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## Radek Ptáček

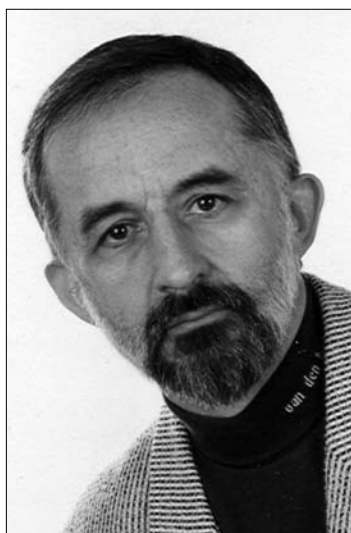


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## Police interrogator - a helping profession?

### Joza Spurný



### Joza Spurný, JUDr. Mgr. PhDr.,

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Interview is the most frequent investigative stage, which, in fact, cannot be omitted in any crime investigation. While the legal and criminal approach focuses on content, tactical and process features, the psychological approach aims at the understanding and development of the interpersonal, relational feature of the interview interaction. It appears that effective interview interaction can be spoken about when, except for quantitative criterium, ie gathering and documenting a necessary amount of legally relevant information, we accept psychological, ie qualitative features performed by an extent of social satisfaction of participants in the interview interaction. The interview interaction particularly depends upon the interviewer's abilities and skills to establish, keep and develop psychological contact. Establishing psychological contact depends on the interviewer's perception and emotional experience of the interview interaction (especially behaviour and responses of interviewees or other people, and conditions under which a particular interview interaction takes place), and on how this experience is reflected in the attitudes towards the interviewee, the interview and the interviewer him/herself. The research is aimed at grasping the specifics of interpersonal relationships, at mapping the factors which influence these relationships, and at finding the presence of attitudes which facilitate establishing psychological contact in the course of the interview.

**Theoretical research basis.** Experience with establishing and developing interpersonal relationships in therapeutical, clinical, counselling practice shows that the attitudes facilitating the course of the interaction are the following:

- therapist's empathy with client's feelings and their personal importances,
- therapist's accepting, non-assessing attitude towards the client, his unconditional positive regard,
- authenticity of the therapist's attitude towards the client on the basis of internal congruity between experience and behaviour (current experience and self).

Practical utility of this psychotherapeutic person-centred approach was confirmed through its application in other fields of human activity – especially in education, in training of non-professionals in helping professions, in manager's training, in conflict resolution, etc. Based on the analogy, we infer the interaction facilitating attitudes present in the course of the interview as a significant (and in practice insufficiently respected so far) instrument not only of establishing and developing of desired interpersonal relationships between the interviewer and the interviewee, but also of minimizing the negative feelings which are present at every interview interaction. Practical experience suggests the basic precondition for establishing and developing of psychological contact is the interviewer's willingness and ability to accept the personality of the interviewee without prejudice and critical assessment, to grasp the point of what has been said (often not clear or too complicated), to manage emotional tension (and the tendency to aggressive behaviour) evoked by the investigated case, by the behaviour of the interviewee, or by own negative feelings and state. A stereotypical (rigid) course of the interview, conflict character of relationships between the interviewee and the interviewer (or attorney), unwillingness, or the interviewee's refusal to give a statement, occurrence of feelings of secondary detriment of crime victims, interviewer's feeling of own non-competence, etc are the consequences of absent contact between the interviewer and the interviewee. On the contrary, interaction facilitating attitudes present at interviewing a witness or victim lowers the possibility of so-called secondary detriment occurrence, unpleasant feeling of exhaustion derived from the interview, impersonal interviewer's approach. The presence of these attitudes creates favourable conditions for influencing an accused person's willingness to give a statement. Internalization of the mentioned

