

Psychology 405

Creating a Working Alliance

Overview Model of Skill Assignments 1 and 2: Commentary

This commentary is intended to accompany the DVD recording, *Overview Model of Skill Assignments 1 and 2*, which is included in the *PSYC 405* course materials package. Essentially, this DVD and commentary present samples for Skill Assignments 1 and 2.

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Introduction

Welcome to the *Overview Model of Skill Assignments 1 and 2*. The purpose of this DVD Overview is to help you produce a useful demonstration of your counselling skills. This Overview demonstrates what good interviews look like and how they should be analyzed for purposes of *Psychology 405*.

This *Overview* DVD and the accompanying text supplements the detailed and lengthy demonstration of skills provided in the second DVD in the course titled *Creating a Working Alliance: Counselling Strategies for the Interpersonal Dimensions of Working Alliances*.” This second DVD demonstrates each of the skills mentioned in the *Video Skill Demonstration Commentary* resource; you should consult this second DVD like a dictionary when you want to see what a particular skill looks like.

In this *Overview* DVD you will see George and Erin demonstrating ways of doing Assignments 1 and 2, accompanied by a text commentary and analysis. The beginning of the DVD provides an overview of what to watch for when preparing to do your demonstration video for your two assignments. Then the demonstrations commence with George as the counsellor and Erin as the client for the first two interviews/assignments. In these interviews Erin is contemplating going back to school alongside family obligations. In the subsequent analysis, George provides a written commentary on each interview/assignment that is integrated with the play-by-play transcription of the DVD interview. This is one procedure you can follow in your skill demonstration assignments.

In the second set of interviews/assignments, we see Erin as the counsellor while George plays the client. Here, George discusses with Erin his frustrations at work, where he feels that he is not being properly recognized for his contributions. After the interviews, notice how Erin uses the Skill Grid mentioned in the “Video Skill Demonstration Commentary” as part of her analysis. The relevant Skill Grid accompanies each transcription of the interviews. The Skill Grid interprets what has happened in each of the transcriptions. Finally, Erin combines all of the elements together in her written analysis of each of the interviews/assignments.

Notice that both sets of interviews revolve around authentic topics—going back to work and lack of respect at work. These topics are meaningful, but are not too difficult to work with. It is recommended that you choose your own topic with this kind of balance in mind.

Skill Assignment 1: Demonstration Video Analysis

by George Joyes

Introduction

The goal of this assignment is to demonstrate basic counselling skills as defined by Hiebert (1977) within the context of a working alliance. A working alliance is a relationship based on developing a bond, getting agreement on goals, and getting agreement on tasks. Meara & Patton (1994) state

We suggest that, typically, when a client comes for assistance with career concerns, there may be some attention given to the relationship aspects of the work, but often there is not enough focus on the counselor's deliberate building of the working alliance. As a result, client and counselor have different views with respect to what they are about. (pp 165-166)

The DVD demonstrates the creation of a working alliance between George (counsellor) and his client, Erin, through the deliberate use of basic communication skills. George will use SOLER and attending skills to create the bond. As Meara & Patton (1994) state,

In word and attitude, the counsellor makes clear to the client that the work in career counselling proceeds more effectively when it is undertaken as a collaborative and purposeful endeavour in which the pair, together, will identify problems and search for their solutions. At the onset the counsellor invited the client to collaborate in a partnership of thinking and talking together about the client's career problems and decision making... The point is that the counsellor stresses their joint or collaborative search for solutions; and in doing so helps dispel the notion that career counselling is simply information exchange. (p. 168)

George uses open questions, closed questions, and declarative probes to develop the goals and tasks of the session. He uses reflection and summaries to ensure that both he and the client share the same understanding of the issues.

Session Plan

1. George will start with an open question to ensure that the client establishes the agenda. From prior discussion, George already knows that Erin will be discussing her desire to return to school.
2. George will then use an overview to explain how the session will unfold, and will ask for formal approval from the client to proceed.

3. He will then use questions to explore the client’s issue, first to describe it, and then to explore feelings that accompany that description.
4. He will use a summary followed by a transition to move between the domains.
5. He will end with a master summary and an invitation to the next session.

Throughout the session, he will use attending skills to maintain the bond.

General Comments

The session went well, partly because the client was very verbal. George actually used too many questions that depended upon Erin’s ability to interpret non-specific cues. Too many of his questions could only be interpreted as questions because he used voice inflection and body language. With a less co-operative or less knowledgeable client, he would have needed to be more careful about asking fully articulated questions.

His non-verbal communications and attending skills were excellent, however. He was relaxed and attentive with fair posture and excellent eye contact. The switching camera focus was not ideal for this skill demonstration. Ideally it should have been focused more on George for the assessment of his counselling skills.

Skill Analysis (Transcript Analysis)

#	Question/Statement (George only)	Skill Used	Analysis
1	I’d like to start by just asking you, what I can help you with today?	open question	Good. General question to let the client set the topic.
2	Uh-huh.	attending	There are many examples of affirmative responses throughout the session. They are to communicate to the client that the counsellor is listening.
3	Okay. So, what we’re going to talk about is your plans and desires to go back to school and some of the implications of that? Uh-huh.	paraphrase	Fair. George stated this paraphrase as a question, using voice inflection. The client responded in agreement and George noted that agreement with an “uh-huh.” He could have used a closed question to obtain agreement instead of using inflection.
4	So what I’d like to do is explore that issue from two perspectives. First, I’d like to talk to you about describing the actual issue:	overview	Poor. George should have broken this into two parts like he started to do with “First...” The “Second...” should have addressed

	describing all of its parts; what each of the parts mean; what they look like to you, and some of the emotional impacts of these parts, of whatever the decision involves.		the emotional aspects.
5	Is that okay by you?	closed question	Good. This obtained client agreement to proceed.
6	okay, good...	attending	
7	So first, tell me please—why a Doctorate?	declarative probe	Good. Seeking distinct further discussion of the topic.
8	You’ve got family history experience. You know what the job entails. You’ve thought a lot about it. It has a lot of perks for you. Okay.	summary	Fair. George summarizes all the points he can remember about why Erin wanted to pursue a PhD. He framed the last statement as a question, using voice inflection. Erin agreed, prompting the okay. George should have used a closed question to gain affirmation of his understanding.
9	What are the downsides? What are the things about doing a Doctorate that don’t appeal to you?	open question	Poor. George stacked the questions. The second, which was added to clarify the first, was unnecessary with this client.
10	Okay. Basically there is a conflict between what you want for yourself academically and career-wise and what you want for yourself as a Mom and as a wife? Okay.	reflection	Fair. George tried to reflect the gist of what the client had just stated. Her ongoing response during this statement was nodding and recurring yes, so George could assume that his reflection was accurate. Once again, he should have asked for formal assent with a closed question.
11	Have you any other educational opportunities?	closed question	Good. George focused the client on other options. If she said yes, George would explore these options.
12	Yeah, yeah, uh-huh, right, exactly	attending	
13	So an MBA to do what kind of a career?	declarative probe	Good. The client mentioned acting as a Board Chair, which is a volunteer (unpaid) position, so George wanted to find out exactly how this educational choice related to career, which was the topic of the session.
14	Not as an employee, but more of a specialist or consultant role?	prompt	Poor. George was trying to understand the clarity the client had around this

			career since she was so clear about the employment options with a PhD. George was off the mark with his question. He should have used a declarative probe to ask about what specific positions Erin foresaw.
15	Is there an MBA that is directly related to that role of working with non-profit corporations?	closed question	Poor. An open question regarding Erin's research into such a program would have been better.
16	Have you looked at where you could do a Doctorate in your area?	closed question	Fair. Again an open question would have been better.
17	Close to your house is important if you've got a family.	reflection	Good. George shows that he appreciates Erin's perspective.
18	Any other downsides to going to school?	closed question	Poor. This would have solicited better information as a probe or an open question.
19	Hard work, yeah, right, with a family.	attending	
20	How about the finances? Is that something you've thought through?	open and closed questions	Poor. George stacks the questions here. He should have stopped after the first one.
21	It's always a consideration...the story of life (chuckle)	attending	George uses humour to indicate understanding and to maintain the working alliance.
22	To summarize what I've heard you say, the possibilities are a Doctorate or an MBA for two quite different career paths, both of which interest you. But the fly in the ointment is that you are enjoying being a Mom, and there are conflicting demands between your role as mother and wife and the dedication and hard work you know it's going to take to go back to school. Is that accurate? Okay.	summary and closed question	Good. George's summary seems to sum up the discussion so far. The closed question asked for her agreement—that his assessment was accurate.
23	Now I'd like to change focus a little and talk a little about what some of the emotional implications are, because the technical things we've talked about—here's what school looks	transition and overview	Poor. The transition started well, but George got lost in the words. He probably should have broken the idea into two steps: first, the transition, and second, the reorientation. Both the transition and the reorientation suffered

