

Egan's problem management counselling model

Gerard Egan's "The Skilled Helper - A Problem-Management and Opportunity- Development Approach to Helping" first appeared in 1975 and was reprinted in 2014. It is one of the world's best-selling reference books for helping professions. The reasons for this popularity are likely to lie in the practical guidance for overcoming problems and opening up new opportunities (cf. Ertelt, Schulz & Frey, 2020, p. 70). According to Egan, the client must answer four basic questions to solve his problem:

1. What specific problems should I work on ("Current scenario")?
2. What do I want in place of what I now experience as problematic ("Preferred Scenario")?
3. What "strategies" do I have to use to achieve this?
4. How can I translate planning into concrete "action"?

A three-step counselling model is used to answer these questions.

Stage I - Clarification of the current scenario includes

- the client's precise presentation of the problem history ("story"),
- helping the client to make visible aspects that have not been sufficiently considered so far ("blind spots"),
- to work out the problem areas that are important for counselling. The main focus is on those areas and untapped opportunities where significant changes can be brought about.

Stage II - Formulation of the preferred scenario takes place

- by working out possibilities for a better future, supported by divergent thinking and brainstorming techniques,
- through the change catalogue process, where the counsellor helps to aim for realistic and motivating goals,
- by strengthening the tendencies towards self-actualisation by providing incentives to the client to strengthen perseverance in achieving goals.

Stage III - Development of appropriate action strategies through

- Presentation of possible actions involving a well-considered examination of the different paths,
- Selection of best-fit strategies,
- jointly developed plan for organised action to achieve the set goal.

The process steps to these levels require different counselling skills (cf. Ertelt, Schulz & Frey, 2020, p. 96; cf. Egan 2014):

- **Stage I** of the helping process is the assessment stage, where the aim is not to narrow down the client with the help of a diagnostic schema but to encourage the client to self-reflect. This is helped by a special attitude of attention, active listening, empathy, professional and sensitive probing and a summary that sets priorities and gives direction. In addition, there are skills of self-disclosure, client-centred provision of information, such as interpretation and explanation of previous findings, and focusing on narrowing down the problem areas to be addressed.
- At **Level II**, guidance is needed on divergent and creative thinking, brainstorming and formulating one's own goals. The counsellor must also be able to get the client to commit to a future scenario.
- **Level III** skills include determining the strategy for action together with the client, weighing up different courses of action (for example, with the balance matrix method) and using supportive forces (for example, through the client's personal network).

References

- Egan, G. (1975/2018). *The Skilled Helper – A Problem-Management and Opportunity-Development Approach to Helping*. Brooks/Cole.
- Ertelt, B.-J., Schulz, W.E. & Frey, A. (2022). *Counsellor Competencies – Developing Counselling Skills for Education, Career and Occupation*. Springer Nature Switzerland