**Vocabulary:**

*to omit = auslassen, unterlassen, weglassen  
to grasp = begreifen, erfassen, aufnehmen  
empathy = Einfühlung, Einfühlungsvermögen  
precondition = Bedingung, Voraussetzung  
to evoke = hervorrufen  
detriment = Nachteil, Schaden  
derive = von etwas stammen/herrühren  
to convey = mitteilen, vermitteln  
incongruity = Unstimmigkeit, Unvereinbarkeit  
Missverständnis  
dispositions = Anordnungen, Vorbereitungen*

attitudes by the interviewer creates background for achieving changes in his/her experience and behaviour in the form of bigger independency on surrounding assessment, better ability to understand with empathy what he/she has conveyed, restriction of the tendency to make labelling judgments and a prior assessment, reinforcing the interviewer's ability to communicate openly, lowering of incongruity between his/her experience and behaviour, etc. To enable the interviewer to involve the attitudes mentioned above in his/her behaviour, it is necessary, in addition to "universal" social skills how to communicate and influence various categories of interviewees (witnesses, victims, accused, the elderly, children, women, the ill, etc), to develop those interviewer's personality dispositions, the existence of which enables to individualize considerably and establish relationships in the interview interaction on the basis of sincere human, non-labelling and empathy-based understanding attitude of the interviewer towards the interviewee.

**Methodic and methodological research basis.** Regarding this particular problem, the objective and aim of the research, we have applied principles and procedures of qualitative research while gathering and interpreting data and making choice of research methods as well. The conducted research has supported that the very soft data achieved from the content analysis of interview interaction audiorecords, enabled to respect and register uniqueness of the structure and dynamics of analysed interview interactions, and, consequently, has

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increased ecological validity of conducted research. The research sample consisted of 308 interviewers (253 men, 55 women) with the scale of 1–25-year practice. Observation and analysis of the authentic interview records focused on 185 interview interactions altogether, including 85 with accused, 62 with witnesses, 38 with victims. Further, we assessed data from 123 controlled interviews with interrogators.

The research was drawn as a mapping one, realized in three consecutive field inquiries with use of participant observation methods, controlled interviews and analysis of activity products – authentic interview records. At first inquiry (July – September 1996) based on the participant observation method in a natural environment, we obtained information on the experience and behaviour of participants in 60 interviews. Following our instructions, observations were carried out directly in the field by independent observers – students of the Police Academy of the CR. The very inexperience, the absence of professional "stigma" concerning the students – observers together with less emotional involvement in the matter (than the interviewee or the interviewer), were the sources of new, uncliché observation brought by this method. The second data set includes the information achieved in the analysis of 123 authentic interview records (December 1996 – January 1997). The analysis of the discourse was focused especially on the interviewer's way of establishing contact, interviewer's approach towards the interrogated (and the other way round), verbal behaviour facilitating or blocking communication, etc. Investigators – the authors of the records completed the authentic record of the interview with a written record on the course of the interview, focused on their feelings, impressions of the course of a particular interview interaction. Controlled interviews (125 records) carried out by the students of the Police Academy of the CR with interviewers (July – September 1997)

were the third source of empirical data. The layout of the controlled interview covered questions searching for the factors influencing the interview interaction, searching for the causes of conflicts occurrence in the interview, on classification of so-called problem persons, on interviewer's and interviewee experience of the interview interaction.

**Research findings and their interpretation.** The interviewer's ability and willingness (intuitively or consciously) to hold, present, make use of interaction that facilitates attitudes to regulate relationships in the interview, is conditioned especially by the interviewer's characteristics, by his/her professional and social competence and, above all, by his/her current experience of particular conditions (interview situations "now and here"), in which the interview interaction takes place. The presence or absence of interaction that facilitates attitudes in a particular interview interaction is a highly individual matter. However, the analysis of interpersonal relationships in particular "interview" situations has disclosed a general tendency in interviewer's attitudes (views or prejudices), the occurrence of which makes establishing and developing of psychological contact difficult. The results of the research indicate the presence of interaction that facilitates attitudes (and/or the ability to establish psychological contact) in the interview is significantly restricted if:

- the interviewer holds an alienating, condemning, aversive attitude towards the interviewee which is evoked by modus operandi of investigated case that has "emotional impact" on the interviewer (eg interview with an offender accused of sexual abuse of his own daughter, interview with a mother who attempted to kill her two children, interview with a victim – 11-year old girl sexually abused repeatedly by her mother's friend while mother herself influences negatively daughter's willingness to give a

statement, interview with offenders who committed crime in an especially condemning way: rape, torture, murder committed brutally, when children, ill, elder or helpless people are victims);