	like; it means a lot of work. But there's also... underlying that, among those issues, well...how's it feel? –Which is quite important to the decision making, of course.		from garbled, run-on sentence fragments.
24	So when you look at pursuing a Doctorate or an MBA, which one feels more appropriate? —Doing that degree and the career path that follows.	declarative probe	Good. George segmented the question to include both the degree and the career since he believed that Erin hadn't fully thought through the MBA option in terms of career options, and he wanted her to look at the learning process in terms of job opportunities.
25	Feels more like what you feel yourself as?	reflection	Fair. The reflection is accurate, but the phrasing is poor.
26	So the best feeling, just from a visceral perspective, for you is the Doctorate?	closed question	Good. George was seeking to confirm his understanding of the feelings Erin had expressed that George tried to reflect above.
27	So is the feeling all good, or are there negative feelings about becoming a “doctor”	open question	Good.
28	It's the great unknown, isn't it?	attending	
29	How about your husband? There's going to be an impact of you doing all this work on your children and on your husband. What are your feelings around that?	open question	Poor. Again, George has stacked more than one question. This often leads to client confusion, as indicated by Erin asking George for clarity.
30	Around the whole thing. You're not going to be available. You've got no time.	clarification	Poor.
31	There'll be a loss there.	reflection	Good.
32	Okay. So what I've heard you say... the feelings are mostly positive about getting the Doctorate, despite the great unknown of “is there viable employment at the other end?” And the feelings are still strong about the role-modelling of you working being good for your daughter and for the daughter that's coming (*). But there is also	summary and closed question	Good. The summary covered all the emotional points Erin had mentioned, and George asked for her assent that it was correct. * This is an assumption by George. Erin did not inform him of the gender of her unborn baby.

	this sense of loss, of “you won’t be there all the time because you have to go to work. Does that sound about right?”		
33	Anything else you want to add?	closed question	Good. George is making sure that the client has the opportunity for input into the counselling direction.
34	So, we talked about the two options for the degree, in summarizing, for the Master’s degree and the Doctorate, with preference for the Doctorate because it feels more natural to you. The impact on your husband and your children is something you’ve thought about; you’re aware of. Your husband is on your side totally, it sounded like (*). The kicker is your own loss, because you’re not going to be able to be a Mom at home if you decide to go for a Doctorate full time.	master summary	Fair. George should have mentioned the two job options as well. * George is making an assumption here—they did not discuss this. George failed to ask for the client’s formal acknowledgment that his summary was correct.
35	That’s a pretty good starting place to do some problem-solving for us at our next session, which we will take up during our next interview. And that’s all for today.	closure	Good. George ends on a positive note while suggesting expectations for the next session.
36	Do you have anything that you want to add or anything else you want to ask me?	closed question	Good. George’s question ensures that the client has one more opportunity for input into the session agenda.
37	Well, thanks for coming in. Bye-bye.	closure	

Balance and Sequence

George’s balance of questions appears adequate. He could have used more reflections and paraphrases to indicate that he was listening and to be able to check the accuracy of his understanding with the client. As noted above, he could have used more closed questions to obtain formal assent from the client regarding the accuracy of his observations.

Purposefulness and Flexibility

George's purposefulness and flexibility were acceptable. They got through the agenda as planned, and he used the skills to explore the client's issue as planned. He demonstrated flexibility by exploring the MBA career, because he did not expect this option, and needed to better understand better what it meant to the client. George could have been more specific about both defining and getting agreement upon the goals.

Conclusion

Overall the session went well. George used a variety of skills to create a bond, to define the process, and to explore the client's issue from the two planned perspectives of meaning and emotions.

References

- Hiebert, B. (1997). *Generic interpersonal skills involved in creating a working alliance*. Athabasca, AB: Athabasca University.
- Meara, N. M. & Patton, M. J. (1994). Contributions of the working alliance in the practice of career counselling. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 43(2), 161-177.

Skill Assignment 2: Demonstration Video Analysis

By George Joyes

Introduction

The goal of this assignment is to demonstrate basic counselling skills as defined by Hiebert (1977) within the context of a working alliance while also demonstrating the five-step problem solving model from Unit 5 of the *Study Guide*. The working alliance is a relationship based on developing a bond, getting agreement on goals, and getting agreement on tasks as defined by Bordin (as cited in Meara & Patton, 1994). It is critical for the counsellor to maintain focus on the working alliance during all sessions with the client.

In this demonstration, George will show the creation of a working Alliance with his client, Erin, through the deliberate use of basic communication skills. I will use SOLER and attending skills to maintain the bond.

George uses open questions, closed questions, and declarative probes to develop the goals and tasks of the session, and reflection and summaries to ensure that he and the client share the same understanding of the issues. He uses transitions when moving among the five steps of the model, to the extent possible within the time constraints of the assignment.

Context and Plan for the Session

George and Erin will continue to discuss the issue that Erin tabled in session one: her options for further education.

1. George will start with an open question to ensure that the client establishes the agenda.
2. He will then use an overview to explain how the session will unfold, and ask for formal approval from the client to proceed.
3. George will build upon the discussion from the first session to develop a problem definition that will be the basis of the problem solving process.
4. He will use a summary followed by a transition to move between the steps of the planning model.
5. George will end the session with a master summary and an invitation to the next session.

Throughout the session, George will use attending skills to maintain the bond.

General Comments

George conducted an effective session. His non-verbal communications and attending skills were excellent. He was relaxed and attentive with fair posture and excellent eye contact. As with the first session, the switching camera focus was not ideal for skill demonstration. While the session went well overall, George committed two major errors in this demonstration. First, he talked too much during several of the stages, most notably in the transitions. George wanted to demonstrate for students how some of the sections could be introduced, but for a client as knowledgeable as Erin, this was unnecessary. Second, George rushed a bit at the end of the interview to try to get to more phases of the problem-solving model. In doing so, he abandoned the working alliance model and started “telling” the client. You can find more details about this in the Skill Analysis Chart.

Skill Analysis (Transcript Analysis)

#	Question/Statement	Skill Used	Analysis
1	Welcome back, Erin. How have you been since I last saw you? The pregnancy is progressing okay? I'm glad to hear that!	relationship building	Good. These comments rekindle the bond through welcoming and acknowledging the client's present status.
2	When we left off last time, we had talked about your decision to go back to school or not to go back to school; the Doctorate or the MBA; and your feelings and thoughts around how that was going to impact on your role as a mother and as a wife. So I'd like to continue on that today if that's okay? (yes) All right!	opening review and closed question	Good. George's review and closed question solicited agreement about the previous session.
3	What I'd like to do is take us through a problem solving that looks...it's several steps in a model that is a structured way of looking at where we're at and where you need to get to and defining the steps along the way. The first step is we'll be doing what we did last time but in a little more detail. It's called problem description and problem definition. The second phase is we're going to brainstorm some	orientation	Fair. George shows some hesitation, indicating some nervousness. He started talking before he had thought through what he wanted to say and how he wanted to say it. NOTE: George mentioned only four steps (not five) because he intends to deal with the first step—developing a problem solving orientation—in process immediately.

	possible ideas around that, solutions and other concepts that we can work on. Then we'll look at all of those and then appraise them and find out which you rate as the one you want—your best option. And then we're going to actually start the action plan to implement that choice. And the final step which, we will probably won't get to today, would be to then evaluate the effectiveness of the plan (okay). So these are the steps we are going to go through together—the four steps. (uh-huh)		
4	Have you had any experience with problem solving models in the past?	closed question	Fair. An open question would have been better here (e.g., "What experience...").
5	You're comfortable with a structured way of problem solving?	paraphrase and closed question	Fair. George is continuing to establish a problem solving orientation.
6	So, do you think that the two of us together can get there from here?	closed question	Good. George stresses Erin's belief in problem solving, and increases the bond by using a "we" phrase.
7	Okay, Super! Shall we start? (yes)	closed question	Good. George is getting assent to continue.
8	Last time, we talked about the two options: Doctorate and MBA. You've had some time to think about it, so I'd like you to again describe for me if you would—put it in a box—your thoughts around which of those two options...	review and declarative probe	Good. George is asking his client to reiterate her own summary of her thoughts in the previous session, and to add any new ones.
9	Yeah, of course, uh-huh	SOLER	There are many examples of verbal and non-verbal responsiveness in George's counselling style.
10	You're in the luxurious stage that this isn't a career crisis for you. There are some things, options, that you're looking at, and you basically need to make a decision if you want to go for them, and which one.	paraphrase	Good.

