

Working Model for Strategic Communication: Persuading the Hostile Target during Interrogation

Ravinder Yadav

DRDO-Defence Institute of Psychological Research, Delhi -110 054, India

Email: ravinderyadav@dipr.drdo.in

ABSTRACT

The model aims to assist the security force personnel in the new era of warfare where the enemy is eliminated not by the weapons but by the information wars first. Also, a robust shield is required to counter it in the form of information-operations. The locals are made resilient enough to counter the information-war of the enemies. The interactions with the locals are required to convert into opportunities to win their hearts and minds. Generally, in a hostile environment, any interaction with the people turns in the form of an interrogation, since the trust is low and the stakes are high.

The present paper accumulated the experiential knowledge from the experts operated in the vulnerable and hostile areas, to develop a scientific model of strategic-communication. The model explains the psychological techniques step by step, used by the experts to convert interrogation as an opportunity to build a sustainable relationship of support and cooperation.

Keywords: Persuasion; Strategic communication; Interrogation; Information warfare; Psychological techniques

1. INTRODUCTION

Interrogation is the specialized art of questioning an individual to extract pertinent information of interest which the hostile individual is unwilling to part with or consciously intending to conceal. So the aim is to get maximum precise input and to create a source of continuous information. Since the environment in which an interrogator has to operate is hostile and prejudiced, therefore, he has to use his skills to weigh the information carried by an interrogatee. Under such high stake conditions, at times, interrogations resort to physical stresses, without waiting for the returns of the strategies applied for developing mental pressures. Thus interrogation is often confused with the terms like third-degree methods, fortune, brainwashing coercing etc. In this context, a psychological model of persuasion is developed to avoid counter-productive outcomes of interrogation by using coercive techniques¹, especially during counter-insurgency operations.

The judicious use of interrogation strategies can serve both the purposes of probing and winning over the hostile and alienated section of the population. The use of extreme physical stress not only inhibits the extraction of pertinent information but also causes more and more alienation, leading to more and more violence and hatred. It serves as a media to gather the hard-core intelligence and other propaganda. During interrogation, one to one contact with the target population helps in the detainee's mental rehabilitation. It also helps in creating a sense of security in their minds.

1.1 Interrogation as Persuasion Technique

According to Jowett & O'Donnell², "Persuasion is a subset of communication where the interaction is made to relate the existing repertoire of information, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of the recipients to fulfil their foreseen personal and societal needs." In a counter-insurgency scenario, it is important to win over the alienated population through persuasion during interrogation. The face-to-face interaction with the subject also helps in checking the alienation of the general public. The person after persuasion acts as a media for conducting as well as combating various insurgency propaganda. With this aim, interrogation becomes a tool of mainstreaming the alienated and hostile target.

1.2 Interrogation a Technique of Strategic Communication

During interrogation, persuasion is possible by changing the attitude of a person. For persuasion tactics and techniques are used for associating him with good and positive appeals, actions, persons or by generating the negative consequences depending on the aim of the interrogator. Generally, the individual had been influenced and made to identify himself with the target objectives of the antinationalist groups, this identification neutralizes him to follow the line expected by the interrogator. However, this is easily said than done. It needs an all-round efficiency in the techniques to be adopted to influence the attitudes of a suspect. A review of the limited literature available in this context highlights the role of the following factors:

- Emotional appeals³
- Cognitive Dissonance^{4,5}
- Foot-in-the-Door tactic⁶ and
- Group Pressure⁷.

Overall, interrogation is the only technique that brings the two extremes players of insurgency face to face, i.e. the state authority and the affected population or population being used for various propaganda by the enemy. This face-to-face interaction with the alienated population, conducted by using certain psychological principles provides intelligence and wins the hearts and minds. Otherwise, the state has to listen to various human rights abuses or more alienation of the population.

This study tried to identify certain psychological techniques, that could prevail over the situation and to persuade the detainees when applied systematically by the experts. The research culminated with the development of a persuasive working model for a hostile target.

