

THE COUNSELLING PROFICIENCY SCALE: THE PROGRESSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF A SCALE FOR THE EVALUATION OF SPECIFIC COUNSELLING INTERVIEW COMPETENCIES

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Abstract

This article describes the development and suggested application of a scale which the writer developed for the evaluation of individual counselling interview competencies. The scale, called the Counselling Interview Proficiency Scale, can be used by the counsellor himself or by an independent rater and can be applied to live or taped interviews. The scale is viewed by the writer as being in the process of refinement and those trying the scale are encouraged to provide feedback on the scale to the writer. In addition, the reader is encouraged to define and validate competencies not appearing on this scale but felt to be crucial in the reader's counselling setting.

Résumé

Cet article décrit le développement et l'utilisation suggérée d'une échelle proposée par l'auteur pour évaluer la compétence à mener un interview dans la consultation d'individus. Cette échelle, nommée Counselling Interview Proficiency Scale, peut servir au conseiller lui-même ou à un évaluateur indépendant. Elle peut s'appliquer aux interviews actuels ou enregistrés. L'auteur veut perfectionner son échelle et encourage les conseillers qui ont utilisé l'échelle de lui communiquer leurs impressions. De plus, l'auteur encourage le lecteur à définir et à valider les compétences qui n'apparaissent pas sur l'échelle mais qui, selon le lecteur, sont fondamentales dans son travail de consultation.

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation and improvement of individual counselling techniques are common concerns among all counsellors, regardless of setting or counselling orientation. Counsellor educators, as well as being concerned with the continuing development of their own individual counselling skills, spend a great deal of time working with counsellor trainees in the presentation of the variety of techniques available, the evaluation of the trainees' effectiveness in technique usage, and the continued refinement of the trainees' skills in field placements.

There are several excellent texts which present and describe a variety of interview techniques commonly considered to be effective in individual counselling. A few examples of such texts are: Brammer & Shostrom's, (1977) *Therapeutic Psychology*; Brammer's, (1973) *The Helping Relationship*; Eisenberg & Delaney's, (1977) *The Counseling Process*; Benjamin's, (1974) *The Helping Interview*; and Shertzer & Stone's, (1974) *Fundamentals of Counseling*. The beginning and experienced counsellor can always benefit from a study of the interview techniques described in such sources.

However, it is imperative that the counsellor go beyond an initial study of counselling techniques and move to actively practicing those techniques in real counselling situations *and* evaluating the level of effectiveness or competency with which the techniques are in fact used.

It is the purpose of this paper to present and describe a scale which the writer has developed, and is presently refining, for the evaluation of the counsellor's proficiency in using selected individual interview techniques. The scale, called the *Counselling Interview Proficiency Scale* (CIPS), is shown in its present form in Appendix A. It is hoped that presenting and discussing this scale will (1) encourage the readers to be more alert to the need of more *systematic* evaluation of counselling interview techniques, (2) encourage both beginning and practicing counsellors alike to review (or have reviewed) samples of their individual counselling interviews, using such a scale, and (3) encourage those who have tried this scale, and others like it, to share their reactions and feelings about the use of such instruments as a means of improving interviewing skills, on a more systematic or objective basis. The CIPS, although it has been undergoing some level of application

and refinement over a period of two and one-half years, is being presented here as an instrument in the process of development. Thus, the writer would welcome suggestions from those who use the scale as to aspects which are particularly useful and those which need further refinements.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIPS

Why a Rating Scale?