11	And how about the feeling side, because we talked last time quite a bit about your being a Mom and new baby on the way. I called her a daughter. We don't know that do we? You mentioned that before we sat down to talk. Your husband...I made the assumption last time that he was on-side because you said that you and he talked about the finances.	transition, review, and recovery for assumptions from last session.	Good. Showing one's human nature and acknowledging errors is part of the empathy and bonding process.
12	Do you have any more thoughts around...any more feelings about that? Has anything gelled for you since we met the last time?	closed questions	Very poor. George has stacked two questions. Although they are both about the same thing, the questions address different domains. This is–confusing for the client.
13	Thinking about it from last week, the thing that's added in is your curiosity is a little more piqued about what the options really are? (yes) Okay.	reflect meaning and closed question	Fair. Gaining the necessary information from the closed question relies on body language and voice inflection which is a bad habit of George's.
14	Before we can solve any kind of problem we have to get agreement on what the problem is. Can I suggest to you that the problem definition is something like “You need to figure out which of these options is the best one for you, and then decide whether the option is going back to school and which program: or whether the option for you would be to not to do that right now because of your parenting picture..”	problem definition prompt	Fair. The danger inherent in prompting is that a counsellor can lead the client where she does not want to go. In this case, George was having trouble getting the client to discuss the problem concretely. Her responses were often philosophic or academic rather than practical. George decided to close the discussion and move to the next step, so he needed a problem definition that he and the client could agree upon.
15	Would that describe the specific situation clearly? (yes) Okay.	closed question	Good. George seeks assent that the problem definition was acceptable to the client.
16	With that problem statement in mind, I'd like to start the next step in the process, which is to brainstorm some choices—to brainstorm some options of what you think you could do to solve	transition and orientation	Fair. The transition was acceptable. George's orientation to brainstorming was too wordy. As mentioned above, George was trying to demonstrate a way to orient the client to the brainstorming stage, but this process

	<p>this problem. The concept of brainstorming is pretty straightforward. We don't...I won't be evaluating. I won't even be giving you feedback on it. I may throw in a few of my own , but just throw out as many ideas as you can so that we can then look at them individually so we can say "that will or won't work, or that's a silly idea.." But sometimes the silly ideas turn out to be the ones that "well, that's not bad now that I look at it again." So just please feel free. Brainstorm what you think (client talks over me) you can do for us to figure out what you want to go for, or whether you want no option for right now. So just fire away: give me what solutions you see you need to do.</p>		<p>was not required for this client.</p>
17	<p>More research, uh-huh, etc.</p>	<p>SOLER</p>	
18	<p>That's quite a few! You could always decide to get on a slow boat to China and become a tour guide on the Great Wall, but that's not part of solving the problem!</p>	<p>positive praise and humour</p>	<p>Fair. George's enthusiasm about the number of options was good, but the humour didn't add much to the interaction here.</p>
19	<p>Okay, let's take them one-by-one. Let's start with the first one: doing more research. How would you do that?</p>	<p>transition and open question</p>	<p>Fair. George did not mention what we were doing at this stage—ranking alternatives.</p>
20	<p>So the first choice is talking to people. In the careers that you are interested in, would that be who you'd be talking to?</p>	<p>reflection and closed question</p>	<p>Good. George wanted to clarify who the client was planning to talk to, since he continues to be concerned that Erin's ideas are all about researching the field and the programs, but not about the career potential at the other end of the process.</p>
21	<p>Rather than the career on the other side; more of the university and what's going on there?</p>	<p>closed question</p>	<p>See previous analysis.</p>
22	<p>Just to clarify something, the</p>	<p>closed</p>	<p>See previous analysis.</p>

	research that you would be doing is to see what opportunities would flow out of having a PhD?	question	
23	The people who care about you and getting their opinions.	reflection	Good.
24	So, your research sources are university professors, the universities themselves...obviously that sounds to me like an online process (yes), and friends and family.	summary	Good. George made one assumption (that Erin would be researching these online), for which he checked with her for agreement.
25	You mentioned earlier, people who are already working in the careers that you've considered;—specifically in the MBA you mentioned that?	review and closed question	George continues to add to the quest for career rather than talking about school as unrelated to a career at the other end.
26	Anything else on the research side that you can think of?	closed question	Good. George probes for any other client agendas.
27	Researching the finances, yeah, etc.	SOLER	
28	Always part of life isn't it—researching the finances.	humour	Good.
29	Okay, so you have four different elements to research now. Can we move on to the next point? (yes)	summary and closed question	Poor. While George mentions four elements, he should have repeated them.
30	The next point was alternate work arrangements at home, as I recall. In discussing that with your husband—him changing careers, perhaps sharing, however you work that out...How would you get to there?	review and open question	Good.
31	Is there a possibility with his career, of a job that involves some working at home and some working onsite rather than all being away from home?	closed question	Poor. An open question would have given the client more opportunity to respond. With this client this was not an issue.
32	Let's explore that in a little more detail, because there is an issue of parenting; we've talked about that. What are your options there?	review and open question	Good.

33	You mentioned that last time—that aspect of time spent when your children were young was really important to both you and your husband, so that obviously has to be a part of your decision making process. You can't just say...from what you've said I don't hear you saying "Well I'm just going to leave to go to school and will put the kids in day care from 6 in the morning to 10 at night." That's not an option for you. (yes). Okay.	review and closed question	Poor. George was trying to get the client to state that her family came before her return to school, but he worded it rather clumsily. A straightforward declarative probe would probably have been better.
34	We talked about the research; we talked about; you mentioned the finances; we talked about the child care situation. We took a bunch of the first things and put them in a category called research.	summary	Good.
35	Any other possible solutions that pop into your head before we move on? Any other things?	closed question	Good. Seeking the client's agendas.
36	So let's move on into the next phase if we can, which is to take each of these choices and look at it and say, What are the pros and cons? —to give yourself an elimination of the ones that you really don't prefer, to the ones that you do prefer, to come up with your best choice as a final one.	transition and orientation	Good.
37	Let's start right off with the research. What are the pros and cons in research of all those things we talked about: talking to friends; talking to people in the career path; researching what schools are available; researching the finances?	open question	Fair. George includes the four points that he neglected to mention earlier, so the question got too long.
38	The second concept we talked about...let's go with the second last one: child care and all the	review and prompt	George prompted the client with a choice (Hiebert, 1997, p. 9) to try to get Erin to state what he had been

	options there. Is there anything more you need to do in terms of...What I heard you saying was there are two and a half years of a window—and it may be longer with the new baby—until school time. So does that mean that the choice is almost pre-made, or are there things that you need to explore around that choice?		clearly hearing her say: that her family came before returning to school.
39	And the husband’s job? Options? You already said that there’s a year-and-a-half window?	open question	Good. George follows up on the preceding question to reaffirm that the time frame for school is not immediate.
40	Two themes keep coming up. There are things you want to do career-wise, and there is home, which sounds to me like a higher priority than the other thing right now, especially with a new baby on the way. (yes) So if we were to take our original problem definition of saying “go to school for the MBA or Doctorate, or stay home” and just take that down to a simpler definition “go to school now: stay home now,” which of these two options would you prefer to choose?	summary and prompt open question	Fair. See previous comment.
41	So given that...given the year-and-a-half window with your husband’s current job before he can make changes in his workplace, a new baby on the way—and you know it’ll take a couple of years or three years before he’ll be going to pre-school—where do you go from here? Now you have two choices. You know you aren’t going to go to school immediately? (yes) The two choices are: decide not to go to school, postpone that decision till later, or start working on it now for the future. Which of these	verbal marker and open question and prompt	Fair. The verbal marker states George’s thesis regarding the time frame. The first question (where do you go from here?) was too vague, so George immediately moved to the prompt to force a choice. NOTE: George’s last few questions were poorly done, because they were running out of time, and he wanted to move to the next phase. This is not a practice you should model as a counsellor.

	two would you choose?		
42	Okay. We're just about out of time pretty quickly here. So let me summarize and check with you to make sure we're on the same page. It sounds like the decision is made to <u>not</u> act on going to school in the very short term because of your strong feelings about being a Mom and your husband's work not being amenable to changes so you can share that role. We're looking at a one-and-a-half- to two-year window before anything would change. In that time there are things that you can do to keep yourself what I call "current" in the field: conferences; publishing; talking to people; starting with that research about options. Does that sound like a plan? (yes)	master summary and closed question	Good.
43	Okay, then, before our next session, what steps do you want to take? What concrete things do you want to do to move that plan along?	open questions	Poor. George has stacked questions, when either of the questions asked would have sufficed.
44	Excellent idea, yeah, etc.	SOLER	
45	So, you're going to make a list and bring it back. We'll maybe recycle what we did today a go through a little more problem solving about where do you want to start on the list, and that'll be the start of your plan, knowing that a new baby's on the way and being a Mom is the first priority.	summary and advance planning for next session	Good.
46	Anything you want to add? Thanks for coming in. Bye-bye.	closed question	George offers the client a final chance to add to the agenda or to challenge his summaries.