2. METHOD AND PROCEDURE

2.1 Sample

The sample consisted of 33 expert interrogators of various government institutes, having an average age of 39 years. During the specified period, most of the investigation-agencies contacted for an interaction. Still, the agencies spared these many experts.

2.2 Tool Used

Three tools developed to tap the experiences, based on the “interactive process” model of Moston⁸ and inputs are also incorporate from the cognitive behavioural model of Gudjonsson⁹ and Psychoanalytic model of Reik¹⁰. Quest made to include the significant personality aspects of a detainee from various researches¹¹ and the models¹²⁻¹⁴ proposed, which have affinity in obtaining the information.

2.2.1 Persuasive Interview Questionnaire

PIQ designed to tap the details of an expert’s role and application of these techniques rather than focusing on the whole process of a single interrogation case. The questionnaire improvised after initial interactions at the workshop with the experts. The final questionnaire consisted of two sections where the first section, consisted of various aspects, coercive & non-coercive techniques to evaluate. The second section consisted of a personal style of interrogation on the initiation of the session, handling the emotions, validating the information and the physical setting of the room.

2.2.2 Interrogation Casebook

The targeted questions were developed and customized for group-specific interaction rather than the single-handled case, which generates the group effect during case studies collection. As a result, they narrated or re-lived the shared memories of the case. And not just replying to the queries while interacting individually. Also, prompted to share their non-conventional techniques/ strategies being used by them.

2.2.3 Interrogation Decision Spreadsheet

This matrix shaped spreadsheet introduced for

comprehensively tapping their knowledge for the effective techniques, strategies, approaches they would prefer with different personalities under various scenarios. This dealt with established techniques and approaches like: Alluring techniques, questioning strategies, cognitive interview, manipulative tactics and coercive techniques.

3. PROCEDURE

3.1 Coordination with Investigating Agencies

The investigating agencies whose mandate is gathering information and evidence contacted for formal interaction. The purpose of the study, with the requirements, conveyed to the expert interrogators.

3.2 Conduction of the Workshops

The expert interrogators that were spared by their agencies interacted in a workshop setting. These interactions conducted at various mutually convenient locations. In these sessions, they responded to the questionnaire and shared their investigating experience in cases form without disclosing the individuals’ identity.

3.3 Tapping the Expertise in the Form of Case Studies

Initially the rapport established with the experts and briefed about the purpose of the study. The interaction took place in a phased manner:

- It started with the sharing of experience with the PIQ. During this process, the experts fully understood the required inputs from them.
- Then in the second phase they were asked to share their case, where they applied certain skills or they needed to improvise to get the desired output.
- After many interactions repetition of ideas start surfacing, then the interrogation decision spreadsheet prepared in conclusion.
- In the spreadsheet the generated inputs and the knowledge accumulated in a structured form. Later, presented it to the next group of experts for their ratings.

4. SCORING AND ANALYSIS

The inputs of the experts on the PIQ were analysed using the frequency distribution method and content analysed the open-ended answers. The case studies discussed were thematically analysed. Qualitative analysis used for the analyses of the interrogation-spread-sheet where the Inter judge reliability also tested, based on that working model for strategic communication is developed.

5. WORKING MODEL FOR STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The model is developed based on the literature review and the experts’ opinion. This model is developed to ease the process of interrogation in the form of a persuasive interview. So, the required information emits easily, and the person becomes our ally in the conflict. The model provides detail about the

- Initial optimisation of the stress level for quality output and
- The process of smooth elicitation of the information for winning their hearts and minds.

5.1 Interrogation: Opportunity for Strategic Communication

In the preparatory stage, the model requires the dynamic manoeuvring of the respondent for strategic communication – interrogation, negotiation and persuasion. Indulging a person in a conversation is an art, especially, when the clouds of mistrust surround the communicators. Especially, when the interaction is desired by one party (State Agencies) to get some input and to plant some strategic information in the minds of another party (usually hostile towards the state agencies).

