

Section 5: Cooperation

Short Description

The goal is to increase participants' abilities for managing relationships effectively. Collaboration training shall promote learners' ability to build and manage relationships, to give and accept help, and to form agreements for cooperation. **Conflict resolution** and **negotiation** training shall support participants in addressing misunderstandings, value, and resource conflicts constructively. Influence training shall promote learners' understanding of their own strengths and values and support them in persuading other people.

Learning Objectives

At the end of the section practitioners will be able to:

- holistically understand what cooperation means and what other concepts revolve around it;
- realize the importance of cooperation skills in the field of career guidance and counselling;
- learn which theoretical approaches can contribute to the development of cooperation skills;
- strengthen their ability to effectively manage their relationships with their clients;
- “cultivate” the feeling that the goal is common among all the team members that they are part of a unity receiving increased satisfaction from the relationships among them, with common moral, rules and values;
- enhance and develop conflict resolution and negotiation skills, which will help to properly manage interpersonal relationships and to identify the source of conflicts and misunderstandings so that they can be addressed holistically in order to help the clients overcome the difficult situation in which they find themselves in, to manage their emotions and to achieve their goals;

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1.1 Theoretical background

Definitions

A counselling environment and relationship is a place to explore problems, have candid conversations, brainstorm potential solutions, and reflect on alternatives. Therefore, cooperation skills are essential to every practitioner, as they enable them to manage relationships effectively.

Important skills that enable a practitioner to act cooperatively are:

Cooperation

It's the practitioner's ability to build and manage relationships, to give and accept help, and to form agreements for cooperation. The word 'cooperation' has increasingly featured in writing about counselling, most commonly about relations between practitioners and clients (Anderson, 1997; Hoffman, 1995; O'Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 2003). Collaboration has had various meanings, including those derived from approaches to counselling where client collaboration is seen as cooperation with the practitioner's directives (e.g. Colson et al., 1988).

The therapeutic alliance has been most commonly defined as reflecting the quality and strength of the collaborative relationship between practitioner and client (Bordin, 1994; Pinsof & Catherall, 1986). The conceptual centre of the alliance is collaboration, defined as, 'the client and therapist forming a partnership against the common foe of the client's deliberating pain' (Horvath & Greenberg, 1994, p. 1). The concept of collaboration conveys a sense of teamwork, partnership, cooperation and working together toward shared goals (Diamond & Scheifler, 2007).

Cooperation is also about negotiating the goals for counselling and deciding on a pathway to reach them. This also means voicing different opinions, concerns, curiosity, questions, and ideas about the direction of counselling, what has been helpful, and what is missing in counselling and/or not working. In other words, collaboration is not intended to be a perfect alignment, rather, it signifies a partnership that is experienced as open, respectful, energized, and purposeful (Bohart & Tallman, 1999; Duncan & Miller, 2000).

Cooperation is enhanced when clients and practitioners recognize that they can shape the manner and accomplishments of their dialogues. In other words, how they negotiate 'going on' (Wittgenstein, 1953) with each other can constrain or facilitate their potential for going on together.

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Conflict resolution & Negotiation

It refers to the ability to address misunderstandings, value and resource conflicts constructively (respectfully, with the goal of resolving a conflict peacefully).

Conflict resolution is inextricably linked with cooperation and negotiation skills, as they also entail managing conflict effectively. Effective conflict resolution refers to competences such as adapting to psychological motivations, saving face, and balancing power difference (Roloff, Putman & Anastasiou, 2003). Research findings (De Dreu & Van De Vliert, 1997; Johnson & Johnson, 1998) indicated that contrary to our culture's tendency to avoid conflict, conflict, when managed in constructive and healthy ways, is positive for relationships, and the workforce. Seeing conflict as an opportunity for creativity, growth, and learning instead of pain and humiliation is a reframe of conflict that helps to avoid ineffective ways of dealing with conflict (Brown & Fisher, 1988; Borisoff & Victor, 1998; Coulson, 1996; De Dreu & Van De Vliert, 1997; Kottler, 1994).

Negotiation skills refer to a subset of knowledge and behaviours that influence “bargaining” performance (Lewicki, 1997). Negotiation as a set of skills is essential in cooperation as it allows for creating something new that neither party could achieve independently and, thus, resolve complex problems through “bargaining” (Lewicki, 1986).

Negotiation is deemed effective when someone achieves his/her ultimate goal (whether that is the ultimate result or a sub-goal in a broader collaboration) or when it is grown out of an understanding of the process that surpasses minimal performance. Effective negotiation also means that practitioners collaborate in decisions and build healthy relationships through working with their clients.

Influence

Influence is inherent in cooperation and negotiation. It refers to the understanding of one's own strengths and values and being able to express them to induce desired responses from others (e.g., inspiration). It is the power to affect or change how someone behaves, or thinks in indirect or intangible ways. It is interrelated with a set of emotional management skills in a sense that effective influence requires emotional understanding and knowing and projecting my own strengths and values in order to persuade a person or a group of people. From a practitioner's perspective, he/she should understand their own strengths and values (enduring behavioural, emotional and cognitive qualities that are habitual characteristics of the individual) and provide support while

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persuading other people. They have to act as an exemplary role model, engage and motivate others and facilitate creative thinking (Bass & Avolio, 2000).

