

# **Counseling for Business & Industrial**

## **Observation in Career Counseling**

### **6.1 History Factors**

The need to understand and make predictions regarding the behaviour of people has always been alive in history for both personal and social purposes. *Introspection (self-observation)* is a form of observation and supervision of one's own person and conscience. The method was especially promoted in the dawn of psychology, considering the psyche a “*circle of phenomena springing from themselves with no determinative connection to the outside*” (Zlate, 1996).

Introspectionists place the study of conscious phenomena at the centre of psychology, calling them *the psychology of conscience*. In Wundt's (1879) conception, internal phenomena may be understood by relating causes and observable effects. For instance, studying reaction speed can yield reasoning on temperament and mental state.

*Behaviourism (the theory or science of behaviour)* – arose in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, being founded by the American psychologist Watson as a response to experimental introspectionism. In essence, the author describes behaviour as “*the whole of responses adjusted to the stimuli triggering them*”, which allows its interpretation (Zlate, 1996). Watson believed the observation and description of behaviour were sufficient to predict and control it. Behaviourists considered behaviour to be the only one that can be studied objectively, observed, measured, and quantified.

For instance, visual images are nothing but muscular tension of the eyes; representations are remembrances of kinetic sensations that once accompanied the perception of the object.

*Humanistic psychology* was initially outlined by the activity and opinions of psychologists such as Maslow, Rogers, Buhler, etc. regarding the analysis and study of complex characteristics of human nature. In short, this current in psychology is based on understanding and interpretation of the significances of situational behaviour (aims, motives, specificity and uniqueness of social events)

from the perspective of the social subject. Such an interpretive approach involves empathy and intuition.

## **6.2 Natural Sciences**

The method was put to use *in the natural sciences* by Claude Bernard, who affirms that “observation” states a fact with the help of investigation and then studies the data obtained. The observer is a “photographer” of fact and the observation must exactly copy the nature of the phenomenon. According to Bernard, “*the observer listens to nature and writes to its dictation.*” (apud Zlate, 1996).

In the field of *psychometrics*, Galton was the first to propose that the standards of experimentation should be directly applied to the study of behaviour types. The author recommended this method to educators in order to measure in their pupils the quality of learning and the frequency of correct answers, initiating what we call today “behavioural tests”.

The model of observation from physics and natural sciences was transferred to *sociology* by Emile Durkheim, who considered facts “*ways of acting, thinking, feeling, external to a person and endowed with power of coercion*” (Lallement, 1993). The specificity of observation in *psychology* stems from the hypotheses the “subject” has. Piaget in 1970 made the distinction between the epistemic subject (the self as agent of scientific research and observation) and the egocentric subject (the self in its individuality as body, subjectivity).

In *social and human sciences* observation represents the relation between two people who “*realize*” and act accordingly. Kohn and Negre (1991) considered that the term observation designates an initial stage of knowledge (exploration phase), a type of action taken by the observer (systematic collection of data), and a stage of information interpretation.

## **6.3 Observation in Career Counseling**

The act of observation in career counseling consists in the intentional, methodical and systematic study of subjects, of their mental manifestations, in their natural development, and the faithful recording of significant psychological facts considered essential in career counseling.

Observation method is the only one “*employed in any research*”, sometimes by itself, at times accompanied by others: experiments, tests, questionnaires, etc. (Schiopu, 1997). The investigation and psycho-diagnosis strategy is, after all, a

concentrated form and one transposed in items and challenging situations – on a certain topic –of a systematic and deep observation.

The term “*observation*” (Lat. *observatio*, Engl. *observation*, Germ. *Beobachten*) has multiple meanings (empirical research, spying, first stage of fieldwork, watching, supervising, keeping an eye on, etc.). According to the field under study, observation can have various meanings.

In *everyday language*, observation is knowledge, examination of an object or process, stating and remarking (critically) on what has been carefully watched or looked at (The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, 1998). In *psychology*, observation is “*the most usual and spontaneous reaction involved in the active process of adapting to the situational circumstances of reality*” (Schiopu, 1997).

In *sociology*, observation constitutes the “*contact with the real world*”, according to Herseni (1969, apud Chelcea, 2001). In *pedagogy*, “to observe” means to enter “*the universe of knowledge of a child or young person*” (Neacsu, 2001), by means of exploring reality under multiple aspects: systematic (spontaneous and un-organized), enumerative, descriptive, observation as an experiment, etc. The numerous observations made during classes (in contexts of learning, social interaction and knowledge, affective reactions to educators, colleagues, or contents of knowledge, etc.) highlight the necessity of correlating / integrating them into a unitary and coherent form.

