdowns. Once an employee turns to be a problem employee, the employer has mainly two options viz., repair and recover, or replace. For the purpose of repairing and recovering and rehabilitating, counselling has an important role to play. Counselling method or technique used in each case differs from situation to situation and individual to individual. This chiefly depends on the type of problem to be dealt with. Problems are generally associated with the causes like:

(i) Inferiority and Low Self-Esteem;
(ii) Injustice or Illtreatment;
(iii) Premarital Anxieties and Sexual Perversion;
(iv) Alcoholism;
(v) Addictions;
(vi) Mental Conflict in Union Rivalries;
(vii) Breakdown in Interpersonal Relationships;
(viii) Low Job Satisfaction and Morale, and
(ix) Breakdown in family life.