The development of a scale to more systematically evaluate and refine one's counselling interview skills, or the skills of another, emerged initially from the writer's interest and research into the actual usefulness of counselling techniques proposed by several writers in the field of counselling (Klas & Peters, 1971). Sources such as those listed in the previous section carefully define and describe the use of a variety of interview techniques deemed suitable for various counselling settings. Counsellor trainees and practicing counsellors read such sources, and then make an effort to utilize the techniques which are recommended. However, specific feedback as to how effectively and appropriately the techniques are applied and how well they lead to the eventual goal of improved client coping is often not too systematic or continuous. It seemed logical to the writer that if specific interview techniques or competencies were selected and if an efficient means were developed to provide feedback to oneself or to others as to how effectively these techniques were used, then the likelihood of continuous self-improvement for both counsellor trainees and practicing counsellors would be enhanced immensely. One must know not only which techniques are deemed to be most crucial but must also have a means at hand to evaluate or have evaluated the level of his competency with each of these techniques.

Review of the Literature

A thorough review was made of the counselling interview techniques deemed to be most appropriate and useful in individual counselling. A variety of counsellee ages and counselling settings were considered. Such sources as Dinkmeyer & Carlson (1973), Benjamin (1974), Brammer & Shostrom (1977), and Shertzer & Stone (1974) proved to be most useful in providing a validity to the choice of such techniques. In addition, writers such as Winborn, Hinds and Stewart (1971) Horan (1972) have presented behavioral objectives and competencies deemed crucial in counselling interviews.

In addition to a review of the competencies deemed most important in counselling, a review was conducted into several existing rating systems that were available in the literature. Examples of such rating scales were those of Myrick & Kelly's

(1971) *Counselor Evaluation Rating Scale*; Wittmer's (1971) *Counselor Activity Profile*; and Linden, Stone, and Shertzer's (1974) *Counseling Evaluation Inventory*. Although these scales were, from all reports, effective for their intended purpose, they could not be used to evaluate a very wide selection of *specific* interview techniques. Also, the scales presented some difficulty for objective self-evaluation. Some were more of a content analysis of what types of techniques were used and how much time those techniques took; others dealt more with global counsellor actions or attitudes than with specific interview techniques. Some also focused several points of evaluation on supervisor-trainee interaction.

The Initial Rating Scale

After the review of the literature described above, an initial list of sixty counselling interview techniques was drawn up. This list was reduced to fifty-two items by combining techniques which had a great deal of similarity. The initial rating scale consisted of identifying information and instructions to the raters: Section I, consisting of fifty-two techniques which were rated on a ten point scale; Section II, consisting of nine open-ended questions to which the reviewer responded.

The initial rating scale was tested out for a full semester with fourteen graduate counselling and guidance students as a part of an "Introduction to Counselling" course. Each student taped (usually video) around five counselling sessions. These tapes were reviewed, using the scale, by groups of three to four students, the instructor, or both, and self-rated by the counsellor-trainee. Approximately sixty tapes were completed and reviewed with the scale. About forty of these tapes were reviewed by the counsellor-trainee and at least two fellow graduate students who gave at least three simultaneous, independent ratings. In addition, the writer, as an instructor, sat in on about one-half of these forty group sessions and rated the tape. The remaining twenty tapes were reviewed and rated by only the instructor and the counsellor-trainee. All tape reviews were dated, identified, and handed in at term's end. In addition, once completed, the ratings served as a guide to discussing the effectiveness of the interview with the counsellor-trainee.

Based on the feedback from those using the instrument and based on the inter-rater reliability levels for each of the items, this initial scale was revised. The revision of: (1) dropping items which came up too infrequently for future consideration; (2) rewording ambiguous terminology in both section I and II; (3) dividing techniques which proved to be of a multiple nature; (4) combining separate techniques which proved to overlap considerably; (5) reducing the ten point scale to a five point scale.

CHARACTERISTICS AND THE USE OF THE CIPS (PRESENT FORM)

Based on the above revisions, the present scale, as shown in Appendix A, was developed. This form of the scale has since been used in rating counselling interviews in both counselling courses and practica. The scale's primary purpose has proved to be a guide to the evaluation and discussion of how effectively the counsellor-trainee utilizes the interview techniques therein described.

The writer wishes to make several points about the application and use of the present form of the CIPS. The techniques fall into particular categories.