Balance and Sequence

George's balance of questions and feedback responses was adequate, though he could have used more reflections and paraphrases to indicate that he was listening and to check the accuracy of his understanding with the client. As noted above, George could have used more closed questions to obtain formal assent from the client regarding the accuracy of his observations.

Purposefulness and Flexibility

George's purposefulness and flexibility were acceptable: they got through the agenda as planned, and he used the skills to explore the client's issue as planned. George demonstrated flexibility by exploring the MBA career, because he did not expect this option, and needed to understand better what it meant to the client. He could have been more specific about both defining and getting agreement upon the goals, and he could have used more open questions to solicit more client input to the session agenda.

Conclusion

Overall, the session went well. George used a variety of skills to create a bond, define the process and explore the client's issue from the two planned perspectives of meaning and emotions. At the end, George began to rush, and partially abandoned the working alliance model by starting to "tell" the client rather than exploring the issue through questions and helping the client to discover for herself. As Meara & Patton (1994) state

[C]ounselors do their best work when they are understated. One implication of this statement is that it's usually best to stay out of the way so that the client is able to do the majority of the talking in the interview...Career counselors have the responsibility to help the client engage in ongoing talk, and to listen respectfully and with interest in what the client has to say...Counselor restraint as a method of maintaining the working alliance is also an attitude or orientation...Use of restraint expresses faith in the client's capacity to use personal resources without undue interference from the counselor. Moreover, such restraint expresses respect for clients' autonomy because clients do have the right to draw their own conclusions about events in the interview. (p. 169)

References

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Skill Assignment 1: Demonstration Video Analysis

by Erin Thrift

Note: Erin’s presentation uses a first-person approach. Although this is not always acceptable in an academic paper, given that the skill assignments are reflective by nature, use of the first person is acceptable.

Introduction

Hiebert (2000) defines the working alliance as “a collaborative working relationship . . . founded on mutual trust and respect, which encourages mutual self-exploration and the disclosure of relevant information, and helps all parties feel ready to risk trying new approaches to dealing with problem situations” (p. 10). Bordin identifies the three essential components of the working alliance as an emotional bond, agreement on goals, and agreement on the tasks to be completed to meet those goals (1979, as cited by Meara & Patton, 1994). Various factors contribute to the development and maintenance of the working alliance, including characteristics of the client, personal qualities of the counsellor, and the technical activities used by the counsellor (Meara & Patton; Kivlighan & Schmitz, 1992).

In the DVD for this assignment, in which I (Erin) am the counsellor and George is the client, I have used basic verbal and nonverbal communication skills in an intentional way to develop a working alliance with the client. This paper is an analysis of the DVD recording of this interview. In the analysis, I will first discuss the plan I had before taping began, and then provide a general assessment of the session. The sections of the paper that follow focus on the skill sequence, balance, purposefulness, and flexibility during the conversation. In the final part of the paper I will discuss some specific areas of weakness and suggest ways these skills could be improved.

Plan for the Session

My goal for this session was to use the skills described by Hiebert (1997) in order to develop a working alliance with George. For the purpose of this demonstration, George was going to discuss a work-related problem in a work environment. My plan was to ask him about what he would like to talk about with an open question, and then to use an overview to describe the plan for the session. This would allow me to talk about the problem in a general way first, then to focus on George’s feelings, and finally to focus on the meanings he associates with his work and this problem. During each segment I planned to use engagement skills to gather information, and then paraphrases and reflections to show that I was listening, make sure I understood what he was saying, and to communicate this understanding to him. Before using a transition to move to another topic area, I planned to use a summary to highlight George’s main points and to make sure that we agreed on the gist of the conversation to that point. I intended to pair closed

questions with the overview, transitions, and summaries, to foster a sense of collaboration, to ensure we had the same view of where the session was headed, and to give George an opportunity to alter the structure of the session if needed. At the end of the session, I planned to use a master summary to sum up everything we had talked about. Also, throughout the session I intended to be conscious of my nonverbal communication, to communicate to George that I was interested in what he was saying and that I was listening to him, thus developing the emotional bond component of the working alliance.

General Comments

In general I was pleased with how this session went, as I successfully managed to develop a working alliance with George through the use of a variety of skills. George seemed to appreciate the opportunity to talk about his problems at work and my efforts to understand his view of the problem. As a result, I feel that we developed a sense of trust and an emotional bond in this session, which is the first component of the working alliance (Bordin, 1979 as cited by Meara & Patton, 1994). I could have done a better job of explicitly developing agreement on goals and tasks, as is discussed further on in this paper.

It is difficult to see the nonverbal skills that I was using during this session, as the camera continuously moved back and forth between me and George and the only shot of the two of us in the same frame was at the very beginning. Ideally, the camera would have had both counsellor and client within the frame at all times, and would have shown our whole bodies rather than just our upper bodies. It is evident from the initial shot that effort was put into the set-up to make the environment conducive to the development of a working alliance. We were seated facing each other with nothing between us. I was pleased that I was sitting squarely, had open posture, and made appropriate eye contact. Perhaps I could have relaxed a bit more, as my face looks tense—a sign of intense concentration, perhaps! I could also have leaned forward a bit more, particularly when the client's level of intensity increased as he discussed the problem. As you can see, I'm pregnant during the taping of this session so leaning forward wasn't easy, but nonetheless, this area of nonverbal communication could have been improved.

Balance and Sequence

I thought that this session had good, but not perfect, balance and sequencing of skills. After the initial questions and overview that established the topic and plan for the session, the conversation was divided up into three parts. Each part was a mix of open questions and declarative probes followed by reflections. Each section ended with a summary before I used a transition to move to the next section. I thought that there was a good mix of declarative probes and open questions, which provided variation and prevented the session from sounding like an interrogation, which can sometimes happen with the excessive use of closed and open questions. I used more reflections in the sections where we focused on feelings and meanings, as opposed to the section where we discussed George's work in a more general sense, which was appropriate. The reflections are used well, and they help to elucidate some of the underlying feelings and meanings. The reflections are also consistent with the focus of the questions. In this respect, it

was advantageous to have another tutor as my client, as George is obviously very clear on the differences between meanings and feelings and stays within the domain I ask him about (many clients don't do this). As such, it was easy to provide reflections within the appropriate domain. I only used one paraphrase in this session, but it was used appropriately, early on, to indicate to George that I was listening and following him as he described his job. The session ended with a master summary, which helped each of us to recall the important points that we had discussed, and then an overview indicated the direction that the next session would take. I paired closed questions with the master summary and overview at the end, which ensured that we had a shared understanding regarding the focus of this session and what we intended to do in the next session.

The primary area that could be improved in the balance and sequence of skills in this session is my use of closed questions. Although closed questions are not particularly useful in engaging the client, they are very useful when paired with skills to enhance meaningfulness, and are a quick way to gain agreement on the goals and tasks of the session. Open questions could have been used as well (e.g., after the overview I could have said, "What do you think about this plan?"), but given the time constraints of this assignment, I would prefer to use closed questions to avoid starting a lengthy conversation about the structure of the session. A closed question achieves the same purpose, but clients often give a shorter answer to a closed question, allowing the counsellor to get on with the rest of the session. In a session where I have more time, I could use open or closed questions to seek input from the client regarding the direction of the session. There were times in the session when I did seek feedback from my client in the form of a closed question. More analysis of this appears further on in the critique and alternative section of the paper.

Purposefulness and Flexibility

This session had good purposefulness. I clearly indicated the plan for our time together to the client in the overview, and I used skills intentionally to explore the problem and learn about the different domains of the client's issue. Since this was a short session, there was not much opportunity to deviate from this basic plan. I demonstrated balance between purposefulness and flexibility through having a plan, but not a script. I was flexible in terms of the skills I used within the session, while still following the basic outline proposed in the overview. This helped to keep me and the client in the same place throughout the conversation.

