

The Effect of Career Counselor Behavior on Reemployment

Peter Behrendt¹ , Katharina Heuer², and Anja S. Göritz¹

Abstract

When looking at career interventions, one-on-one career counseling is one of the most effective and firmly established types of intervention. Furthermore, career counseling process quality has been validated as a predictor of job seekers' reemployment. To elucidate the underlying components of a high-quality counseling process, the effects of counselor behavior in mandatory counseling sessions at three Swiss job centers are investigated. Based on a transfer of psychotherapeutic effectiveness research into the domain of career counseling, three behavior categories are proposed as components of a high-quality counseling process: providing structured guidance during the counseling process, providing personalized support, and activating job seekers' resources. Scientific observers rated these counselor behavior categories in 32 counseling sessions. The ratings of "providing structured guidance" predicted job seekers' reemployment speed at a correlation of .58. The measured effect equals yearly savings of 831 million Swiss Francs CHF (US\$839) in Swiss unemployment benefits. The correlations with the other two behavior category ratings were in the same direction but nonsignificant.

Keywords

career counseling, process quality, behavior analysis, unemployment

During the financial crisis that began in 2007, the world encountered its worst unemployment situation since the Great Depression. The economic and personal consequences have been tremendous. Unemployment means foregoing economic potential, a loss of gross domestic product and taxes, as well as payments of unemployment benefits to the job seekers. At the same time, research has revealed hardships for the unemployed person: an increase of poverty (Liu, Huang, & Wang, 2014), mental health problems (Paul & Moser, 2009), alcohol consumption (Deb, Gallo, Ayyagari, Fletcher, & Sindelar, 2011), crimes committed (Farrington, Gallagher, Morley, St. Ledger, & West, 1986), risk of court conviction and suicide ideation (Fergusson, Horwood, & Woodward, 2001).

One-on-one career counseling has been established as the most effective and efficient intervention in tackling unemployment (Bloom, Hill, & Riccio, 2001; Dolton & O'Neill, 2002; Fay, 1996; Meyer, 1995; Whiston, 2002; Whiston, Brecheisen, & Stephens, 2003; Whiston, Sexton, & Lasoff, 1998) with

¹ Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany

² Technische Universität Braunschweig, Braunschweig, Germany

Corresponding Author:

Peter Behrendt, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Heinrich-Mann-Str. 5, 79100 Freiburg, Germany.
Email: peter.behrendt@psychologie.uni-freiburg.de

an effect size of $d = .75$ (Whiston et al., 1998) that persists for more than 5 years (Dolton & O'Neill, 2002) and pays back the investment within less than a year (e.g., Dolton & O'Neill, 2002; Meyer, 1995). Although the benefits of one-on-one career counseling are accepted in research and politics, meta-analysts (e.g., Whiston, 2002), and governmental agencies (Hooley, 2014) have called to elucidate the actual process of effective one-on-one career counseling. Career counseling process quality per se as evaluated by the counselors' supervisors predicts the speed of reemployment (Behrendt, Göritz, & Heuer, 2019). Nevertheless, the specific counselor behaviors that constitute high process quality await investigation.

Counselor Behaviors as Potential Components of Career Counseling Process Quality

Studies on the process of career counseling are sparse (see Theeboom, Beersma, & van Vianen, 2014). In particular, few studies have investigated the concrete career counselor behaviors that predict employment success (Whiston, Rossier, & Barón, 2016). To fill the gap, researchers have made a case for tapping the large body of psychotherapy effectiveness research as a starting point for elucidating the success-critical components of career counseling process quality, based on the assumption that psychotherapy and career counseling have similarities (Heppner & Heppner, 2003). More than a hundred years of process research in clinical psychology have revealed that the specific intervention methods do not influence patient outcomes much; instead, more than 70% of the desirable effects of psychotherapy are due to intervention-independent, general or common factors (Wampold, 2001). Psychotherapy researchers underline the transferability of the common factors to other settings such as counseling, arguing that these common factors "entail evolved characteristics of humans as a hypersocial species; as such, psychotherapy is merely a special case" of general psychological and social interventions (Wampold, 2015, p. 270).

The two most renowned meta-analyses on clinical common factors (Grawe, Donati, & Bernauer, 1994; Wampold, 2001) and those authors' later research (e.g., Grawe, 2004, 2007; Wampold, 2015) established the following three intervention-independent mechanisms as essential common factors of any psychological intervention delivered by a counselor/therapist: (1) creating in the client or patient the *expectation* that their active participation in the process will help them; this expectation can be created through convincing explanations of a consistent and well-structured counseling/therapeutic process and through the counselor's/therapist's personal competence, (2) a personally supportive and engaged *working alliance* to ensure effective collaboration, and (3) the *activation of the patients'/clients' instrumental resources* to strengthen functional actions.