- (1) These categories taken as a unit, tend to represent the overall counselling model for the CIPS. A few examples of each of the categories are provided below:
 - a. *Core Techniques* (evoking understanding, listening, building and maintaining rapport).
 - b. *Initial Concerns* (physical arrangements, body position, structuring)
 - c. *Building of Trust and Mutual Understanding — Slight Counsellor Lead* (acceptance, reflection, clarification)
 - d. *Furthering of Understanding — Moderate Counsellor Lead* (interpretation, questioning, information giving)
 - e. *Intense Feedback — High Counsellor Lead* (urging, probing, confrontation)
 - f. *Terminal Concerns* (termination, summarizing, referrals)
 - g. *Pervading Concerns* (appropriate talk ratio, degree of lead, non-verbal behaviors)
- (2) The techniques are in the approximate order that they would be found in the interview. Such an arrangement makes rating easier, since the rater usually does not have to search through the entire scale when a given technique is used by the counsellor.
- (3) The scale has been used for reviewing video tapes, audio tapes, and live sessions. It is most effective for video tapes, then live sessions and lastly audio tapes. A few of the techniques on the scale could not be rated without visual observation of the session.
- (4) The scale can be used by a single reviewer or a group of reviewers. In addition, it can be used by the counsellor who did the tape. The scale can be used as an initial training instrument or as an in-service instrument for practicing counsellors. The question of objectivity may come up with the self-ratings, of course, but no real difficulty or inconsistency has been noticed up to this point.
- (5) Most of the scale can be completed while listening to the actual tape or observing a live session. Little more than 5-10 minutes beyond the actual tape time was ever needed to complete the review. Thus, the scale seems to be reasonably efficient, time-wise.
- (6) The emphasis of the scale should be on the gradual development of given counselling interview competencies. Feedback should be positively oriented and positively received. For example, the writer does not recommend that the scale ratings be averaged for a letter grade, since (a) very seldom have all the techniques ever been used in a given interview, (b) different problem areas, clients, and client situations create different demands on the counsellor and his resources. To compare overall averages from interview to interview demands a level of reliability that such instruments simply do not have. However, comparisons of effectiveness with individual techniques from interview to interview has proven to be quite useful.
- (7) One of the major uses of the scale has proven to be as a discussion point between the counsellor and the reviewing group or the counsellor and his supervisor. After the ratings are completed it is recommended that the ratings of each of the techniques be discussed with the counsellor. Such a common core of techniques adds a needed element of consistency to the discussion of the technical effectiveness of interviews. Such discussions lead to the sharing of counselling philosophies; a comparison of theoretical positions; suggestions for improvement of technique usage or choice; suggestions for case management; and many other such spin-offs.
- (8) Some of the techniques will be used several times in one interview, with possibly variable competency. In such an instance, multiple ratings can be given, one for each time the technique is used. The back of the sheet can be used for identifying reviewer comments, if necessary. Techniques falling into such a category include numbers 14, 15, and 16, among others.
- (9) A space is provided between each of the techniques. The writer has often used this space for special evaluative comments, suggestions for improvement, and special encouragement or reinforcement. This space could be enlarged as needed.
- (10) Section II gives the reviewer an opportunity to make comments about the counsellor, the client, the problem area, the counselling process, and aspects of ethical behavior which couldn't be effectively rated in Section I. Also, overall strengths can be outlined. (This is important for the developing counsellor to know, especially in the building of self-confidence). Weaknesses of an unusual

or critical nature can also be pointed out in Section II.