5.1.1 Scenario

Generally, under such circumstances, the conversation turns into interrogation where one party forces others to respond to his queries. It creates a state of stress in the respondent, as a coping mechanism, one resorts to reactive or withdrawal behaviour patterns. In reactive behaviour, one tries to evade a stressful situation. By minimizing his/her scope of knowledge or by diffusing the significance of the incident in question. Whereas, in the withdrawal behaviour, one turns stone-faced and tries to be ignorant, having the low intellect to understand/comprehend the question.

5.1.2 Behavior Patterns

In both cases, reactive or withdrawal behaviour pattern, the desired output is not obtained. In the case of reactive coping, an individual adapts to the two extreme tunes of responding, it could be either owning of all the misdeeds or tries to neglect

or evade even the slightest knowledge one possesses, their stress is minimised for optimal performance. These are natural reaction to ease the stress of the scenario. While, at times when the respondent happens to be an intellect, seasoned culprit, professional-law-violator or influential person they don't acknowledge the stress and try to mislead or manoeuvre the conversation. For them, one has to enhance the stress to get optimum inputs by claiming his authority and by informing the consequences of non-cooperation and misleading. Similarly, in the persons resorting to withdrawal coping, individuals require to be identified and optimize stress for smooth interaction. Therefore, expertise is required in moderating the stress level during communication.

5.1.3 Stress Moderation

Although communication in a hostile environment is always stressful. But due to individual differences, it is very severely experienced by some individuals whereas others still find themselves at ease to manipulate to avoid the aversive consequences pronounce by law. Therefore, the model suggests certain tactics, as a result of research and the feedback obtained from the experts, to ease out the stress by:

5.1.3.1 Providing Good Ambience

Good ambience works as reinforcement and a gesture of respect and care, eases out the stress. It works well with the females and the novice.

5.1.3.2 Assuring Favourable Outcome

Although the favourable outcomes are never told explicitly to the respondent/detainee, provide indirect clues are provided to them. The outcome can be inclined in their favour through indirect means by narrating previous examples, with the

