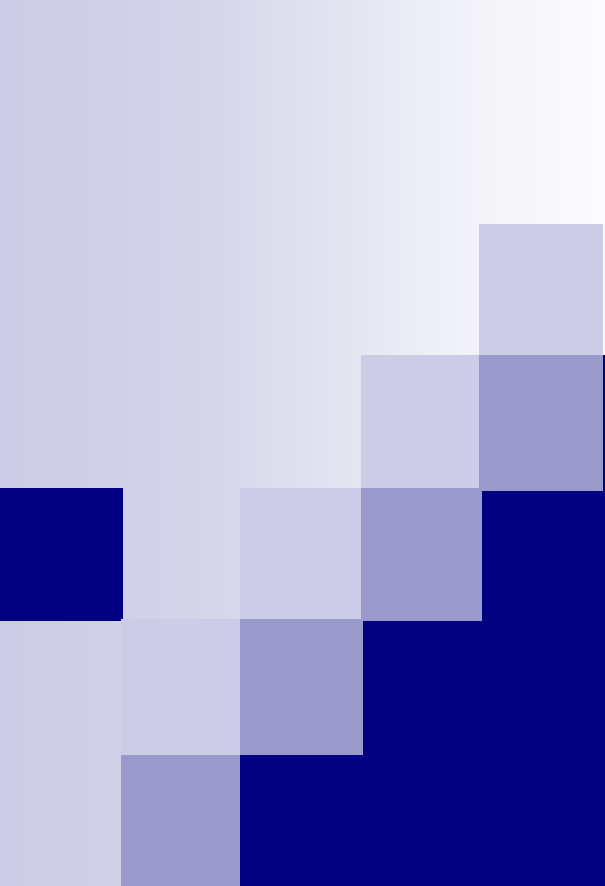




Using Solution-focused thinking in career counselling

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Solution-focused counselling

- Pioneered by Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg and colleagues at Milwaukee Brief Family Therapy Center.
- Brief, constructivist, positively framed, future-oriented, collaborative inquiry that is respectful of client diversity and contextual differences.

Constructivist principles

- Everyone's reality is based on their understanding of, and participation in, their own experiences.
- Human behaviour can only be understood in the context of the client's whole environment and interactions within it.



Solution-focused thinking

- What is solution-focused counselling?
- What are constructivist principles?
- What is solution-focused thinking?
- The solution-focused career counsellor



Overview of a solution-focused strategy

1. Problem clarification and imagining the possible
 - Constructing well-formed goals
2. Building client self-helpfulness
 - Positive exceptions
 - Encouraging hope (WISHED)
3. Constructing meaningful feedback

Problem clarification and imagining the possible

Well-formed goals must be:

- The client's
- Small (but important)
- Specific, realistic, concrete, behavioural, observable
- The 'start' of something
- The presence of something



Techniques that help clients imagine the possible

- Direct questions
- Miracle questions
- Scaling questions

Direct Questions

- *What would you like to get out of today's career counselling session?*
- *How will you know that coming to see me about your [career concern] was a good idea?*
- *How will you know that you are where you want to be?*
- *What will be different for you when you [reach your goal]?*

Miracle Question

- Most useful when clients are 'stuck'.
- Helps clients verbalise their thoughts about 'if only...then'.
- Client envisions a preferred future that incorporates:
 - Work/career/leisure
 - Relationships
 - Financial
- *Suppose a miracle was to happen...what would you notice?*

Scaling Questions

- Can be used to focus the entire session.
- Help clients construct meaningful descriptions of their concerns, goals, strengths, motivation.
 - *What does that place on the scale look like?*
 - *Is there a point on the scale you would rather be?*
 - *What would be different for you at that point?*
 - *What would it take for you to move one point up the scale?*

Building client self-helpfulness with Positive Exceptions

- Help clients explore behaviour or circumstances that make problem less problematic.
 - *Have there been times when ...?*
 - *What did you do differently then (self helpfulness)?*
 - *What would others say was different for you (contextual meaning)?*
- Responses provide examples of client success, resourcefulness, strengths

Encouraging Hope (WISHED)

- **W**h qns (what, where, who where) NOT why?
- **I**nstead (to replace negatively worded goals)
- **S**uppose (to help clients imagine alternatives)
- **H**ow (to encourage self-helpfulness)
- **E**mphasise positive differences
- **D**raw or write, make visible all positives, possibilities.



Constructing meaningful feedback

- Compliments
- Bridging Statement (goal)
- Future oriented message

Relevant reading

- Besanson, B.J. (2004) The application of solution-focused work in employment counselling. *Journal of employment counselling*, 41:183-191.
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- George, E., Iveson, C. and Ratner, H. (2004) *Problem to Solution: Brief Therapy with Individuals and families* (expanded edition). London: BT Press.
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- Miller, J. H. (2004). Extending the use of constructivist approaches in career guidance and counselling: Solution-focused strategies. *Australian Journal of Career Development*, 13 (1), 50-58.