Observation forms can be classified according to various criteria, such as: Guidance of the observation act: **self-observation** (process oriented towards identification of the particularities in one’s own behaviour); **observation as such** (oriented to seizing the behavioral manifestations of others). Implication or non-implication of the counselor: “**passive / external**” (without direct involvement of the counselor in observation); **participatory** (the counselor becomes a member and participates in the activity carried out by the person or the group observed).

The structuring of observation: **structured (quantitative)**, which involves following pre-established behavioral categories, and the observation act consists in classifying the empirical material according to those categories, and **unstructured (qualitative)**, which involves study from the “inside”, over a longer period of time, without any pre-established category or aiming to defining one at the end of the observation process. This latter type of observation offers of complex and integral explanations and descriptions on the facts under observation.

*Degree of intentionality:* **spontaneous observation**, which refers to the data noticed currently, and **intentional observation** aiming to systematically understand a phenomenon or situation.

#### **6.4 Observation in Various Stages of the Counseling Process**

*Observation of behaviour during role-play:* subjects are put into a simulative situation. At any time every person is in a certain mental state, under the impression of an emotion. This emotion usually has an equivalent in bodily elements: body posture, a look, hand movements, etc.; all these elements, apparently isolated, then allow the description of a person's general behaviour at a given time.

*Observation during problem solving:* Guillaumin (1965) states that the importance of the method and the content of observation facts are increased during a psychological examination or a task. Subjects solving a problem allow us to answer both the question "*How much?*", and "*How?*" with regard to the result obtained. The answer to these questions is possible by systematic observation during the task, as well as by focusing on specific aspects of personality: attitudes during the examination, uncontrolled gestures, exclamations and words used, difficulties of understanding, etc. (Dafinoiu, 2002).

*Observation of behaviour during communication:* Mucchielli (1974) is of the opinion that observing the clients involves three points of reference for the counselor:

- noting the attitude and behaviour;
- seizing the context of the behaviour;
- availability for intellectual sympathy with the human subject;

*"The three fundamental aspects of observation (attention given to behaviour, contextual analysis of behaviour observed, empathy) are regrouped to make up what we call the psychological sense imposed on observers in any scientific position held"* (Zlate, 1996).

The correspondence between *active listening, participation, feedback, and empathy* in observation and counseling at a large enhances the opening and the active involvement of subject and favours communication, saving time and energy. Active listening involves careful observation and the maximum use of information offered by para-verbal and non-verbal behaviour of the subject.

Emotional experiences of the subject in the counseling relationship and his/her affective reactions enhance an in-depth understanding of complex (and sometimes contradictory) feelings triggered by a situation, person or event. This deeper type of empathy involves observation of the intentions the subject is rarely aware of (Rogers, 1989). The subject can speak with relative ease about objective elements of self (name, address, etc.), but not as easily about emotions. In an empathic answer model, subjects recognize themselves almost immediately by using the words “*yes, this is what I meant.*” *What do we observe during counseling?*

- Knowledge-oriented thoughts or behaviour.
- Feelings, emotions or psycho-affective behaviour.
- Neuro-physiological effects of an emotional state (blush, sweat, breathing fast, etc.).
- Verbal, para-verbal, and non-verbal aspects of communication.
- Decision-making capacity and choices regarding one’s career.

*A good observation requires:* clear and precise definition of *aims* and *objectives*; selecting the most appropriate *forms* of observation to be used; *conditions* and *means* for accurate observation (recorders, charts, etc.); *immediate writing down* of things observed (in an observation protocol) since time can alter mental recollection; making an *optimal number* of observations; *observation taking place* in varied circumstances; drawing up a *list* of observation units (behavioral sequences, if the case).

*Observation units (temporal): continuing* (longer duration) and *discontinuing* (shorter intervals). Mucchielli (1974) recommends a number of elements observed over equal time intervals, or a few minutes equally distributed over several days at various moments of the day.

*Establishing observation intervals targets:* setting *control landmarks* (or conceptualizing the observed facts) revealed by previous observations, setting *degrees of estimates of the* mental characteristics (extremely, highly, etc.); setting *qualitative estimates* converted in quantitative elements (figures, points: for instance 5 points for the high frequency of the characteristic, 1 point for the lack of it, etc.).