Both two common factor models do not conceptually distinguish behavioral input delivered by the therapist/counselor (e.g., the convincing explanation of the counseling process) from the proximal desired outcome (e.g., the clients' expectation that active participation in the process will help). To explore and test the career counselor's behavioral inputs into career counseling process quality, we extricate the counselors' behavioral inputs from each of the three common factors to arrive at (1) providing convincing explanations of a well-structured process and personal competence of the counselor to engender the job seekers' positive expectations that their active participation in the process will help as summarized in a first behavior category called *providing structured guidance*, (2) engaging for the individual job seeker and supporting the job seekers' personal goals to strengthen a cooperative working alliance and ensure engaged collaboration as summarized in a second behavior category called *providing personalized support*, and (3) activating the job seekers' functional behavior and instrumental resources to strengthen functional actions as summarized in a third behavior category called *activating resources* (Behrendt, Matz, & Göritz, 2017).

After transferring the behavioral components of the three well-established common factors from psychotherapy research to the context of career counseling, the next step is to carve out the specific behavioral components within the career counseling process as predictors of employment success. For

this, we consult meta-analyses on employment antecedents (Kanfer, Wanberg, & Kantrowitz, 2001; Liu et al., 2014), a literature review on the working alliance in counseling (Whiston et al., 2016, p. 598), and a few existing quantitative studies on counseling behavior in settings outside of career counseling. Based on these contributions, we propose specific counselor behaviors as potential sub-components of the three counselor behavior categories to be tested in a field study in three Swiss job centers as predictors of employment success and as such as components of a high-quality career counseling process (Behrendt, Mühlberger, Göritz, & Jonas, in press). In this endeavor, the study develops and tests a rigorous and detailed measurement of the counselor behaviors that are expected to contribute to process quality.

Career Counselor Behaviors

Providing structured guidance. The counselor behavior category providing structured guidance facilitates job seekers' positive expectations that their active participation in the process will help. These positive expectations can be created by the counselors' personal competence and convincing explanations of a well-structured process rationale (Grawe, 2004; Wampold, 2015).

Furthermore, the counselor behavior category providing structured guidance increases job seekers' conscientiousness, which is the sixth predictor of employment success according to Kanfer, Wanberg, and Kantrowitz (2001): Job seekers who possess the self-discipline to reliably follow systematic, well-organized plans achieve reemployment faster. Counselor behavior that structures the therapeutic/counseling process has been identified as important in several studies outside of the career counseling context and in both prominent common-factor models (Behrendt, 2006; Grawe, 2004; Shaw et al., 1999; Wampold, 2015).

In addition to delivering a good process, counselors need to obtain the job seekers' cooperation and engagement by providing compelling guidance. While job seekers' physical participation in the mandatory counseling session can be enforced, their actual engagement in the reemployment process is out of the counselors' direct sphere of influence. Behavioral studies outside of the career counseling context and common-factor reviews show that explaining the process and the ways the process supports the individual job seeker enhance counseling success (Behrendt, 2006; Grawe, 2004; Wampold, 2015).

The psychotherapeutic literature has identified a link between therapists' credibility and patients' engagement in treatment (Karver, Handelsman, Fields, & Bickman, 2005). Psychotherapy research has also shown that therapists who appear organized and confident are trusted more (Heppner & Dixon, 1981). Correspondingly, common-factor models and studies outside the career counseling context have shown that counselors are more successful if they convey professional competence (Behrendt, 2006; Hawthorn & Alloway, 2009; Ianiro, Schermuly, & Kauffeld, 2013; Shaw et al., 1999; Wampold, 2001, 2015), provide competent process guidance ad hoc (Behrendt, 2006; Wampold, 2015), and are self-assured (Behrendt, 2006; Ianiro et al., 2013).

Based on these findings, we propose the following behaviors as potential sub-components of the career counselor behavior category providing structured guidance: (1) structuring the counseling process, (2) explaining the process, (3) explaining how the process supports the job seeker, (4) showing professional competence as a person, (5) providing competent guidance during the process, and (6) conveying personal self-assurance. We propose:

Hypothesis 1: The counselor behavior category providing structured guidance and its respective sub-components speed up job seekers' reemployment.

