

Solution-oriented consulting

In the 1980s and 1990s, solution-focused counselling challenged many of the assumptions of previous theories and models through new ways of thinking. The focus now rested on the potential rather than the weaknesses or limitations of the client. Previously, it had been emphasised that real improvements in a client's situation are only possible when the causes and genesis of the problems are analysed and the client fully understands the true nature of their problem. But especially in the practice of career counselling and counselling-supported job placement, the counsellor often does not have the time for an extensive in-depth diagnosis of the causes of the client's problems.

The following basic assumptions clarify the philosophy of solution-oriented brief counselling (cf. Ertelt, Schulz & Frey, 2022, pp. 121; Bamberger 2015, p. 58 ff.):

1. Improvements in the problem situation are possible even without in-depth self-insight on the part of the client.
2. Goals set by the client are more motivating than goals set by the counsellor.
3. Effective help does not necessarily require an in-depth analysis of the problem.
4. Problems are nothing out of the ordinary and thus appear more solvable.
5. Complex problems do not always require complicated solutions.
6. Strengthening the client's self-motivation, because sometimes they are not so motivated to actively bring about improvements in their situation because they do not know what they actually want.
7. Counsellor and client should realise that retrospection is not essential for problem-solving.
8. Even small improvements can have a lasting impact,
9. If solution steps are successful, continue: if it does not go forward, turn to something else!
10. Sweeping statements about a problem are of little use; it is better to look for exceptions in life where one has had success.

Although solution-focused counsellors also use different counselling formats, one can generally assume five steps in this counselling method:

Step 1: Building a good working atmosphere

Step 2: Setting well-defined goals for action, together with the client. The quality of such goals can be characterised by the acronym MOPS.

M "meaningful", e.g., of importance to the client

O "observable", e.g., comprehensible, clear and specific

P "positive statement", e.g., positive statements about something desirable.

S "small goals", e.g., small, realistic, achievable goals.

Step 3: Orient the client towards the solution. Problems are often brought forward vaguely. The client can be encouraged to be more precise with the following questions.

- *When* did the difficulties arise?
- *What* immediately preceded the occurrence of the problem?
- *Where* does the client usually notice the problem?
- *Who* is usually present when the problem occurs?

Step 4: Develop solution-oriented interventions by using exceptions, questioning ingrained behaviour patterns, using paradoxical techniques, reformulating and encouraging the client to change their previous behaviour.

Step 5: Encourage the client to stick to the goal and the constructive steps.

Bamberger (2015) recommends a solution-oriented **counselling process in six phases**:

Phase 1: "Synchronisation": This includes situational, emotional and conceptual coordination processes between counsellor and client, solution-oriented problem analysis, agreement on cooperation and solution motivation.

Phase 2: "Solution vision": This includes the solution-oriented central question, solution tendencies even before the counselling, the identification of exceptions, hypothetical solutions and the redefinition of problems ("reframing").

Phase 3: "Solution prescription": This is about getting the client to emotionally and cognitively engage in a solution path. The trusting working relationship with the counsellor "rapport" plays a decisive role here. A constructive pause between solution vision and solution prescription can also be helpful. After such a pause, the counsellor should actively encourage the client to continue striving for the solution through positive connotations in the conversation. A well-known method is also the assignment of "homework" between counselling sessions. At the end of this counselling phase, the plan of action is secured.

Phase 4: "Solution support": This phase serves the follow-up support of the client ("follow-up") through different communication channels. These communications ("letters") can serve to deepen, confirm, further inform or also correct.

Phase 5: "Evaluation": This phase serves to identify improvements and to analyse possible obstacles and resource bottlenecks on the part of the client. It is also checked whether changes have occurred with regard to the "target prescription".

Phase 6: "Securing solutions and the end of counselling": This is about preparing for the time after the active counselling phases through the steps "solution initialisation", "solution realisation" and "solution establishment". The farewell phase for "post-counselling" should consist of an offer for securing the change (cf. Bamberger 2015, p. 218):

- The "follow-up interview" is about the offer for an interview after two or three months.
- The "maybe-talk" raises the prospect of possibility.
- In the "option talk", the client receives a talk voucher.
- The "success talk" is a catamnestic talk after half a year.

References

- Bamberger, G. G. (2015). Lösungorientierte Beratung – Praxishandbuch. (5th Edition). Weinheim/Basel: Beltz Verlag.
- Ertelt, B.-J., Schulz, W.E. & Frey, A. (2022). Counsellor Competencies – Developing Counselling Skills for Education, Career and Occupation. Springer Nature Switzerland