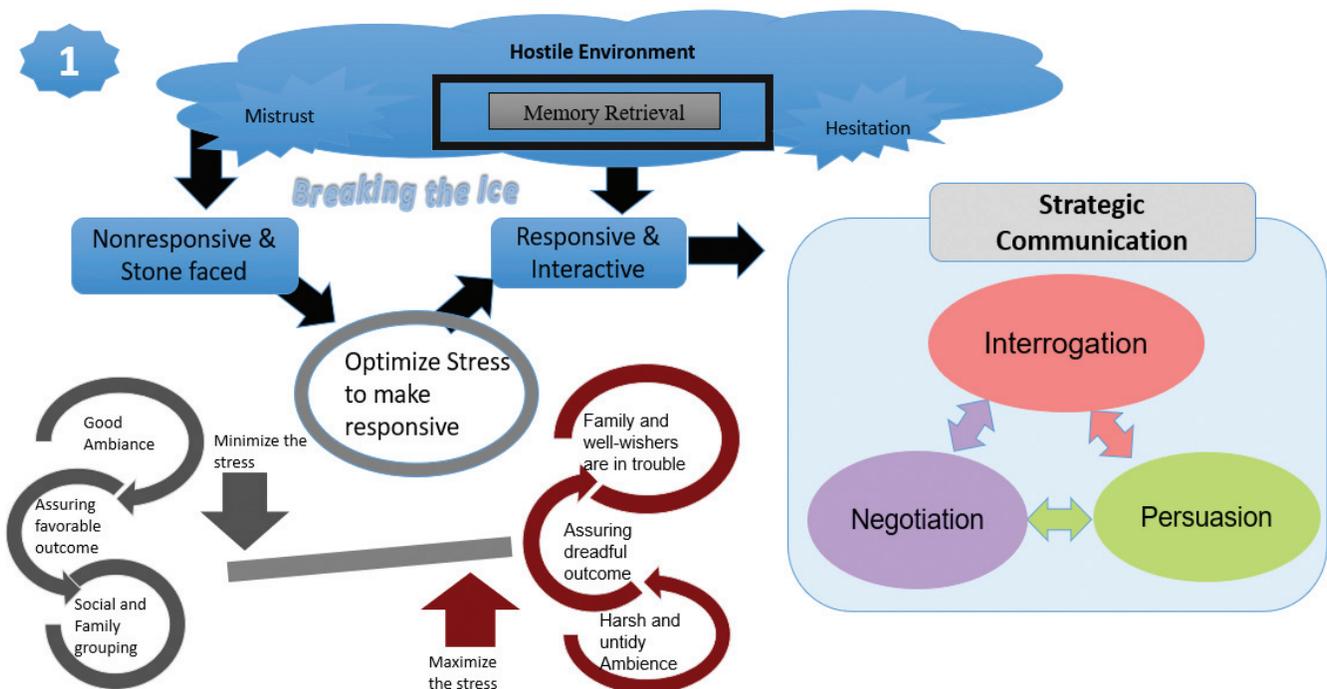


Figure 1. Interrogation: Opportunity for strategic communication.

condition to cooperate in the interaction. It works very well with the novice but even the veterans lured by this tactic.

5.1.3.3 Social and Family Grouping

Family and society play an important role in the development of a person’s self-identity and life’s goal. At times a person keeps his real persona hidden from them or at times the life becomes that much deviant that he finds it difficult to align it again. Therefore, making a reunion with the family or society could be used to make him either tensed or emotional.

There are parallel sets of techniques to enhance the stress to make the individual serious towards the interactions. As a result, practising manipulations become tougher for them. It is generally taken care of, by proving authority on the situation. There are tactics to optimize the stress by enhancing it, like:

5.1.3.4 Providing Harsh and Untidy Ambience

The poor-ambience works well with the high profile respondent/detainee. It breaks his pseudo mirage that he will be treated differently and can escape easily by manipulations. This treatment creates a sense of insecurity in him and he tries to attune himself with the interaction.

5.1.3.5 Assuring Dreadful Outcome

When the detainee is having very low self-esteem and a very shallow value system, it becomes tough to make him cooperative in the interaction. For them, it’s imperative to create fear in their mind by assuring a dreadful outcome. For example, if a local person has provided, some assistant to, or having some knowledge of the anti-national activity and not cooperating. In such cases, assure him that he could also be considered as anti-national or the same charges can be imposed, as a strategy. By and large, this tactic works where the detainee promptly accepts his part of the involvement to avoid the major plenty.

5.1.3.6 Family and Well Wishers are in Trouble

At times, under certain external pressure or being hard trained, a detainee doesn’t respond well in the interaction. For them they are assured that their family and the well-wishers are in trouble and cooperation in the interaction can get their family rid of this problem. Although this tactic requires expertise, where the value for providing safety for the dear ones and the kids rejuvenated and then the tactic is executed.

5.2 Strategic Persuasive Communication & Information Retrieval

This model comprises the steps for retrieval of the information and to sustain the loyalty of the respondent through strategic persuasive communication.

Persuasive communication is a process where attempts made to convince the other to veered around to one’s point of view in a non-coercive way. The strength of this communication style is in its long term returns. During the process, develop the trust by corroborating the desired actions with the values that the detainee also adores. And later the value-based actions are expected and facilitated to enhance the self-worth of the individual. Although all the stages are challenging, the initial phases are of utmost important where the detainee remains hostile or indifferent. In the initial phase, the stress is modulated to make him more interactive. The process of persuasive communication includes the following stages.

5.2.1 Creating Dissonance¹⁵

This initial stage involves the process of building the rapport to raise doubts about the action and the feeling that one upholds. Therefore, opportunities are provided to vent out his true feeling. This stage is marked by showing concern for the detainee and restrict itself to provide the missing information. During this interaction, there should never be a moment where it starts sounding like preaching.