Providing personalized support. The counselor behavior category "providing personalized support" strengthens the working alliance through the counselor's engaging for the individual job seeker and supporting the job seekers' personal goals, commitments, and contributions. A trusted working

alliance needs to be established on the basis of a warm, personal, and supportive relationship as well as on goal consensus (Grawe, 2004; Wampold, 2015; Whiston et al., 2016). Social support as the second predictor of employment success according to Kanfer et al. (2001) promotes the job seekers' reemployment success. Furthermore, supporting the job seekers' individual motivation promotes their personal employment commitment, which is the fifth predictor of employment success according to Kanfer et al. (2001).

In the context of career counseling, a quantitative survey on the impact of working alliance on success (Bloom et al., 2001) states that a counseling relationship that is perceived to be personalized increased employment success by up to 50%. Confirmingly, an experimental study found that a counseling intervention that emphasized a personalized relationship was more effective than other interventions that provided additional support (Meyer, 1995). Correspondingly, counselors outside the career counseling context are more effective when they activate and personally support the job seekers' core motives (Behrendt, 2006; Grawe, 2007; Kanfer et al., 2001) as well as goals and needs (Behrendt, 2006; Gessnitzer & Kauffeld, 2015; Klonek, Lehmann-Willenbrock, & Kauffeld, 2014; Klonek, Wunderlich, Spurk, & Kauffeld, 2016; Wampold, 2001, 2015). Correspondingly, personalized counseling provides freedom and flexibility for meeting the job seekers' individual needs. This fact contrasts with the rigid, predetermined procedures used in text- or computer-based interventions, which were found to be less effective (Whiston, 2002; Whiston et al., 1998). In addition, psychotherapy effectiveness studies identify a patient's active engagement as a critical factor (Tschacher, Junghan, & Pfammatter, 2014). Correspondingly, counselors should create leeway, provide room for reflection, and show patience to enable job seekers to explore their own thoughts and solutions (Behrendt, 2006; Klonek et al., 2014, 2016; Wampold, 2015). To ensure a productive use of the leeway created, counselors should emphasize the value of the job seeker's contributions to the success of the counseling process (Behrendt, 2006; Grawe, 2004; Kanfer et al., 2001; Klonek et al., 2016; Wampold, 2015).

Based on these findings, we propose the following behaviors as potential subcomponents of the career counselor behavior category providing personalized support: (1) supporting the job seeker's core motives, (2) supporting his or her goals and needs, (3) showing patience, and (4) emphasizing the value of the job seeker's contributions to the counseling's success. We postulate:

Hypothesis 2: The counselor behavior category providing personalized support and its respective subcomponents speed up job seekers' reemployment.

Activating resources. The counselor behavior category "activating resources" promotes functional resources and ensuing job search behavior by empathetically encouraging, rewarding, and shaping proactive behavior on the part of the job seeker. While prompting and activating healthy actions of job seekers enhances general counseling effectiveness (Wampold, 2015), promoting job seekers' proactivity and job search skills increases reemployment success in particular (Kanfer et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2014). Many job seekers experience disappointing rejections in their hunt for a job. To sustain functional behavior despite failure, counselors should acknowledge the job seekers' first steps and any functional behavior (Gassmann & Grawe, 2006). With this positive reinforcement, counselors can sustain, build, and shape functional behavior (Estes, 1944; Grawe, 2004). Positive reinforcement works more effectively and sustainably than punishment (Azrin & Holz, 1966). If the counselor achieves that the job seeker activates his or her interpersonal resources to be harnessed in the job search reemployment will be promoted (Kanfer et al., 2001). The activation of functional behavior includes the strengthening of self-efficacy to implement those behaviors (Bandura, 1977; Grawe, 2004).¹ Specifically, job search self-efficacy predicts employment success (Kanfer et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2014): First, self-efficacy enhances the successful implementation of behaviors in general (Bandura, 1977); therefore, job search self-efficacy enforces successful reemployment behavior in particular (Guan et al.,