Characteristics of a practitioner mastering the cooperation skills

Career practitioners should build a solid alliance with the client in order to be effective. Henneman, Lee & Cohen (1995) conducted an analysis of the concept structure of collaboration and proposed the following essential, defining attributes without all of which collaboration cannot exist: a. commitment to a shared venture; b. willing participation; c. team approach; d. shared planning and decision-making; e. shared contribution of expertise; f. a non-hierarchical relationship in which power is shared and based on knowledge rather than role or title. Even though the client's willingness and positive stance are contributing factors in the overall outcome, the professional's collaborative practice, such as professional listening, professional confidence, sharing and supportive relationship, is the only dimension to contribute uniquely to the professional's perception of collaboration.

Therefore, collaborative practitioners are flexibly and actively engaged in the change process with their clients (Bachelor, Laverdière, Gamache, & Bordeleau, 2007).

By forming a cooperative relationship, the practitioner works together with the client to create a new understanding of the individual's experience, allowing for transformation. A crucial part is the practitioner's recognition that a person in therapy is the expert on their own experience. The therapist does not act as an authority figure or as if they have greater knowledge or understanding. They may offer their own suggestions or perspective, but they avoid imposing their own ideas on the individual in therapy (Anderson, 2001).

In a nutshell a practitioner effective enough in cooperation can be attributed with the following characteristics:

- self-awareness;
- developed personal mental resilience;
- holistic knowledge about his attitudes, belief system, strengths, positive characteristics and skills;
- confidence;
- honesty;
- acceptance towards clients;
- adaptability;
- creativity;

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- confidentiality;
- respect for individuality;
- honesty and clarity in relation to their limits;
- holistic approach to the client's issues;
- respect for the differentiation and different needs of everyone depending on their age and period of life;
- understanding the subjective experience of each member and the way they perceive the counselling process;

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Importance of cooperation skills in career counselling

The relationship between practitioner and client is of paramount importance. This kind of relationship concerns the emotion, the attitudes and the beliefs of those involved in the counselling process (Thwaites, 2007). The quality of this evolving relationship determines the outcome of the counselling process more than the actual career prospects and results.

Practitioner's behaviour should reflect empowerment and acceptance in the eyes of the client. The practitioner should be perceived as a capable, serious, sensitive, honest, confidential and responsible person, who accepts the client unconditionally and has the necessary training and skills to provide guidance (Malkiosi-Loizou, 2012). In order for those qualities to be projected and applied in the counselling process, cooperation is essential. Cooperation, in the context of career counselling, includes offering help to the client or the team, when the need arises, always according to the rhythms of the client or the team and regulating the behaviour in such a way that his actions are not misinterpreted (Salas, Sims & Klein, 2004). Similarly, the process by which a climate of unity is achieved between a practitioner and a client or between a practitioner and a team is called a partnership (Salas, Sims & Klein, 2004).

Furthermore, counselling, like other forms of social interaction, is not without disagreements and that's the reason cooperation skills are essential. Suppose the client considers the practitioner's responses to him or her to be inconsistent with what he or she seeks from the practitioner. The practitioner, in turn, may interpret such 'inconsistency' as the client resisting working collaboratively. Such problems can arise over differences in perspectives and judgments. Disagreements like this are often associated with misunderstandings over how the professional relationship and its emergent proceedings are regarded by clients and practitioners (e.g. Vera & Speight, 2003). Collaboration can involve an upfront discussion of such expectations en route to an implicit contract of what collaboration entails. This is a common view of the working alliance in which professionals and clients outline relational arrangements, goals and tasks at the out-set of counselling and adhere to them thereafter (e.g. Horvath & Greenberg, 1994). Additionally, counselling is a process where client and practitioner judgment is called upon at each conversational turn (Strong & Sutherland, 2007).

Cooperation serves throughout each step of the counselling process. During the practitioner's preparation, he/she should be able to plan and organize a course of action, specifically structured and thought through upon the client's abilities, aspirations and goals. This can only be achieved through honest conversation and cooperation among the practitioner and the client when setting

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the goals of the process. Similarly, while practitioners and clients are exploring and assessing different educational and career pathways, cooperation is still essential. Practitioners should be able to understand the complexities behind the client's career questions and the reasons behind possible limitations, perceptions and hesitations. At this point, it is important for the practitioner to use his/her own strengths to help him find solutions and set goals (Green, Lee, Trask & Reinsheld, 2005). Additionally, client's resistance and hesitations may cause frustration and conflict within the process that may call for modification to the counselling plan. Practitioners need to be adaptable, able to negotiate and manage conflict in order to lower the tension and sustain the relationship. As experts, they are to be able to provide feasible alternative paths and influence their clients.