Flexibility could have been improved by offering George more opportunities to agree or disagree with the way I structured the session. I let him know what the plan was and got agreement at the beginning for the way the session would progress, but throughout the rest of the session I didn't give him any explicit opportunities to alter the course we were on. As mentioned in the previous section, I could have given George more opportunities to buy into the process by pairing skills to enhance meaningfulness with questions to solicit his agreement and to reinforce his role in the direction the session was headed. This would have enhanced our sense of collaboration and conveyed to him the importance of being an active agent in this process (Amundson, 1995).

It is important to note, however, that there is a fine line to walk in such an assignment. On one hand I need to demonstrate my use of skills, and I need to structure the session in order to do

this. On the other hand, the overall goal of the assignment is to develop a working alliance, and for this to happen there needs to be agreement on goals and tasks. If there isn't a working alliance, there won't be a positive outcome to the session.

Skill Analysis (Transcript Analysis)

I have critiqued particular areas of my session in the above sections of this paper. In this section, I will focus on the specific interactions in the interview, and offer suggestions for what I might have said or done differently to improve the session.

#	Question/Statement	Skill Used	Analysis
1.	Hi. How are you?	open question	Opening social interaction.
2.	Good. Thanks for coming in today. Is there anything you'd like to talk about today?	praise closed question	Good praise. Poor question. This is not a suitable closed question, as George could have said "No." Also, this question doesn't make much sense in context, since the client obviously wants to talk about something—after all, he's come for counselling. It would be better to use an open question and say, "What would you like to talk about today?"
3.	Okay, what I'm thinking we can do today is . . . we'll start off with you telling me a bit about your job and what it is you don't like about it. And then maybe we'll break it down into more specific parts and look at some of your feelings around that and some of what that means to you and how it relates to your values and [the] meanings you have related to your work . . . if that's okay?	overview closed question	Good. I explained to the client what will occur during the session. I then sought client assent to the process.
4.	Okay. So tell me a bit about your work.	declarative probe	Good. Allows the client to start the discussion wherever he wishes.
5.	Uh-huh. So you do lots of different things	reflection	Good. Reflecting meaning indicates that I am paying attention.
6.	Un-huh. And what's your role in that?	open question	Good. I was asking for specific information.

7.	Un-huh	SOLER	NOTE: I make many agreeing and/or attending responses throughout the interview to indicate that I am listening. They will not be mentioned again in this analysis.
8.	So elaborate on that: “it doesn’t work like that” . . .	declarative probe	Good. I was asking the client to delve further into the topic.
9.	So let me see if I got this straight. You all are responsible for the same thing, but because you’ve been there the longest, if there’s any problems, any questions . . . you’re acting like a supervisor to the other . . . the people you work with, without pay that would recognize your extra duties or any recognition or title that would set you apart. So that’s where your frustration is coming from?	paraphrase closed question	This was an excellent paraphrase of the client’s description of his job. The closed question was asked to check with the client to ensure that my understanding was accurate.
10.	An issue of fairness . . . to be recognized for what you do?	prompt	Good. I was checking out my understanding by framing it as a question. This technique can be dangerous if I get it wrong.
11.	Okay, I’d like to switch topics then and talk about feelings specifically because I can tell there’s some emotions around this: you’ve been thinking about this, feeling this for a while, so can you tell me . . . tell me what are the feelings that are associated when you think about your work right now?	transition declarative probe	Fair: I started to turn what was meant to be a declarative probe into a closed question. Fortunately, I caught myself and made the correction within the skill. However, this is a mistake I need to be aware of, particularly if I’m working with a nonverbal client. Turning a declarative probe into a closed question gives the client the opportunity to respond with a yes/no answer, which would defeat the point of the probe which, in the case of a nonverbal client, would have been intended to solicit a more thorough answer (Hiebert, 1997).
12.	There’s some mixed emotions then? You like your job. You like what you do, but the problem is that you’re just not being recognized and you’re feeling	reflection	Fair. One skill that I could improve on are my reflections, which are at times long and rambling, although accurate. It would be better to be more concise in my reflections to try to focus on the

	frustrated because of that, and especially with your boss's reaction: he's not understanding at all what you're saying, and you're feeling stonewalled by him.		most significant emotions rather than trying to cover everything the client has said. This reflection borders on being a summary because of its breadth. It would be better to say "So there's some mixed emotions, then. There are many aspects of your job you feel positive about, but you're feeling frustrated by your boss' reaction to you and you're feeling stonewalled by him."
13.	So how do you feel when you go into work in the morning?	open question	Good. I wanted to discuss George's before and after work feelings.
14.	And how do you feel at the end of the day, when you come home from work?	open question	See previous comment.
15.	Tell me what you feel in your body when you go in to talk to your boss and he says "It's a team, George."	declarative probe	Good. I wanted the client to look at his physical responses to the situation as part of his feelings.
16.	So it sounds like you are a little bit fearful of your own response that eventually you'll just reach the point you'll be so frustrated you won't be able to handle it anymore...you'll blow up.	reflection	Good. This was a strong feeling that I needed to recognize.
17.	So your emotions have really run the gamut. On the one side, you like your job; you like what you do. It sounds like you like the people you work with. You don't mind answering their questions. You have some expertise, and you think what you do is valuable there. You know what you do is valuable there. But on the other hand, you're not being appreciated by your boss, but when you do try to let him know "Hey, look, do you realize how important I am?" you're not getting any sort of recognition or respect. He's not realizing what you're doing and you're getting increasingly angry	summary	Good. I covered all the points the client had raised. I could have asked a closed question to ask the client if my summary was accurate, but he acknowledged it. It would have been better to explicitly ask him to comment on the accuracy of the summary, both to show that I considered him an active participant in the process and to reinforce the working alliance.

	by that lack of respect.		
18.	Okay, well let's again switch the focus a bit and talk about what this means to you and how it relates to your values around work. So tell me some of the meanings that are there for you around work. What does your work mean to you?	transition declarative probe open question	Fair. I changed the topic from speaking about feelings to talking about meanings. It would have been better to say "Ok, well let's switch the focus again here, and let's talk about what this means to you and how it relates to your values around work. Is that okay with you?" If he agreed, I would then say, "Tell me some of the meanings that are related to your work." Poor. I stacked the questions. This can be confusing to clients. One question would have sufficed.
19.	It sounds like . . . that helping people is really important to you, but not just helping them but also feeling appreciated—they thanking you: "I've had a problem and now you've helped me.	reflection	Good.
20.	How is that value of helping and being appreciated for what you are doing being fulfilled or not fulfilled by your boss?	open question	Fair. I asked a double question, however. I could have made this two questions in sequence. Fortunately, the client was quite verbal and provided a complete response.
21.	It sounds like money is not the only thing that is important to you. You could do that roofing and get a paycheque at the end of the day, but having a raise, for you, would reflect that he respects you.	reflection	Good. I wanted to tie money and respect together as the two critical themes that the client had been expressing.
22.	So him saying thank you; realizing what you do and get some recognition of what goes on, and maybe that being reflected in a raise would help to fulfill that value you have of helping people and feeling like you had done something worthwhile: you've been able to help someone and they've appreciated it.	paraphrase	Good. I once again tied together the themes of his values with the boss's behaviour.
23.	Let me just try to summarize what	master	Good. I covered all the themes of the

	<p>we've talked about today. It sounds like you're frustrated at your job: you do a lot of work there, you've been there for four years, you help not only your customers but the other staff, and that's not being reflected in the way that your boss treats you or the pay that you get. And so there's a lot of emotions that have built up because of that, and you're frustrated; you're feeling like you're not respected and you're increasingly getting angry. And even at this point if the boss shifted and did start to do some of the things you feel he should have done from the start—to raise your pay, give you a different title, recognize what you do—you're not sure that that would compensate for the emotions that you are carrying. At this point there's just so much frustration that's built up that it might not be salvageable. Is that a reflection of what you're feeling?</p>	<p>summary</p> <p>closed question</p>	<p>interview with sufficient detail.</p> <p>Good. I checked with the client to see if my summary was accurate.</p>
24.	<p>Well, why don't we end with that for this session, and then the next time we meet...this has been a chance for me to get to know what's going on with you...and then we'll go on and start looking at steps you could take to start solving that or brainstorm some ideas for how you can move forward from here. Does that sound okay to you?</p>	<p>closure</p> <p>closed question</p>	<p>Good. I encapsulated today's content and set the stage for the next session.</p> <p>Got client agreement.</p>
25.	<p>Thank you.</p>	<p>end</p>	<p>I always try to thank the client.</p>

Conclusion

Overall, I was pleased with how this session went. I used a variety of skills to develop a working alliance with George. We explored the problem he came to discuss, which sets us up well for the second skill assignment, in which I will use the same basic skills in the context of the problem solving model. In the next skill assignment demonstration I will aim to continue to use a variety of skills in an intentional way, use clear structuring skills to ensure that George and I stay together throughout the session, and follow along with what George is saying so that my reflections and summaries can be accurate, as they were in this session. In the next session I will try to improve my use of closed questions in the ways described above, be more concise in my use of reflections, and be more relaxed in my posture throughout the session.