2014; Kanfer et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2014; Spurk, Kauffeld, Barthauer, & Heinemann, 2015). According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), self-efficacy is enhanced through verbal persuasion, vicarious success, personal accomplishments, and emotional arousal. To promote the job seekers' self-efficacy, counselors should strengthen job seeker's self-esteem and confidence via verbal persuasion or case reports of vicarious success (Behrendt, 2006; Grawe, 2007; Greif, Schmidt, & Thamm, 2010; Hawthorn & Alloway, 2009; Kanfer et al., 2001). In addition, counselors should focus on and recognize the job seeker's accomplishments and evoke relevant emotional experiences (Behrendt, 2006; Gassmann & Grawe, 2006; Grawe, 2004; Greif et al., 2010; Wampold, 2015). To validate and strengthen these positive emotional experiences, counselors should show empathy (Behrendt, 2006). By validating emotions, empathy activates the underlying motivational resources. Research indicates that therapists (Moyers & Miller, 2013) and counselors (Greif et al., 2010) who show empathy achieve better treatment outcomes and higher satisfaction regarding goal attainment (Gassmann & Grawe, 2006; Wampold, 2015).

Unemployment can lead to hopelessness, passivity, and depression (Paul & Moser, 2009). To positively cope with these impediments (Lipshits-Braziler, Gati, & Tatar, 2015) and sustain the proactivity that is crucial for success (Bloom et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2014), job seekers need encouraging activation. Therefore, counselors should focus on chances and change-oriented outlooks instead of problems (Smith & Grawe, 2005) and reframe the situation as an activating challenge instead of demoralizing fate (Ginevra, Pallini, Vecchio, Nota, & Soresi, 2016). To emotionally boost activation, counselors should show empathy for the job seekers' negative emotions and the underlying motivation for change.

Based on these theories and findings, we propose the following behaviors as potential subcomponents of the career counselor behavior category activating resources: (1) promoting self-efficacy, (2) recognizing accomplishments, (3) stimulating the experience of personal strengths, (4) showing empathy, and (5) framing problems as activating challenges. We postulate:

Hypothesis 3: The counselor behavior category activating resources and its respective subcomponents speed up job seekers' reemployment.

Method

To specify the counselor behaviors that underlie a high-quality counseling process, the three behavioral common factors of therapy success were transferred to the context of career counseling. The effect of the three proposed success-critical categories of career counselor behavior (Hypotheses 1–3) and their behavioral components on reemployment speed is tested in the field based on videotaped counseling sessions that were rated by trained scientific observers. These behavior ratings were examined as to whether they correlated with the counselors' success at reemploying their counselled job seekers over a period of 5 years.

Participants and Procedure

In 2015, the 40 active counselors in three Swiss job centers were offered participation in the study and were asked to provide one videotape of a personal counseling session. The career counselors were asked to choose a follow-up-counseling session with a counselee with average education level and without language barriers or other unusual job search difficulties. First counseling sessions are more formal than consecutive sessions and therefore were not included in the sample. As a reward for providing the videotape, participating counselors received a personal video feedback including a report with their personal scores in the career counselor behaviors. A total of 32 counselors (i.e., 80%) and their seven respective supervisors volunteered to participate in the study. Each of the counselors had one of their monthly counseling sessions videotaped. The career counseling sessions were mandatory

for job seekers who drew unemployment benefits. In these sessions, the job seekers' personal career counselor reviews the counselee's job search activities, discusses individual goals, progresses, challenges, and next steps, as well as potential support offers or potential penalties by the job centers. The counselees did not receive any reward for participating in this study. They freely consented prior to the videotaping. The acceptance rate was not captured but was in similar studies estimated to be higher than 99% (Behrendt et al., 2019). The data collection process was cleared by the job centers' juridical consultancy. The average duration of the counseling sessions was 33 min. On average, the 32 counselors were 47.8 years old ($SD = 9.5$), their counseling experience averaged 10.9 years ($SD = 6.7$), and 78.1% of them were women. On average, the 32 counseled job seekers were 38.6 years old ($SD = 13.3$), 46.9% of them were women, and 50.0% were Swiss, whereas 50.0% were foreigners.

Measures

Employment success was operationalized by the reemployment speed, measured by the officially recorded working days of receiving unemployment benefits before reemployment. This measure of employment success directly reflects economic costs: Unemployment insurances payed 22.2 million CHF (US\$22.4 million) in unemployment benefits per working day in 2014 to the Swiss job seekers (Staatssekretariat für Wirtschaft SECO, 2015). The macroeconomic situation was operationalized as the regional unemployment rate and controlled in the analysis.