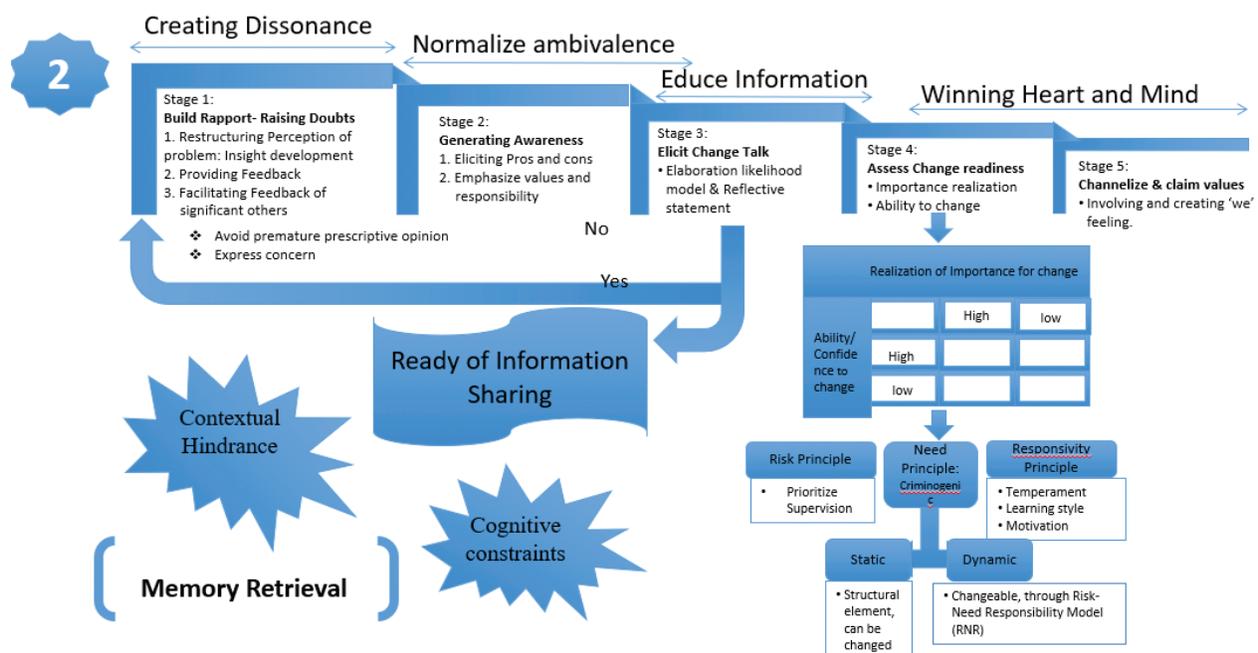


Figure 2. Strategic persuasive communication & information retrieval (Detainee is responsive and communicating).

- After this venting out of the feeling, the next step involves the development of insight. In this stage efforts are made to change the perception of the problem by restructuring the problem, its magnitude and its source. Initially, information is provided about other dimensions of the problem and the contradictions in the values justifying the cause are highlighted. It puts him on back foot and tries to justify his point by narrowing or magnifying various aspects. It provides an opportunity to negate his thinking process, without being prescriptive, by providing another dimension to the problem as no logic can approve the innocents suffering. Initially, this step seems vague and of minimal use. But it yields favourable results as it creates a dent in the thinking process of the detainee. It creates a dissonance that means creating doubt in the mind of the detainee about his perception of the problem and more valid dimensions to the problem.
- Once the dissonance is developed, consolidation of the dissonance is done. At this step, the detainee asks for elaborating the presented facts, then the argument is supported by the evidence and the picture of the horrific nexus can be presented.
- The examples of the indirect suffering borne by loved ones due to insane actions are highlighted. At this stage, highlight how these actions are condemned in holy books, religious chants by the preachers but again without being prescriptive.

5.2.2 Normalising Ambivalence

After successful completion of the first stage the second stage of normalising ambivalence starts by generating awareness. It starts with the next session where the detainee's dissonance is tried to be shifted towards the desired action by provoking him to elicit the pros and cons of this anti social actions¹⁶. Once the detainee starts expressing such an opinion he is rewarded by praising the values of his culture, society or family. And these values then associated with the responsibility that he has to accomplish for the safety of the women, children, religious books, purity of the religious places, freedom from poverty and the landlords etc.