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Skill Assignment 2: Demonstration Video

by Erin Thrift

Introduction

The working alliance is important throughout the course of therapy, not just at the beginning of the process. The counsellor must monitor the working alliance as counselling progresses beyond the first session. To maintain the alliance, the practitioner must continue to develop the emotional bond, foster agreement on goals, and acquire agreement on tasks to meet those goals (Bordin, 1979 as cited in Meara & Patton, 1994). The micro skills described in Hiebert's taxonomy (1997) are the tools that are used in an intentional way to sustain the working alliance.

This paper analyzes the second video demonstration, in which I continue to work with George to find a solution to the work-related problem he began discussing in the first assignment demonstration. In the second session, the focus is on using basic communication skills within the context of the problem solving model described in Unit 5 of the *Study Guide* (Hiebert, 2000). In this paper, I will discuss the plan for the session, make some general comments regarding the session, and analyze some specific areas of the session (balance and sequence of skills, purposefulness and flexibility, and the problem solving model). Suggestions for how to improve weak areas will occur throughout the paper.

Context and Plan for the Session

In this session, I will continue to work with George on the problems he is having at work. The focus of the first skill assignment was on developing a working alliance, using counselling skills to explore an issue and its different domains. In this assignment I want to continue to develop the working alliance that began in the first session by using the same basic communication skills, but move beyond exploring the issue to helping George find a viable solution to his problem. To do this, I will use the problem-solving model described by Hiebert (2000). I will plan to work through the first three steps completely (develop a problem-solving orientation, explore and define the problem, and generate and rank alternatives) and begin to work on coming up with the steps for an action plan, which is part of the fourth step (implement an alternative). Since exploration of the problem began in Skill Assignment 1, exploration will be shorter in this session. Instead, I will focus on defining the problem. George will be responsible to actually implement the plan between sessions, and the last step (evaluate the solution) will occur in a follow-up session (not required for this course). As I work through the problem solving model, I will continue to use the skills that I used in Skill Assignment 1, but the skill sequence and balance will vary depending on the stage. For example, I will use fewer reflections during the brainstorming stage, because giving feedback to my client at this point might interfere with his creativity to come up with diverse options. Throughout the session I will use various engagement skills to gain information from George, and will confirm my understanding of what he means by using reflections and summaries. My use of skills to enhance meaningfulness will be more or less the same as in the first skill assignment: I plan to use an overview at the beginning,

summaries at the end of each stage, and transitions to indicate a change in focus during the session. I will pair each of these skills with a question in order to develop collaboration with my client and to gain agreement on goals and tasks. I will use basic attending skills (paraphrases and nonverbal skills) throughout the session to let my client know that I am listening to him and to continue to develop the bond.

General Comments

There were many things that I thought I did well in this session that helped to maintain the working alliance developed in the first assignment demonstration. The basic attending skills I used throughout the session helped to maintain the bond we had developed in the first session. Again, it is difficult to view my nonverbal skills because of the way the demonstration was filmed, but I was pleased that I looked more animated and relaxed throughout the session and leaned forward as appropriate during the conversation. These types of nonverbal skills indicate to the client that I am “with him” and interested in what he has to say. The time spent exploring and defining the problem (although a bit on the long side, as discussed later in this paper) and questions asked to ensure we both agreed on the problem definition helped to ensure agreement on the goals of the session. A clear overview at the beginning of the session that outlined the basic steps we would work through, as well as clear transition statements, helped to ensure agreement on both goals and tasks. I did much better at pairing my skills to enhance meaningfulness with questions in this session to ensure that there was explicit agreement between George and I with regards to the focus and structure of the session.

Skill Analysis (Transcript Analysis)

#	Question/Statement	Skill Used	Analysis
1	Hi George. Thanks for coming back. How are you doing today?	greeting open question	Good. Maintains the bond. Bonding.
2	Good. Well, last time you told me about your job and how you're feeling dissatisfied at your workplace. It sounds like you like your job, and you like the people you work with, you like what you do, but you're feeling frustrated by just not getting any recognition and your boss, you trying to tell him what you're doing and him not respecting you and recognizing that both in terms of	review closed question	Good. The review captured most of the first session meaning and the feelings expressed. Poor. I should have used an open question or a declarative probe to elicit a more thoughtful response.

	how he treats you and reflected in your pay. Are there other things that have come up with you since then?		
3	Uh-huh.	SOLER	NOTE: I make ongoing feedback sounds throughout the interview to indicate that I am paying attention. They will not be noted in this report.
4	Good. So what I'd like to do today, then, is move on from where we were the last time. We'll talk a bit more about your problem, and then we'll go on to try and think about how you'd like things to be different and get a definition of the problem that we can both agree on. And then after that, once we've kind of got that clear in our head what exactly is the problem we're working on, we'll go on to brainstorming: look at some different options; and then we'll evaluate those different options; and then come up with an action plan. How does that sound to you?	overview closed question	Good. Fair. I could have asked whether he clearly understood the plan and offered to respond to any questions. I could also have explained why it is important for George and I to share a common understanding of the process and goals.
5	Okay. Are you familiar with solving problems in this sort of prescribed steps that I laid out?	closed question	Poor. An open question would have elicited a more expansive response from a client who was unsure. Fortunately George is a talker, so this was not an issue.
6	Tell me more about the skills you use when you're working with a customer to solve a problem.	declarative probe	Good. I asked for more detail on his experience at problem solving as part of establishing both the problem solving orientation and my understanding of the client.
7	It sounds like you're quite good at solving problems. At first you try to deal with the emotions that are there, then you try to understand what's going on and then you can look at different solutions . . . and try and find different solutions.	praise paraphrase	Good. Good.

8	Those skills . . .are those skills that you feel you could apply to this problem?	closed question	Poor. I could have asked something like “Do you see how you can apply those skills to this problem”?
9	It sounds like you’re feeling positive about being able to solve this problem—to find a solution to it.	reflection	Good. Reflection with praise helps to maintain the bond.
10	Yeah, and you’ve got the skills to be able to do it. It sounds like you are a good problem solver from what you’ve been able to describe.	praise reflection	Good. I continue to work on the relationship throughout the session.
11	Okay, well, let’s get started. So you told me last time that you were feeling frustrated, you were feeling anger boiling up inside of you. When you’d talk to your boss, you didn’t get the recognition or respect, as you said. That was reflected both in sort of being dismissive and saying “George, we’re a team here,” and then not raising your pay or calling you something different, setting you apart from the other people when you really were doing a different job. Are there other things you could add to that?	review closed question	Good. I needed to review before moving to the next phase. Good. I was checking for agreement.
12	You’re carrying a big load, but it sounds like you thrive on the challenge.	reflection	Good. This was an ongoing theme for George, and was worth a verbal marker of importance (Hiebert, 1997, p. 6).
13	We talked about last time of how it’s important for you to feel like you’re helping people and it sounds like it’s also important for you to feel like you’re challenged and able to deal with those challenges, to feel competent and feel “okay, I can deal with the hard cases.” Those are two things that are important to you?	review	Good. I tied the former session to the current session with the new point of enjoying the challenge, to provide reflection and continuity of the insights from the past and current sessions.
14	Yeah, it’s not work. It’s fun to	reflect	Good.