*Observation chart* –according to the *behavioral units* to be observed, and based on *criteria* so as to ensure the systematic nature of observation (Drumond, 1981):

- 1) criteria regarding *form – location* (e.g. we distinguish between the pupil's behaviour in the classroom, outside the classroom, in the counselor's office, etc.); *orientation* (position of subject's motor structures in relation with environment structures); *dimensional typology* of the subject (certain reflexive movements can be noticed and recorded – e.g. finger tapping); *intrinsic properties of body or skin* (change in complexion colour, body temperature, etc.);
- 2) criteria *regarding the direct effects* of subject's behaviour on the environment;
- 3) *theoretic* and *abstract* criteria that can be of two types – classification by *cause* (competitive behaviour triggered by the presence of a rival; affective-cognitive manifestations, voluntary or involuntary, etc.) and *functional* classification (behaviors have certain functions, in close connection to psychological needs).

### **6.5 Factors Differentiating Counselors in the Process of Observation**

Personal equation<sup>4</sup> of the observing counselor (Dafinoiu, 2002) is related to the following perceptive types: *descriptive* (thorough, dry); *evaluative* (tendency to evaluate, interpret, judge); *learned* (furnishes complementary information); *imaginative* and *poetic* (neglects facts and favours fancy);

- 1) the counselor's tendency to get anchored in the present and the client's to go back to past experiences;
- 2) the variable capacity of counselors to "articulate" the data in the perceptive field, that is finding root cause and connections between the observed facts;
- 3) width / range of observation field refers to the relations between the volume of observation and the degree of focus;
- 4) the capacity to resist perturbation that can alter the observation field, that is the possibility to differentiate between "fact objectivity" and "subjectivity of interpretation";
- 5) the projection is based on a certain identification between the counselor (the observer) and the subject (the observed); this identification enhances up to a point the observation and understanding of things observed (e.g.: observing pupils in school will be done easier by a person who went through the same experience recently or is familiar with school life), but facts may be altered as well (e.g.: counselor likes someone in the group over the others);
- 6) personal interpretation represents a phenomenon related to projection that attributes to real facts significances springing from one's personal universe (Veron and Gardner, 1960, 1962);

- 7) the psycho–individual particularities of the counselor (professional and life experience, temperament, focus, the ability to seize the essential, do not make suggestive interventions, etc.).

## **6.6 Counseling through Observation**

“The observer’s personal equation” the phrase was coined by the German astronomer Bessel (1816), who noticed that the errors committed by the various astronomers who had made the same observation, repeatedly, were specific to each. Consequently, each observation bears the observer’s personal hallmark. The categories of persons that can become subjects of counseling through observation are:

***Pupils*** – to prevent and diminish school failure, alleviate behaviour disorder, improve self-image, self-knowledge of psycho-intellectual potential / attitude / interests / aspirations / system of values; develop decision-making and career-guidance abilities, perform well in vocational testing, discuss the meaning and value of work, etc.

***Parents*** – in view of learning about the psycho–pedagogical field, develop cooperation between family and school, raise awareness of their important educational role, and increase responsibility for their own children.

***Teachers*** – in the process of raising awareness of the aspects related to educational and professional guidance, eliminate conformist and stereotype choices, ensure pupils’ contact with new career models, seek and use information about personal development according to the needs of each pupil, advocate a positive understanding with regard to career planning, etc.

***Educational Managers*** – for the training of communication skills, participation, motivation and team work, improvement and adaptation of the educational offer to the needs of pupils and the community, optimization of the manager-teacher-student communication, strengthening the connection with school counselors, organization and encouragement of students visiting universities according to their interests (mapped with counselor’s support), exploring possibilities for professional partnerships, etc.

Among the aspects to be observed we enumerate desirable *aptitudes* for a certain field of activity:

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Sensorial</b>	<b>Mental</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· muscular strength and physical resistance</li> <li>· reaction speed: uniform, selective</li> <li>· manual skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· sight</li> <li>· hearing</li> <li>· good capacity of walking and standing</li> <li>· standing noise, vibration, temperature variations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· attention</li> <li>· memory</li> <li>· spirit of innovation, inventiveness</li> <li>· logical thinking, ability to argue in favour of proposals</li> <li>· practical intelligence (quick understanding of issues, solving problems, organizing one's work)</li> <li>· theoretical–applicative intelligence (understanding technical, economic and organizational problems that require research and study)</li> <li>· verbal skills (fluency, intelligibility, grammatical correctitude)</li> </ul>

<b>Personality traits</b>	<b>Psychosocial traits</b>	<b>General and specialized knowledge</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• commitment</li> <li>• organizational capacity</li> <li>• discipline, diligence</li> <li>• initiative</li> <li>• discretion, tact, loyalty, etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sociability</li> <li>• adequate behaviour (posture, language)</li> <li>• team spirit (integration in group)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• aesthetic sense</li> <li>• general knowledge</li> <li>• technological knowledge</li> <li>• mathematical knowledge</li> </ul>