- the interviewer succumbs to the first impression he/she makes about the interviewee according to his/her own experiential keys, while static judgement keys, permanent personality characteristics prevail when judging the interviewee. This is caused by the interviewer's practical need to "diagnose in a flash", label the interviewee with one of the offenders-witnesses types. The factors which are the most often regarded by interviewers as the interview complicating reflect especially interviewer's negative experience with these persons categories. This – together with a gravity of an investigated case and trial position of the interviewee – creates unfavourable conditions for non-assessing acceptance of the interviewee;

- the interviewer makes a significantly aim-oriented assessment of the interviewee when the interviewee is perceived and judged through his/her current role by the interviewer, ie if he/she is "competent interviewee", ie if and how he/she is able and willing to give a statement at that time. Judgment of the interviewee's ability and willingness to give a statement (what he/she knows and if he/she is willing to give a statement) is one of the first interviewer's assessments. The interviewee being close to the interviewer's idea of "competent" interviewee (ie he/she is willing and able), especially through his/her permanent personality characteristics influences the interviewer's first impression, his/her attitude

towards the interviewee, and judging the interviewee behaviour credibility (his/her statement). The need significantly preferred by interviewers to estimate the interviewee's personality supports the idea of necessity to develop the interviewer's ability of empathy when judging the interviewee's personality, his/her experience and behaviour. The common procedure of opening the interview (with an interviewee who is tense in most cases because of a lack of information, does not know what he/she faces, feels negative influence of "official" environment) with another topic appears problematic. In this case, the interviewer's ability of empathy (because of sensitive estimation of a suitability or unsuitability of the mentioned procedure at the beginning of the interview) is an essential condition;

- concerning the interviewer's behaviour, focus on the subject of the interview (ie obtaining legally relevant information), unwillingness to get interested in interviewee's feeling, minimal need to reflect and influence the social atmosphere of the interview is obviously purpose-oriented, aim-motivated. This occurs, especially, when the evidence situation is not clear, without any discrepancies, and the interviewer considers the case as a routine matter. More often, we meet the "hound's syndrom" (as we might call the mentioned interviewer's procedure) when the interviewer is strongly motivated to clear inquired case, or in cases when the interviewer finds himself/herself pressed for time;

- the tendency to assess and interpret the interviewee's current behaviour (especially credibility of his/her statement, behaviour), based on the accordance with interviewer's versions of the cause of the case and the role of the interviewee in the case. The idea made by the interviewer about the role of the interviewee in the inquired case may lead to misinterpretation of the interviewee's behaviour, to mistaking of cause and consequence, to "overlooking

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#### **Vocabulary:**

validity = Gültigkeit  
 consecutive = aufeinanderfolgend  
 to disclose = bekanntgeben, mitteilen, eröffnen  
 to condemn = verurteilen, missbilligen

Concerned significant influence of situational factors perceived by the interviewer, is considered as the source of incongruity in his/her experience and behaviour and can be a factor which strengthens the tendency to polarize the interviewer's role attitude.

The interviewer often achieves conflict-free interpersonal relationships at the cost of denying and hiding his/ her own negative feelings (anger, helplessness, etc).

or mishearing" information which does not fit the interviewer's idea;

- the interviewer considerably feels and disproportionately experiences the influence of situational factors. It proves these factors very strongly intervene in the interview interaction and affect unfavourably (even sometimes indirectly – as in the case of miserable workplace) the interviewer's and interviewee's mind. However, the prioritizing by the interviewer might lessen the interviewer's willingness to realize and admit a most considerable influence of personality factors (causal attribution). Concerned significant influence of situational factors perceived by the interviewer, is considered as the source of incongruity in his/her experience and behaviour and can be a factor which strengthens the tendency to polarize the interviewer's role attitude. Consequently, its presence considerably reduces the interviewer's willingness to show his/her inner feelings authentically;
- the interviewer tries to meet the requirements of his/her professional role, to realize expectations, idea (his/her, public) of the interviewer-professional's behaviour towards the interviewee. Along with these characteristics of professional interviewer's behaviour (registered and acknowledged by observers) as correctness, propriety, patience, interviewer's acquaintance with the case, giving clear questions, keeping professional distance, helping the interviewee to form preciser answer, keeping mutual respect, and other, considerably preferred, expected and desired interviewer's ability (social skill) "not to express his/her feelings" ("to stay neutral", "do not let himself/herself to be provoked or "to get affected by compassion") has appeared;
- the interviewer is not willing (able) to show his/her own experience, emotions, to be authentic for the reason it is necessary not to be involved (even at the cost of denying of his/her own emotions). Found in the interviewers' answers in controlled interviews, the most significant tendency to