	have those challenges.		
15	So there's a lot of things in this job that you really like.	reflect	Good.
16	So let me ask you this: If a miracle happened and you woke up one morning and your problem with your work was just gone, what would be different in your life?	open question	Excellent. This question asks George to consider an "ideal" solution as a way of looking at a preferred outcome.
17	Your boss wouldn't be there.	reflection	
18	Would you be there?	closed question	
19	So it sounds like you think the business is almost running without him. You're almost acting like the boss, without the benefits of pay, not making the money,	paraphrase	Good. I covered the key points George had mentioned.
20	Your ideal situation is not that you'd change jobs necessarily, not that you'd leave this position and do something totally different.	reflection	Checking my perception again.
21	No. You like where you're working. It's just your relationship with your boss.	reflection	
22	It is your relationship with your boss and not feeling respected . . . those two things.	paraphrase	George had mentioned these two themes often, so an agreeing statement indicates that I have heard him.
23	Yeah. Do you receive recognition and respect from the other people you work with?	closed question	I was seeking clarification about his feelings about the other staff and his feelings about lack of respect.
24	My understanding, then, of the problem—and you can correct me if I'm wrong—is that you really like your job, there's a lot of things that are very satisfying to you about that. Working with your coworkers is satisfying; helping to solve their problems; working with customers is satisfying. You like the challenge of different customers all the time, different problems, different emotions,	summary	Good. I covered all the points George had mentioned.

	those are all parts of your job that you enjoy. The part that you are not enjoying is your relationship with your boss, who doesn't seem to recognize or respect the work and the effort that you actually put in and the fact that you're not compensated fairly for what you actually do for the company.		
25	So working with customers is what you really enjoy.	reflection	
26	Tell me about how you feel when a customer phones up and is angry at the start and then at the end . . .	declarative probe	Good. I wanted to ascertain how George felt when he was successful in his job.
27	So a lot of the values that you hold about work are fulfilled by the customers you work with—you get to help them, there's challenging situations that come up with them and they respect you. They respect your competence, and they appreciate you . . . are very appreciative of the time and effort you put in.	summary	This final summary was building to the problem definition step.
28	So if we . . .the problem then sounds like . . . is really your relationship or your place in this company, your relationship with your boss. Is that how you would define this problem?	closed question	Fair. I was trying to get an agreed-upon problem statement.
29	Feeling respected.	reflective	
30	So maybe it's not even your relationship with your boss. Maybe it's the feeling of not being respected.	reflective prompt	Good. I rephrased the problem description.
31	Yeah. And there are other parts that can contribute to that in different ways. Your boss is a big part of that, but really it's this feeling of respect.	reflection	Very good. We were narrowing the problem description towards a definition.
32	Yeah. Not being valued at your work. So we can agree on that.	problem statement	Poor. The problem statement should be framed in terms of outcomes for the

	That's maybe something we should brainstorm solutions for?	closed question	client. Getting agreement.
33	Okay. So let's make a transition here and let's just change the focus and talk about brainstorming some different options. So what we're going to do is we're just going to try and generate as many different options as we can dealing with this issue of not feeling respected. So what sort of ideas can you come up with that relate to you feeling like you're more respected? And I don't want you to censor them or evaluate them at this point. We'll do that later on. But just to generate ideas, and I'm going to write them down.	transition open question	Fair. I missed some detail in the transition that I added after I asked the next question. Also, I didn't ensure that George understood the goals and tasks for the next step.
34	More respected, yeah. That's the main issue and that might relate to your boss or something else.	reflection	
35	So one option is that you try to talk with him, but you're saying at this point that that's not an option. We're not even going to go there because it's hopeless.	paraphrase	Very good. I encapsulated the option and summarized George's feelings about it.
36	So, leaving and moving to another company you mentioned, what other options are there?	prompt open question	Fair. This question started us back on the brainstorming process. I could have been more directive, but with this client it did not seem necessary.
37	Buy him out.	reflection	
38	So is that different than moving to another company? Same thing.	seeking clarification	Very good. This question eliminated having two brainstorming options that were the same.
39	Like, be in-house.	reflection	

40	So instead of being a consultant or a whole bunch of customers coming to you, you would have one primary customer. That's what you mean by that?	paraphrase closed question	Good.
41	So we've got four: leave and move to another company, buy your boss out, start your own company, and be hired by one customer. Anything else you can think of?	summary closed question	Good. I listed the four options and asked George if he could think of any others.
42	No, those are the four options we should work with here.	reflection	Good. I confirmed George's statement that these were all the options we had.
43	Okay, let's change the focus then, and switch from just coming up with options to evaluating the options. So we'll go through each of them in turn, and I'll get you to just evaluate the pros and the cons of each option.	transition	Good. I informed George of the process in sufficient detail for him to understand the tasks. I should have ensured that he understood and agreed.
44	So let's start with leaving and moving to another company. What are some of the good things about that?	open question	Good.
45	So the good things would be you have a lot of experience in that area and you could move but the bad thing is you would be starting from square one.	paraphrase	Good.
46	And maybe not any more respected than you are now.	reflection	
47	Yeah. Okay, let's move on to the second one: buying him out.	transition	Good. I could have asked about the pros and cons again to reinforce the task.
48	So the cons are, it's too expensive.	reflection	
49	That's not . . . are there any pros to that option?	closed question	Poor. I should have used an open question.
50	Yeah. It would change a lot of things for the better, but it's unfortunately not realistic at this point. Financially, it's not realistic.	paraphrase	

51	Starting another company.	reflection	
52	You're in a good position to be able to start your own company because you've got a network of customers that you've been working with. And it sounds like what's really important to you is they respect you so you'd automatically be moving to another place that you know you'd be respected, people you are already working for.	reflection	Very good. I included both meaning and feelings in the reflection.
53	It would be satisfying to build your business up and reap the rewards of that rather than giving them over to someone else.	paraphrase	Good. Again, I covered both domains.
54	Have it correlate a bit better with the work and the pay that you're getting . . . the respect that you're getting from people. I guess it's another pro that it would just eliminate the relationship with your boss.	reflection prompt	Good. The prompt also injects some humour.
55	Yeah, you'd be your own boss.	reflection	
56	Okay, and then the last one: be hired by one customer, so go to their company and work for them. Tell me about that.	transition declarative probe	Good. Good.
57	So a con would be that you'd be in a situation again where you had a boss. Although a pro would be that you already know him. He respects you. . . a better relationship already than what you have with your current boss. But then you're not necessarily building up your own company and reaping the rewards of that.	paraphrase	Good. I included enough detail to cover all the main points.
58	So things could be different. There's a bit of an unknown there about what's ahead.	reflection	

59	So we have four options—or at least three, because it sounds like buying him out is not an option. So leaving and moving to another company, starting another company, and being hired by one customer. You’ve talked about the pros and the cons of each of those. If you had to rank them as to what is your first choice, what would it be?	summary open question	Good. I needed to summarize before moving on to the next phase. Good.
60	Starting your own business.	reflection	
61	And is there a second option that you would move on to?	closed question	Poor. I should have asked an open question.
62	Yeah, okay so one, two, three. So let’s change focus here and talk about that first option: starting your own company, and we’re going to talk through some of the steps you would need to take to start seeing if that is realistic or if that’s a real possibility, exploring that option a bit. So can you tell me . . . Tell me what you need to do first to make that happen.	summary transition declarative probe	Poor. I should have outlined the three options from first to last. Fair. I could have provided more detail and sought agreement. Good.
63	You have a good relationship built up and an investment in this relationship.	reflection	
64	You already have a relationship of respect, and so you could say to him hypothetically, “I’m looking at different options,” and get his feedback. Sounds like you would respect that feedback. Sounds like you would present it as a hypothetical possibility . . . just exploring options.	reflection prompt	Good. Poor. George had mentioned talking to Jim but hadn’t said whether he would present the options he was exploring as hypothetical or real possibilities. <i>Hypothetical</i> is my word, which is presumptuous. I was reading into the possibility that Jim might tell George’s boss about their conversation, although George had said that he didn’t think Jim would do this. It would have been better to have asked George about what he thought

			would be the best way to approach Jim, rather than making the assumption that he should present his query as hypothetical. George should be the one to decide how he will discuss his options with Jim, although through my use of questions I could ask George to consider the possibility that Jim might not keep their conversation confidential. If George felt that this was a real risk, I could ask him to think of ways that he might mitigate this risk.
65	So, it sounds like that's a good first step that you could take is to phone up Jim and arrange to meet him and tell him some of your options that you're thinking of. There's a slight possibility that he'd phone your boss, but it sounds like what you're saying that that's a very, very slight possibility, and maybe a risk that you're willing to take at this point.	summary	Fair. We were approaching the end of the recording time and I was rushing.
66	So you'd talk to Jim first and get his feedback, gather some information from him of what you would need if you were to start your own company . . . what a customer like him would need . . . and then after that . . . there might be some other things that you would need to look at. You mentioned that . . . maybe he doesn't know that you need to investigate about how to start your own business.	summary	Good.
67	So the first step with Jim...when do you think that might happen?	open question	Fair. I was trying to move to the next step (action plan) but was rushing.
68	So how would that be if that's the first step that you take before we meet again? And we'll meet again, and you can come back and tell me how that went, and we can	open question prompt	Good. I was seeking agreement. Fair. I set the agenda for the next