- (11) The CIPS gives the supervisor and the counsellor a more permanent record of the progress made in the development of the counsellor's interviewing competencies. It also serves as a reminder to the counsellor, from interview to interview, as to which of his techniques were effectively and ineffectively used and which approaches seemed most effective for the client and his problem area. The scale has served as a useful interview summary and write-up, in some cases.
- (12) Techniques which do not appear on the scale, but which come into frequent use, can simply be added to the list, using the same format. This scale, of course, is not comprehensive enough to include a significant sampling of techniques from each and every counselling approach or counselling setting. It has proven to be less applicable to elementary settings than to secondary and adult counselling situations; such techniques as dealing with the shy client and play therapy, for example, are not directly included on this scale. Different forms of this scale may eventually need to be devised for the different age groups or different settings.
- (13) Points 2, 3, and 4 of the five-point rating scale are not defined in any descriptive terms. The literature tends not to favor the descriptive or the open-ended scale, on any consistent basis. The writer did not find descriptive terms to be of any particular advantage; however, such terms could be applied, provided that there is agreement among the raters as to the meaning of the descriptive terms.
- (14) In the opinion of the writer the various techniques of dealing with client resistance are not yet adequately represented on this scale. Further refinement to incorporate these techniques is underway.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE CIPS

With any such rating scale there exist the concerns of validity and reliability. The revised scale's validity is primarily of a content validity nature, of course; this type of validity appears to be at a satisfactory level for the purposes for which the scale was designed. The techniques were initially selected from sources which represented a variety of counselling approaches and which were commonly used as texts or references in counselling courses. The items on the scale were reviewed by fellow counsellor educators, as well. The process of refinement of the original scale to its present form, which involved using the scale in the actual setting for which it was intended, would further add to the validity of the instrument. In terms of validity, it is recommended that those

who plan to use the scale give it a careful scrutiny to ensure that the techniques on the scale are, in fact, important tools in the counselling situation in which it will be used.

Inter-rater reliability ranges between .80 and .85. Twenty counsellors supplied at least five tapes each for the inter-reliability ratings. Each of those one hundred plus tapes was rated, using the CIPS, by approximately one to three other raters. At present, about 200 useable reliability comparisons have been made. The reliability improved gradually as the raters gained experience with the instrument and with the meanings and manifestations of the techniques on the scale. Needless to say, to ensure a reasonable level of reliability all raters should first have some degree of agreement as to what the techniques are and how they are effectively and appropriately applied. This level of reliability is considered to be acceptable, considering the nature of the instrument and considering that the ratings are not to be used in determining overall averages or scores anyway. In addition, the techniques and their ratings are used as jumping off points for discussion and elaboration; thus, inconsistencies in rating a technique can usually be clarified between the reviewer and the counsellor. However, the reader should be cautioned again that this scale is still very subjective in nature and that its validity and reliability are yet based on a relatively narrow sample. For techniques which come up several times during an interview, with possibly varying degrees of competency, it is necessary to clarify the particular instance that is being rated to hope for acceptable inter-rater reliability.

SUMMARY

It should be emphasized here that the use of such a scale should not lead to viewing counselling techniques as ends in themselves. Regardless of theoretical orientation, techniques should be viewed, and used, as tools to achieve such overall counselling purposes as an increase in client responsibility, better client decision-making, and improvement in client self-confidence and coping skills. Reviewers using the CIPS should keep such an orientation in mind, namely that of how effectively the techniques are used to achieve the overall goals of the particular counselling situation.

This scale is being presented here not as a final, validated and thoroughly reliable scale. Rather, the writer presents the scale as one in the "process of becoming" a useful scale. The writer takes the position that to improve in his counselling interview skills the counsellor or counsellor trainee must frequently put samples of his own work under self-scrutiny and/or the scrutiny of others. A scale such as the CIPS gives some

consistency to such evaluations, allowing for self-comparisons over a period of time. Such a scale, of course, must consist of techniques appropriate to the client, the problem area, and the demands of the setting.

It is hoped that the readers will try using the CIPS and provide feedback to the writer as to the degree of usefulness of the scale and the items therein.