5.2.3 Educate Information

The beginning of this stage lays in the change talk¹⁷, a gesture shown by the detainee, that marks the successful end of the normalizing ambivalence stage. The change talk gesture, mark with the favourable verbal and non-verbal expressions, reflected by the detainee which are accompanied by the clarity of voice, eliciting the client's motivations for change. In this stage, certain models of communication are used to obtain the information, like the elaboration likelihood model where evaluated information is asked, in which the mental functioning of the detainee gets involved. At this stage, the reflective statements are used to align the thought process of the detainee. In the reflective statements, the information provided by the detainee is comprehended and reinstated to understand the fact clearly. The other aspect of the reflective statement is to normalize the feelings or additive guilt during the confession/interaction. E.g. one can say, "under that circumstance, you

tried to defend yourself and the bullet gets fired". If one fails to cooperate at this stage, then again efforts are made to create dissonance and ambivalence is normalized to restart educating the information.

This stage is the apex time to obtain the information from the memory of the detainee, as there are the least filters that are applied in the flow of the information. But that doesn't mean that full information will get oozed out since there are certain cognitive constraints that the human mind has in encoding and decoding the information. Also, certain contextual constraints create hindrance in information withdrawal.

5.2.4 Winning Heart and Mind

This stage comprises of two steps, assess change readiness and channelize & claim values. At this stage, consolidation of the harmonious behaviour of the detainee takes place.

5.2.4.1 Change Readiness¹⁸

The change readiness depends on the detainee's following aspects.

- ability of the detainee to change
- realization by the detainee about the importance of the change.

Both of these things are required on the higher side to ascertain the change permanency in the behaviour of the detainee.

The other aspect that is important in ascertaining the change permanency includes the assessment of the criminogenic (crime-related) need of the individual. These needs are related to crime-involvement, the antisocial activities are required for sustaining livelihood and social life. These needs could be static, related or confined to a particular location or situation that require antisocial behaviour to sustain. These needs could be dynamic also, requiring the study of the risk need responsibility model (RNR)¹⁹. This model provides the probability to indulge in anti-social activities to fulfil the responsibilities and the risk associated with withdrawal from these activities.

The efforts required to be put in these cases require an assessment of the risk principles that could draw an individual back to an earlier state of antisocial attitude. Therefore, high-risk activities are required to be prioritized for supervision. Individuals psychological aspects will also play a major role, especially the motivation to change and learning retention.

5.2.4.2 Channelise and Claim Values²⁰

In this last stage, the values that are surfaced or generated during the interaction are claimed to be owned by the state agencies. The recent tasks and the actions undertaken by the agencies are correlated with it. These value based actions are then attributed to the help and support provided by the individual, which is further asked to act in the desired way to restore these values and vice versa.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In today's world, psychological methods have developed to the extent that even the hostile target can be brought into communicative terms by optimizing the stress perception

techniques, without using coercive techniques. Later, he can be a win over by using the steps of strategic persuasive communication. These steps are creating dissonance, normalizing ambivalence, educating information and winning hearts and minds. Hence persuasive communication is one such strategy that serves as a strong tool for extracting information as well as persuading other non-state actors who may be involved actively or passively in acts of militancy, terrorism, and insurgency.