Based on the above, developing and enhancing practitioners' skill of cooperation is essential as it is a crucial element in the counselling process and it contributes effectively to the solution or better management of the client's problems and concerns, especially in crisis periods.

Methods for cooperation skills improvement

Cognitive Behavioural Approaches

Cognitive behavioural techniques could help learners "review" some of their thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours in order to resolve problems and prevent or negotiate a conflict (Ellis, 1973). Based on this perspective, the practitioner tries to help the client get rid of irrational ideas and replace them with other, logical ones (Malikiosi-Loizou, 1989).

In order to achieve the aforementioned, he/she follows a specific procedure:

- Develop a climate of trust;
- Reveal irrational beliefs and help clients become fully aware of them;
- Show them how these irrational ideas create problems;
- Help clients change these irrational beliefs and speak to themselves;
- Encourage them to apply these new concepts.

This procedure can be well applied in the career counselling process, too. Clients' attitudes, beliefs and hesitations may affect the counselling result and even produce a conflict environment. Early on, practitioners need to be able to detect such issues and moderate their behaviour accordingly. Building on with trust and honesty, active listening and communication, practitioners can persuade clients to follow the above mentioned procedure and reach a consensus.

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Coaching is also a method that combines cognitive and behavioural techniques (Grant, Curtayne & Burton, 2006).

- Having a supportive relationship, in which individuals can feel safe to trust and analyse their personal and professional issues, can relieve them of tension and stress, helping them to manage conflicts more effectively (Myers, 1999).
- The process of setting specific goals and then striving to achieve them, can enhance self-efficacy (Sheldon & Houser-Marko, 2001) resulting in successful negotiations and a climate of cooperation.

Systematic participation in the above procedures and support in dealing with failure, can create resilience and strengthen self-regulation (Baumeister, Gailliot, DeWall & Oaten, 2006) which are important elements for resolving any conflicts between the consultant and his/her clients.

Mindfulness

Based on interdependence theory, scholars have recently developed a concept to describe individual's caring and satisfying others' autonomous needs in interpersonal interaction, namely social mindfulness, demonstrating that socially mindful behaviours are noticed and appreciated by others and that higher levels of perceived mindfulness from others lead to more favourable social judgments (Van Doesum, Van Lange, & Van Lange, 2013; Van Lange & Van Doesum, 2015). Moreover, it has been proved that social mindfulness plays a vital role in interpersonal interaction and team relationships (Van Doesum, Van Prooijen, Verburgh, & Van Lange, 2016). Thus, social mindfulness represents a new perspective on cooperative behaviours. Cooperative behaviours refer to individuals' resistance of self-interest to maximize collective interest (Van Vugt, Snyder, Tyler, & Biel, 2000).

In socially mindful behaviour, the conductor respects and protects the receiver's option in interpersonal interaction, which helps build trust between two strangers (Declerck et al., 2013). Studies have indicated that trust is a crucial mechanism promoting cooperative behaviours (Irwin, Edwards, & Tamburello, 2015; Parks et al., 2013), especially when people meet conflict of interests (Balliet & Van Lange, 2013). As Van Lange and Van Doesum (2015) illustrated, high social mindfulness promotes a close relationship and facilitates interpersonal interaction. Socially mindful behaviours are of vital significance for improving and building interpersonal and intimate relationships.

In career counselling, social mindfulness can take the form of the practitioner acknowledging the immediate or expected inclusion of the client in the counselling process, assessing the effects of

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their own actions on the remaining behavioural options of clients and maintaining a positive regard throughout the counselling process. Perspective taking and empathetic concern are also important. Even though career practitioners may have already developed an action plan, this may be translated by clients as limiting. While presenting limited options can prove beneficial sometimes, not taking away outcome options for someone can help in building and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Career practitioners should be able to “sacrifice” or modify their choice options if this results in client’s increased appreciation and satisfaction.

Self-reflection and lifelong supervision

Lifelong supervision of practitioners and psychotherapists has been internationally recognized as a key instrument to enhance, support and ensure the quality of services provided. Nowadays, supervision of practitioners has become a new, flourishing and discrete profession, based on theoretical models, practiced according to specific standards and leading to positive outcomes for all parties involved. Many studies present the state of play concerning the supervision of practitioners. Moreover, they focus on the positive impact of lifelong supervision on enhancing the quality of counselling services (Vassara, 2016).

According to Loganbill, Hardy and Delworth (1982), supervision is defined as the close interpersonal relationship where a person has undertaken to facilitate the development of the other's skills. At the heart of the definitions of supervision is the strengthening of the skills of the supervised and the evaluation of their consulting work. As mentioned from Hawkins and Shohet (2006), in 1987 the British Counselling and Psychotherapy Association considered it necessary to clarify that supervision does not come for the benefit of the supervised but mainly for the benefit of the final recipients of the services.

Self-reflection and lifelong supervision can benefit practitioners to focus on developing and exercising a positive attitude towards clients, to enhance skills such as cooperation and to walk through stressful work situations.