not express his/her feelings is considered as an attitude based on the interviewer's need (idea) "not to forget his/her part", even at the cost of inner conflicts (incongruity) between his/her experience and behaviour, with negative consequences on his/her mind. The interviewer often achieves conflict-free interpersonal relationships at the cost of denying and hiding his/her own negative feelings (anger, helplessness, etc). This is supported also by the interviewers' tendency to perceive and present especially outer stressogenic factors (working conditions, problem persons, interpersonal conflicts) while their inner sources and causes – ie interviewee's and his/her own feelings, intrapsychic conflicts are not realized sufficiently or they are suppressed;

- the interviewer resists empathy in understanding the interviewee's feelings and experience for fear he/she will lose the distance, lose ability to judge interviewee's statement objectively, which reduces interviewer's objectivity and influences his/her decision making. The interviewer's unwillingness or inability to listen actively, perceive current (especially negative) feelings of the interviewee is considered as an interviewer's defence reaction, as an attempt not to be "infected" with unpleasant experience of the interviewee. Therefore, he/she rather denies these feelings, covers them with adopted rigid behavioural pattern;
- the interviewer shows the tendency to regulate the interview interaction by increased verbal production. The interviewer's effort to "fill in the space in the interview" appears to have origins not only in the effort to make use of time efficiently, but often in interviewer's uncertainty and concerns about silence that he/she may not understand. The interviewer's need "to dominate the interviewee psychologically", to have the situation under control (which strengthens the role attitude towards the interview interaction) can be found in increased verbal production;

- the interviewer denies the existence of intrapsychic conflicts, the sources of which are usually the following:

- interviewer's double role – he/she is in the commanding position towards the interviewee when setting "rules" and the course of the interview on the one hand. On the other hand, he/she finds himself/herself in a dependent position towards the interviewee, his/her information, willingness and ability to give a statement;

- concerns about own incompetence, where he/she is not sure about the points at the issue he/she investigates, eg, in case of new kinds of crime (tax evasion);

- the necessity to provide the interviewee with information selectively and gradually;

- the need to stay calm, to keep his/her distance even from provoking interviewees who approach the interview and the interviewer in a conflict way, or when the interviewee loses motivation to keep on giving a statement.

**Conclusion.** The research results conducted by the Department of Social Sciences at the PA (Police Academy) of the CR (Czech Republic) in 1996-98 supported unequivocally the basic proposition of holding individuality and unrepeatability of interview situations (as a specific kind of social contact under conditions of legally regulated relationships) which proposes a pattern-free, creative and individual attitude of the interviewer towards the interviewee and the interview. In addition to the legal and criminalistic principles, as well as the procedures and recommendations how to gain the purpose and aim of the interview, there are psychological factors that affect the course and result of each interview interaction – interviewer's attitudes of which are considered as crucial. The attitudes held by the interviewer towards the interviewee, towards the interview and towards himself/herself present personality basis, philosophical and ethical frame of their attitude towards the interview, influence the choice

of instruments (esp psychological ones), towards establishing psychological climate in the interview, and towards gaining the aim of the interview. The results, achieved with the classification analysis of qualitative data (interpersonal relationships) enabled to create a set of key factors (of psychological character), which influence the presence of interaction facilitating attitudes in the interview to the highest extent. The relationship analysis which has been conducted, has made it possible to judge and describe basic psychological causes of the presence / absence of interaction facilitating attitudes in interviewers' behaviour and acting. It occurred while the need for empathy towards the interviewee is generally respected among interviewers, and elements of empathical attitude appear in verbal and nonverbal interviewers' behaviour in various levels of intensity and frequency (esp towards victims and witnesses), interviewers' willingness and ability to accept the interviewee (esp accused person) unconditionally and without assessment, and to show their feelings authentically (to achieve congruity between their experience and behaviour) is considerably restricted. Contribution of conducted research, acquired data and inferred conclusions is seen especially on the ground:

Theoretical – this is when we collect data for completing the current knowledge basis of forensic and criminal psychology with the view of emphasizing elements of helpful attitude of the interviewer towards the interviewee (application of PCA attitudes into the interview interaction) in the interview interaction interviewer – interviewee.

**Vocabulary:**

*unfavourable = ungünstig, unvorteilhaft*  
*attribution = Zuordnung, Zuschreibung*  
*to suppress = unterdrücken*  
*to perceive = bemerken, wahrnehmen, empfinden*  
*unequivocal = eindeutig, unmissverständlich*

In addition to the legal and criminalistic principles there are psychological factors that affect the course and result of each interview interaction – interviewer's attitudes of which are considered as crucial.

The results, achieved with the classification analysis of qualitative data enabled to create a set of key factors, which influence the presence of interaction facilitating attitudes in the interview to the highest extent.

The research has brought general problems and questions. We intend to work on these issues and verify them theoretically in other research activities, which is considered as a contribution to the practice. Examples of the issues are following:

- the issue of the power of information in the interview interaction;
- possibilities and borders of helping in a legally regulated relationship;
- interviewer's authenticity and role;
- acceptance of the interviewer's personality;
- research – we have verified the functionality of research methods applied as necessary to be adopted to real possibilities and conditions, under which the field data collection was carried out (real, concrete interview situations, related legal and ethical limitations). At the same time, we have achieved ground material for construction and modification of other research methods and procedures;
- practical – except particular knowledge on the interview interaction participants' behaviour and experience specifics, especially possibility of gaining immediate feedback (from taperecords, its analysis based on given outline, observers' and interview interaction participants' findings) on the structure and dynamics of the interview interaction directly by interviewers (probands) is recognised as the main contribution in this field;
- educational – supporting the basic proposition on the need to complete (and gradually replace) current informative way of psychological training of interviewers with didactic (experiential) procedures and methods making the interviewer possible to internalize the interview interaction facilitating attitudes on the basis of own experience.

## Zusammenfassung

**Das Verhör ist die am häufigsten angewandte und auch die wichtigste Untersuchungsmethode bei der Aufklärung von Verbrechen.**

**Der Verlauf und das Ergebnis des Verhörs hängen zum Großteil von den Fähigkeiten der Person ab, die das Verhör durchführt. Inwieweit diese eine psychologische Verbindung knüpfen und üblicherweise vorhandene negative Gefühle abschwächen, oder gar vermeiden kann, ist für den Erfolg des Verhörs essentiell. Das Aufbringen von solchen Haltungen wie Einfühlungsvermögen, Glaubwürdigkeit und einer unvoreingenommenen (nicht bewertenden) Einstellung von dem Verhörenden gegenüber der verhörten Person sind Grundvoraussetzungen, um einen psychologischen Kontakt herzustellen, aufrechtzuerhalten und das Konfliktpotenzial beim Verhör zu mindern. Wenn die oben angeführten Einstellungen von der Person, die das Verhör durchführt, offen gezeigt werden und von der verhörten Person wahrgenommen werden, so erleichtert dies die Beziehung zwischen den besagten Personen. Die von 1996-1998 von der Abteilung für Sozialwissenschaften der tschechischen Polizeiakademie durchgeführten Forschungen zielten auf das Verstehen von spezifischen Eigenheiten der zwischenmenschlichen Beziehung bei Verhören, auf die ausschlaggebenden Faktoren, die diese Beziehung beeinflussen, und auch auf das Erkennen von förderlichem Verhalten des Verhörenden bei der Verhörpraxis ab. Der Artikel präsentiert sowohl theoretische und methodologische Forschungsgrundlagen, als auch Ergebnisse und Erkenntnisse, die durch das Betreiben von Feldforschung erzielt wurden.**