Expert Raters

The counselors' behavior was rated by psychologists based on videotaped counseling sessions. To ensure objectivity and reliability, the Freiburg Counselor Behavior Rating Manual (Behrendt, 2013) was used to provide observable indicators and anchor examples for each of the 15 component behaviors proposed within the three counselor behavior categories (Table 1). The manual specifies a Valence Scale ranging from 1 = *negative* to 5 = *particularly positive* (e.g., unstructured to well-structured behavior) and a degree scale ranging from 1 = *superficial* to 5 = *particularly intensive* (e.g., superficial to particularly intensive explanations). Prior to the ratings, all five scientific raters had undergone a 10-day rater training program, and each rater had to achieve a personal interrater-reliability of $r_{\text{Pearson}} > .7$ with the manual developer's master ratings in two consecutive test ratings.

Working with transcripts, the first raters watched the videotaped sessions twice before they rated it. Subsequently, a second rater watched the video and revised each behavior rating to improve reliability. Receiving previously conducted ratings as a guideline reduced cognitive load and allowed a more reliable rating. To ensure that rating scores did not inflate as the session duration increased, the rating sum for each behavior was divided by the session's duration. To ensure intuitive understanding and maintain score comparability of behaviors with highly different occurrence probabilities, the scores were transformed into standardized percentiles.

Results

An explorative factor analysis (PCA) of the data with varimax rotation yielded a three-factor solution based on the scree test and the parallel test (O'Connor, 2000) that explained 61% of the variance with a significant Bartlett test ($p < .001$) and $KMO = .58$. The three-factor structure matches the three theoretically derived factors because all items significantly load on their expected factor at $r > .4$. Only the item "structuring the counseling process" additionally loaded slightly higher on the factor providing personalized support.

The interrater reliabilities were calculated based on blind reratings by different raters of a random sample of $n_{\text{rel}} = 7$ (i.e., 20%) counseling sessions of this study (Wirtz & Caspar, 2002). The average

Table 1. Freiburger Counselor Behavior Rating: Interrater Reliability, Observable Indicators, and Anchor Examples.

Item	Interrater Reliability ICC (3, 1)unjust	Observable Indicators for Positive Rating	Criteria for Rating (Valence vs. Degree Scale)	Anchor Example for Small Positive Valence or First Degree Rating
Providing structured guidance Structuring the counseling process	.74**	Clear thread of interventions provided prospectively (explanations in advance), ad hoc (current process management) and retrospectively (summaries and visualizations of the achievements)	Valence: comprehensiveness, clarity (for each of the three aspects)	Clear thread with visualization or summary of the results
Explaining the process	.85**	Explaining the effects of the counseling methods	Degree: detail, plausibility of the explanations (conclusive, not necessarily objectively true), relevance to the counseling issue	Short sentence to explain the method
Demonstrating that the process supports the jobseeker	.60°	Verbal and/or nonverbal communication, "We will manage this together" or "I am there for you"	Degree: detail, strength of imparting optimism regarding the success of the counseling, intensity of commitment to the jobseeker and his/her concern	"We will manage this together"
Showing professional competence	.91**	Explanations by the counselor regarding solutions, models or counseling approach	Valence: comprehensiveness, clarity, plausibility (conclusive, not necessarily objectively true)	Competent communication of an explanatory model
Showing competent process guidance	.57°	Fit of the intervention and clear thread of the intervention provided by the counselor	Valence: comprehensiveness, distinctness	One situation with the implementation of one remarkably competent approach
Conveying self-assurance	.88**	Nonverbal self-assurance of the counselor	Valence: comprehensiveness, distinctiveness	Steady visual contact, body tension, dedication, clear and confident voice
Providing personalized support Supporting core motives	.86**	Aligning the interventions with the jobseeker's core motives (ideal self)	Valence: self-centrality of the processed motives, strength of the solution-oriented support provided in the interventions	Not only working on concrete rational goals but on topics and questions that are highly significant to the job seeker
Supporting needs	.97***	Perceptible need of the jobseeker AND the counselor does not fulfill this (only negative ratings)	degree (only negative ratings): abrupt ignoring, intensity of communicating need	Weak need that is only addressed briefly and is not followed (only negative ratings)