REFERENCES

- Vrij, A.; Meissner, C.A.; Fisher, R.P.; Kassin, S.M.; Morgan III, C.A. & Kleinman, S.M. Psychological perspectives on interrogation. *Perspect. Psychol. Sci.*, 2017, **12**(6), 927-55.
doi: 10.1177/1745691617706515.
- Jowett, G.S. & O'donnell, V. Propaganda & persuasion. Sage publications, 2018, ISBN-13 : 978-1412977821.
- Janis, I.L. & Feshbach, S. Effects of fear-arousing communications. *J. Abnormal Soc. Psychol.*, 1953, **48**(1), 78.
doi: 10.1037/h0060732.
- Festinger L. Cognitive dissonance. *Scientific American.*, 1962, **207**(4), 93-106.
doi: 10.1038/scientificamerican1062-93.
- McGuire, W.J. Resistance to persuasion conferred by active and passive prior refutation of the same and alternative counterarguments. *J. Abnormal Soc. Psychol.*, 1961, **63**(2), 326.
doi: 10.1037/h0048344.
- Freedman, J.L. & Fraser, S.C. Compliance without pressure: The foot-in-the-door technique. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.*, 1966, **4**(2), 195.
doi: 10.1037/h0023552.
- Quinn, V.N. Applying psychology. McGraw-Hill College; 1995, ASIN : B002UQ2XB6.
- Moston, S.; Stephenson, G.M. & Williamson, T.M. The effects of case characteristics on suspect behaviour during police questioning. *Br. J. Criminol.*, 1992, **32**(1), 23-40.
doi: 10.1093/oxfordjournals.bjc.a048178.
- Gudjonsson, G.H. Compliance in an interrogative situation: A new scale. *Personality and individual differences.*, 1989, **10**(5), 535-40.
doi: 10.1016/0191-8869(89)90035-4.
- Reik, T. The compulsion to confess: On the psychoanalysis of crime and punishment; 1959.
- Alison, L.; Alison, E.; Noone, G.; Elntib, S.; Waring, S. & Christiansen, P. Whatever you say, say nothing: Individual differences in counter interrogation tactics amongst a field sample of right wing, AQ inspired and paramilitary terrorists. *Pers. Individ. Differ.*, 2014, **68**, 170-175.
doi: 10.1016/j.paid.2014.04.031.
- Luke, T.J. & Granhag, P.A. The Shift-of-Strategy (SoS) approach: Using evidence strategically to influence suspects' counter-interrogation strategies; 2020.
doi: 10.31234/osf.io/wncb5.
- Granhag, P.A.; Kleinman, S.M. & Oleszkiewicz, S. The scharff technique: On how to effectively elicit intelligence from human sources. *Int. J. Intell. CounterIntell.*, 2016, **29**(1), 132-50.
doi: 10.1080/08850607.2015.1083341.
- Luke, T.J. A meta-analytic review of experimental tests of the interrogation techniques of Hanns Joachim Scharff; 2020 May 25.
doi: 10.1002/acp.3771.
- Elliot, A.J. & Devine, P.G. On the motivational nature of cognitive dissonance: Dissonance as psychological discomfort. *J. Pers. Soc. Psychol.*, 1994, **67**(3), 382.
doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.67.3.382.
- Van Harreveld, F.; Van der Pligt, J. & de Liver, Y.N. The agony of ambivalence and ways to resolve it: Introducing the MAID model. *Pers. Soc. Psychol. Rev.*, 2009, **13**(1), 45-61.
doi: 10.1177/1088868308324518.
- Hettema, J.; Steele, J. & Miller, W.R. Motivational interviewing. *Annu. Rev. Clin. Psychol.*, 2005, **1**, 91-111.
doi: 10.1146/annurev.clinpsy.1.102803.143833.
- Birgden, A. Therapeutic jurisprudence and responsivity: Finding the will and the way in offender rehabilitation. *Psychol., Crime Law.*, 2004, **10**(3), 283-95.
doi: 10.1080/10683160410001662771.
- Andrews, D.A.; Bonta, J. & Wormith, J.S. The risk-need-responsivity (RNR) model: Does adding the good lives model contribute to effective crime prevention?. *Crim. Justice Behav.*, 2011, **38**(7), 735-55.
doi: 10.1177/0093854811406356.
- McRae, B. Negotiating and Influencing Skills: The art of creating and claiming value. Sage; 1998.
doi: 10.1177/002194369803500307.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author thanks Director, DIPR and Division HODs Sh. N.P. Singh, Sc 'G'(retd.) and Dr. R.K. Sokhi, Sc 'G' for providing the facilities to undertake this research work

CONTRIBUTOR

Dr Ravinder Yadav, obtained his PhD (Psychology) from JNV University, Jodhpur. Presently working as Scientist 'D' at DRDO-Defence Institute of Psychological Research, Delhi. He is overall responsible for collection, analysis and writing the paper.