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Appendix A

Counseling Interview Proficiency Scale

Counselor's Name _____
 Client's First Name and Initial _____
 Interview Number and Date _____
 Reviewer's Name _____

The following scale consists of two types of ratings of a counsellor's proficiency in interviewing skills: (1) a rating of the counsellor, on a five-point scale, of his skills in several specific counselling interview techniques and; (2) an open-ended rating of the counsellor's general effectiveness, his particular strengths and his apparent weaknesses. The techniques on this scale represent many of the basic counselling interview competencies demanded of a counsellor. The scale can be both 'self' and 'other' rated

Section I: Using a five point scale, rate the counsellor's effectiveness in each of the *applicable* counselling interview techniques listed below. A rating of "1" reflects the lowest level of effectiveness. A rating of "5" would reflect a mastery of the technique.

Rating TECHNIQUE

1. — Counsellor conveys a sincere concern and willingness to help. (through word and/or action).
2. — Counsellor displays a non-threatening manner. (Client feels accepted & at ease.)
3. — Counsellor displays a feeling of ease at the beginning of the session.
4. — Counsellor's manner is natural and typical of him/her.
5. — The physical arrangements and counselling climate are pleasant, relaxing, and private.

6. — Physical distance between counsellor and client is appropriate to the type of problem and the client's perceived life space.
7. — Counsellor's postural position reflects comfort along with interest.
8. — Counsellor listens attentively. (Maintains comfortable eye contact, refers back to client's earlier comments, etc.)
9. — Counsellor provides needed structure and direction in the interview. (Proper focusing on any problems, appropriate explanation of role, etc.)
10. — Counsellor maintains an appropriate degree of lead (when considering client characteristics, the problem presented, and demands of the setting).
11. — Counsellor provides accurate and sufficient information to client.
12. — Counsellor gains needed information from client.
13. — Counsellor appropriately reflects on feeling level cues of the client.
14. — When reflecting client's feeling comments, counsellor accurately describes client's feelings, but in fresh words.
15. — Counsellor questions are open-ended. (Generally avoiding "yes-no" client responses).
16. — Counsellor's questions are sincere rather than of a cross-examining nature.
17. — Counsellor avoids useless probing.
18. — Counsellor insures that the presented problem/situation is thoroughly clarified by/for the client before decisions or plans are pursued.
19. — Counsellor encourages without pressuring the client.

20. — Interpretative comments of counsellor are worded tentatively and in a non-threatening manner.
 21. — Counsellor is not easily shocked, surprised, or angered by what the client says.
 22. — Counsellor provides required emotional support to client.
 23. — Counsellor reassures client at appropriate times in appropriate ways.
 24. — Counsellor responds to client's non-verbal behaviors, when appropriate.
 25. — Counsellor's non-verbal behaviors are consistent with his expressed feelings.
 26. — Counsellor, when discussing values, does not *impose* those values on the client.
 27. — Counsellor's level of language is appropriate to client's age and intelligence level.
 28. — Counsellor avoids creating a dependency on part of the client; counsellor keeps locus of both interview and post-interview responsibility on the client.
 29. — Counsellor appears to be goal-directed during the interview. (Knows what he is trying to accomplish throughout the different stages of the interview)
 30. — Counsellor appears to know at what interview process stage he is.
 31. — Interview is terminated gradually and naturally.
 32. — Client appears to "feel better" or "feel satisfied" at completion of interview.
 33. — Counsellor terminates interview on a positive note (or with a positive plan).
 34. — Counsellor arranges for next meeting with client, (if appropriate).
 35. — Client (or, if appropriate, the counsellor) provides an effective intra-interview summary and/or post-interview summary.
- Section II: Please respond to the following open-ended questions (if appropriate).
1. What particular counselling strengths were evident during the session?
 2. What particular counselling weaknesses were evident during the session?
 3. *Special comments of reviewer:*
 - a. On the counsellor:
 - b. On the client (or consultant):
 - c. On the problem/decision which was dealt with:
 - d. On the process stages:
 - e. On ethical behavior:
 - f. Other:
- Keep the completed scales on file in chronological order.