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Item	Interrater Reliability ICC (3, 1)unjust	Observable Indicators for Positive Rating	Criteria for Rating (Valence vs. Degree Scale)	Anchor Example for Small Positive Valence or First Degree Rating
Showing patience	.73**	Nonverbal patience	Valence: comprehensiveness, distinctness	Perfectly calm, very attentive and enduring listening with no explicit intervention to calm down the jobseeker
Emphasizing jobseeker contributions	.81**	Clarifying former or current contributions the jobseeker makes to counseling	Degree: comprehensiveness, intensity of the jobseeker's contribution, intensity in increasing consciousness of the value of contributions	"Good idea"
Activating resources Promoting self-efficacy	.88**	Focusing on relevant strengths, reducing the anticipation of subjective difficulties or providing encouragement	Degree: detail, verbal persuasion, nonverbal persuasion, relevance to the jobseeker's issue	"You'll get there, you have managed similar situations previously."
Recognizing	.95***	Explicit verbal or nonverbal recognition	Degree: duration, verbal positivity, nonverbal positivity	"Yeah" (with a very confirming intonation)
Stimulating the experience of personal strengths	.85**	Stimulate the reexperience of a positive skill	Degree: detail, intensity of experience, the counselor's esteem	In short: "Please recall how you managed this at that time"
Showing empathy	.90**	Appropriate emotional reaction to the jobseeker's emotions or his/her description of an emotional situation	Valence: duration, intensity of emotions	"When I listen to you and put myself in your situation, I assume that you were totally annoyed. Am I right?"
Framing problems as challenges	.95***	Addressing problems and conveying an optimistic action orientation and drive	Valence: duration, intensity of attitude	"I can see that you are ready for action. Use this to convince the boss that you are not a shy person"

Note. ICC: nrel = 7 counseling sessions were completely reassessed.
° p < .1. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Table 2. Correlation of Career Counselor Behaviors With Speed of Reemployment.

Career Counselor Behavior (Category)	Correlation With Speed of Reemployment r_{Pearson}
Providing structured guidance	-.58***
Structuring the counseling process	-.37*
Explaining the process	-.23
Demonstrating that the process supports the jobseeker	-.28
Showing professional competence	-.22
Showing competent process guidance	-.42*
Conveying self-assurance	-.43*
Providing personalized support	-.19
Supporting core motives	-.23
Supporting needs	.13
Showing patience	-.14
Emphasizing jobseeker contributions	-.04
Activating resources	-.12
Promoting self-efficacy	-.05
Recognizing	-.27
Stimulating the experience of personal strengths	-.09
Showing empathy	.01
Framing problems as challenges	-.11

Note. Speed of employment was measured by days of unemployment benefits received before reemployment. $N = 32$ jobseekers who were counseled in $N = 32$ counseling sessions conducted by $N = 32$ counselors; please note that the confidence intervals of all reported correlations do overlap.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

reliability of the ratings of the 14 behaviors, the intraclass coefficient $ICC(3,1)_{\text{unjust}} = .86$, was excellent according to Cicchetti's (1994) criterion (below .40 = *poor*; .40–.59 = *fair*; .60–.74 = *good*; .75–1.00 = *excellent*). Eleven of the 15 behaviors were rated with excellent reliability, 3 with good reliability, and none with poor reliability. Intrarater reliability was calculated based on two counseling sessions that were reassessed by the same first rater 1 year after the first rating. The $ICC(3,1)_{\text{unjust}}$ indicates an excellent reliability for both rerated counseling sessions: $ICC_{\text{intra1}} = .93$ and $ICC_{\text{intra2}} = .94$.

For testing the career counselor behaviors as predictors of reemployment speed, correlational analyses were conducted using SPSS package 23. To investigate the number of days until reemployment as a function of counselor behavior, the scientific observers' behavior ratings for each counselor were correlated with the counselors' average success in reemploying their job seekers between 2010 and 2015. Job seekers whose counselor provided more structured guidance in the videotaped session received unemployment benefits for fewer days. The effect size of $r = -.58$ was large ($p < .001$; 95% confidence interval [CI]: $-.77 < r < -.29$). Hence, Hypothesis 1 was supported. When a counselor "provided more structured guidance" and was rated one quartile better by the scientific observers in that respect, the counselor's job seekers were reemployed 37.5 working days earlier on average. Swiss unemployment insurances pay 22.2 million CHF of benefits per working day to all Swiss job seekers. In consequence, an improvement of structured guidance by one quartile would amount to annual savings of 830.8 Mio CHF for Switzerland. The other two behavior categories, providing personalized support and activating resources were not significantly correlated with the reemployment speed (providing personalized support: $r = -.19$, $p = .30$, 95% CI: $-.51 < r < .17$; activating resources: $r = -.12$, $p = .51$, 95% CI: $-.45 < r < .24$). Given a conventional level of statistical significance, Hypotheses 2 and 3 were rejected. However, in terms of descriptive tendencies, the effect sizes were in the expected direction in that if the counselor provided more personalized support and activated resources more their job seekers received unemployment benefit for fewer days (Table 2).