	then start to look at evaluating that option.		meeting. I did not provide the opportunity for George to understand what that meant, and I did not ask for agreement.
69	Okay, great. I'll maybe just summarize what we've talked about today so it's both clear in our minds. You talked about some of your skills first of all in solving problems, and you certainly demonstrated that today. You were able to think through the problem and deal with the emotions first and understand it and then look at different options. We talked a bit more about your problem, and we boiled it down to this issue of respect, and your boss as related to that. And then we looked at some different options that would put you in positions that you could get more respect, and your first choice is to start your own business. And then we came up with a plan for investigating how you would go about doing that—of starting your own business. And talking to Jim is what you're going to do. And we'll meet again and we'll talk about how that went and maybe come up with a few more steps related to that as that opens . . . opens up doors or gives you more information. Is that an accurate statement of what we talked about?	master summary Closed question	Good. I used too many run-on sentences. Good. I sought agreement from George that my summary was accurate. This will provide us with a starting point from which to review for the next session.
70	Yeah. You agree with that?	closed question	Good. One more check for agreement.
71	Well, thanks a lot, George, and good luck with that meeting with Jim.	closure	Good. I am continuing to maintain the bond by showing interest in the outcome of the next step.
72	—Look forward to hearing how it goes. All right, bye.	closure	Maintaining bond.

One area that could be improved in order to strengthen the working alliance was the balance of talk during the session—I talked too much. Meara and Patton (1994) state that counsellor restraint and brevity contribute to the working alliance between counsellor and client. They are of the opinion that “counsellors do their best work when they are understated . . . [and] that it’s usually best to stay out of the way so that the client is able to do the majority of the talking in the interview” (p. 169). When the counsellor does talk during the conversation, it is best to “keep remarks brief and to the point” (p. 169). In retrospect, I said too much during the session. It would have been better for me to interject fewer times, and to be more concise. At times I was so keen to show George that I was listening and understood his position that I would cut him off (e.g., when he answers the miracle question). It would be better for me to ask my question and then give him time to respond without interruption.

Balance and Sequence

Overall, I was pleased with the skill balance and sequence in this session. As mentioned above, the skills used vary between the steps of the problem-solving model, which is appropriate. In particular, you can notice decreased variation in skill use during the brainstorming stage. At this point, the skills I used were limited to questions, paraphrases, and summaries. I deliberately avoided using reflections that might have indicated my evaluation of a particular suggestion. There was also an improvement in my use of closed questions in this session. I often paired closed questions (and sometimes open questions, as with the first overview) with skills to enhance meaningfulness, which helped to develop a sense of collaboration between us.

One area that is lacking in this session is focus on affect, both in my questions and reflections. Throughout the conversation I focused on his work values and hardly touched on his feelings. While we did explore feelings George was experiencing in session one, it would have been good to briefly revisit this aspect of the problem early on in this session. For example, I could have asked him about the feelings he would experience if he was respected. I could have used a reflection such as “The anger you talked about in the last session seems to arise when you are in situations where you are not respected. Perhaps you also feel hurt that your contributions are being overlooked.” It would also have been good to ask about the feelings he has about the different options towards the end of the session. For example, as we were evaluating each option I could have asked him, “What feelings come up for you when you think about X?” Towards the end of the session I could have asked him “When you think about talking with Jim and exploring different options, how does this make you feel?”

Purposefulness and Flexibility

This session had better balance between purposefulness and flexibility than the first session. I followed a clear plan to move through the steps of the problem-solving model, up to developing an action plan (as presented in the overview). Then, as with the first session, I was flexible in the skills I used within these steps. In this session I checked in much more often with George to make sure we were in the same place and that we had continued agreement on the direction that

the conversation was headed. The transitions I used were clear and often paired with a question to make sure he was okay to change the focus of the session.

Since I spent too long exploring and defining the problem, I was rushed to work through all of the steps of my plan. If we hadn't been making a demonstration video, I probably would have stopped the session after we ranked the alternatives and would have let George know that we would be talking about the action plan in the next session. Since I wanted to offer at least a brief example of all of the steps in this demonstration, I compromised flexibility to some degree.

Problem Solving Model

I succeeded in working through the steps I had named for this session, although some segments of the problem solving model could have been improved. I did a good job of establishing the problem-solving orientation early on in the conversation. Through my use of questions I was able to draw George's attention to the problem-solving skills he already had, and to encourage him to make a connection between the skills and method he used to solve problems at work with customers and the skills and method he would need to use to solve this problem. I used descriptive praise at this point in the session to affirm his problem-solving abilities, and he agreed that he was feeling positive about his ability to work towards finding a solution. This formed the basis for the rest of the problem-solving steps; if George was feeling discouraged and thinking that this problem was impossible to solve, there would have been little point in moving on to the next steps until he had developed a more positive problem-solving orientation.

My intention was to spend less time on the problem exploration stage since we had already discussed the problem in the previous session. I asked George twice if there were additional comments he wanted to make about the problem that had come up since the last time we had met. He said no, and said that the issue of respect (or lack thereof) was what had really resonated with him from our last conversation. I wanted to spend more time defining the problem and as such, focused on how he would like things to be different in his work. Although we did eventually agree on problem definition, this aspect of the session took longer than I expected, and as a result, I felt very rushed to move through the rest of the steps. Since this was a demonstration of an assignment, I wanted to get through all of the steps up to the action plan. In student assignments, however, it is better to *not* complete all of the steps than to rush through them. If one of the steps takes longer than expected, it is probably wiser to end at an earlier point in the model and indicate to the client that you will finish working through the process in the next session, than to rush through additional steps.

It would have been much better to have shortened this stage and to have spent more time brainstorming and discussing George's options, particularly since he identified clearly (early in the process) that a lack of respect is the primary problem. I spent too long trying to come up with a problem definition statement with him. Since he was very clear on the nature of the problem early on, I could have involved him more actively in this stage, which would have shortened this step considerably. For example, I could have asked, "If you had to pick the main thing you'd like

to be different in this situation, what would it be?” or “How would you fill in the blank in this statement: The problem with my work that I’d like to change is _____?”¹

Apart from being rushed, brainstorming, evaluating the alternatives, ranking the alternatives, and developing an action plan went well. I used skills such as questions and probes to encourage George to take the lead in this process, and then used reflections and summaries to highlight the main points he had come up with. Since George is the one that will ultimately be carrying out the plan, it is important that he be very involved in generating, evaluating, and ranking the alternatives, and in coming up with an action plan.

During the brainstorming process, George began by telling me about an option—trying to work things out with his boss in his current position—that he had already evaluated and deemed to be impossible. To avoid getting stuck on this point, I summarized the point and then asked him to generate other alternatives. I was quite directive at this point, as clients can easily begin to evaluate their ideas during brainstorming instead of focusing on coming up with various options. The process of evaluation can stymie the creative process, so although I wanted to let George know that I had heard what he said, I didn’t want to spend a lot of time discussing it at that time.

Conclusion

Overall, I was pleased with how this second session with George went, although there were areas for improvement. I achieved my goal of continuing to develop a working alliance while helping George to find a solution to his problem. I used a variety of skills throughout the session as we moved through the steps of the problem solving model. In future sessions, I will work on balancing the focus between affect and meaning domains, being concise and brief in my responses throughout the session, not interrupting the client, involving the client more directly in the problem definition stage, and not making subtle suggestions and assumptions during the action planning step.

References

- Hiebert, B. (1997). *Generic interpersonal skills involved in creating a working alliance*. Athabasca, AB: Athabasca University.
- Hiebert, B. (2000). *Creating a working alliance: Study guide (revised ed.)*. Athabasca, AB: Athabasca University.

¹ Spending too much time on exploration and definition of the problem is unusual. More often, students don’t spend enough time on this stage and instead forge ahead with trying to find a solution before they have taken the time to adequately listen to the client’s experience. Exploring and defining the problem is a very important step, and getting the problem definition right is critical for the rest of the process. Missing this step renders subsequent efforts in vain, since the counsellor isn’t focused on the core of the issue.

Meara, N. M. & Patton, M. J. (1994). Contributions of the working alliance in the practice of career counselling. *The Career Development Quarterly*, 43(2), 161-177.