A similar mixed picture applies to the correlations between the individual counselor behaviors and job seekers' speed of reemployment. The individual behaviors structuring the counseling process, "showing competent process guidance," and "conveying self-assurance" shortened the job seekers' unemployment to a medium to large degree and are statistically significant ($p < .05$) despite the small sample of 32 counseling sessions. Descriptively, the individual behaviors "explaining the process," "demonstrating that the process supports the job seeker," "showing professional competence," "supporting core motives," and "recognizing" had a perceptible effect on reemployment (all correlations between $-.29 < r < -.21$); however, they failed a conventional level of significance ($p > .05$). Finally, the individual behaviors "supporting needs," "showing patience," "emphasizing job seeker contributions," "promoting self-efficacy," "stimulating the experience of personal strengths," "showing empathy," and "framing problems as challenges" did not correlate at all or only to a trivial degree with the speed of job seekers' reemployment (all correlations between $-.15 < r < .14$).

Discussion

On the level of behavioral factors, counselors who "provide more structured guidance" speed up their job seeking clients' reemployment by more than 7 weeks. In contrast, counselors who provide better "personalized support" or those who more successfully "activate resources" do not significantly shorten the period of unemployment. On the one hand, these results confirm the importance of the common factors to create positive expectations in the job seeker (Grawe, 2004; Wampold, 2015) and highlight the importance of a competent (Ianiro et al., 2013; Wampold, 2015) and well-structured process (Grawe, 2004; Whiston et al., 2003) that facilitates job seekers' conscientiousness (Kanfer et al., 2001). On the other hand, the two common factors working alliance and activating resources (Grawe, 2004; Wampold, 2015) that strengthen personal commitment, proactivity, job search skills, and self-efficacy (Kanfer et al., 2001) were not confirmed to significantly lower time until reemployment in the current study. The participating job centers had been reinforcing a solution-oriented approach that focused on job seekers' personal support (Bloom et al., 2001; Meyer, 1995) and activating their resources (Bloom et al., 2001) for five years. This distinctive focus on personal support and activating resources—by way of a ceiling effect—could have restricted the range of observed behaviors that were supportive in a personalized or resource-activating manner, thereby concealing otherwise noticeable effects. Moreover, Whiston, Rossier, and Barón (2016) estimate a correlation of approximately $r = -.30$ between the quality of the working alliance and days of unemployment, a value contained in all of the three CIs of the factor–reemployment–correlations.

Beside the correlations of the coarse-grained behavior categories (i.e., factors) and days of unemployment, the fine-grained correlations of specific counselor behaviors and days of unemployment provide a more detailed picture: The counselor behaviors structuring the counseling process, showing competent process guidance, and "conveying self-assurance" significantly shortened the job seekers' period of unemployment. These effects were of medium to large size. Explaining the process, demonstrating that the process supports the job seeker, showing professional competence, supporting core motives, and recognizing perceptibly sped up reemployment but failed a conventional level of statistical significance. The remaining counselor behaviors we explored did not influence reemployment at all or only to a slight degree. To sum up results, the presented study confirms that career counselor behavior affects the speed at which job seekers find new employment. Thereby, the counselor's behavior category providing structured guidance can be considered an established component of process quality. The magnitude of these effects corresponds to high economic value, consistent with findings on the benefits and returns of counseling interventions (Dolton & O'Neill, 2002). The associated savings are highly likely to significantly surpass investments: More than 800 million CHF per year could be saved by improving counselors' behavior.

With regard to strengths and limitations of this study, the results' internal validity is augmented through state-of-the-art statistical methodology, objective outcome data, and behavioral observation with established reliability. Due to the relatively small sample ($N = 32$) and hence low statistical power, all CIs of the correlations between any counselor behavior and days of unemployment are wide, and additional existing relevant effects might have remained undetected. External validity is augmented by a field study approach; however, transferability to other job centers remains an open question. Furthermore, as counselor behaviors were observed and not manipulated, all findings are correlational; consequently, the findings are unable to establish that counselor behavior causally influenced the speed of reemployment.

Conclusions that amount to delivering a definite list of distinct career counselor behaviors that shorten the period of unemployment are impossible due to the explorative nature of this study that ventured into uncharted territory as well as due to the relatively small sample size. In this study, we spent available resources in favor of videotaping, transcribing, coding, and recoding of 32 counseling sessions, thereby being able to work with intersubjectively rated behavioral data rather than low-hanging but error-prone subjective reports of the counselors or the job seekers. By way of trade-off, the considerable effort of processing the counseling sessions amounted to relatively small statistical power. Given the explorative state of any research into individual counselor behaviors on career counseling success, we focused on discovering traces and overall categorial structure that may be followed up in future research rather than to test one or two behaviors with high statistical power.

As regards practical implications, career counselors are encouraged to invest their efforts in enhancing structured guidance of the job seekers especially by conveying personal competence, self-assurance, and providing a well-structured process. Accordingly, counselors should provide competent, clear, and plausible explanations, keep eye contact, body tension, speak with dedication and a clear and confident voice, as well as structure the process with a clear thread with prospective explanations, visualizations, and summaries. The resulting employment acceleration pays off. Supervisors should focus their behavioral assessments and related feedbacks on these specific behaviors to foster the counselors' personnel development. Quality manuals should provide structure and guidance to support counselors in doing so themselves. Furthermore, career counseling organizations such as job centers are encouraged to invest in their counselors' behavioral competence by behavior training and coaching that uses behavioral feedback (Fukink, Trienekens, & Kramer, 2011). Once specific success-critical behaviors have been replicated in further research, these behaviors can inform counselor selection, evaluation, and development.

The current study lends support to the value of detailed behavioral process analysis in the context of career counseling. The well-established common factors of psychotherapy effectiveness have been transferred and specified to the context of career counseling and thereby have taken in meta-analytical results on the antecedents of employment success. The study revealed that it is possible to reliably assess the proposed behavioral components of career counseling process quality in the form of video-based ratings by trained scientific observers. Further research is required on the Freiburger Counselor Behavior Rating manual to corroborate and perhaps improve its quality for measuring counselor behavior. Moreover, this study opens up many avenues for future empirical research and theory building. On the aggregated level of the behavioral factors that influence career counseling success, future research could sound out whether the three-factor structure replicates or needs to be modified by subtracting or adding factors both in the same and in different counseling contexts. If the three-factor structure holds, it might be refined by dropping or adding individual counselor behaviors.

On the fine-grained level of individual counselor behaviors, the findings likely are not the final words on this issue. The present results provide a starting point for future research, in that some of the individual counselor behaviors that were examined in this study could probably be dropped from consideration (more likely those that in this study did not correlate with reemployment), while other behaviors' operationalization could be refined and new behaviors be added.

In general, similar studies need to be conducted in the career counseling context but with new and larger samples as well as in additional counseling contexts such as partnership and marriage counseling. Future studies should also experimentally vary aspects of counselor behavior to examine and establish causality and to investigate the theoretically proposed mediating variables such as job seekers' conscientiousness, counselor credibility, the job seekers' expectation that the counseling will help, job seekers' cooperation in the process and job seekers' job search engagement. Furthermore, experimental settings could evaluate interventions that foster important counselor behavior and consequently increase reemployment success. Finally, examining other dependent variables such as client well-being, client satisfaction with the counseling and even counselor's job satisfaction would help painting a differentiated picture.

Conclusions

All over the world, almost 200 million individuals suffer from the harmful consequences of unemployment, over 100 000 in Switzerland (Statista, 2019). Counseling process quality has been shown to speed up job seekers' reemployment. This study has started to reveal a set of counselor behaviors to be components of process quality that speed reemployment by more than 7 weeks. The proposed model and the resulting findings should stimulate further research on common factors of career counseling success and guide investments in process quality to promote reemployment, realize economic savings, and improve the life of the unemployed.

Authors' Note

Peter Behrendt of Freiburg Institut has worked as a consultant for the State Department of Economy and Labor in Solothurn and delivered training to improve process quality and counselor relationship behavior after completion of the study. The State Department of Economy and Labor in Solothurn provided access to the field data. The department heads were involved in the study design and encouraged their counselors to voluntarily participate in the study. In exchange for the funding, the department and all participating counselors received feedback on the results of the study. The department was not involved in data analysis and interpretation, the decision to publish the results, or the publication process. Full publication rights were granted prior to the research.

Acknowledgments

We appreciate the extensive support of the State Department of Economy and Labor in Solothurn, Switzerland, that enabled the research and provided comprehensive field access. We also appreciate the engaged and competent project management by Meike Tertocha during the field study and the feedback and suggestions by Miriam Rennung and Birgit Schyns on earlier versions of this article.


Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The execution of the study was supported by third-party funds of the State Department of Economy and Labor in Solothurn, Switzerland.

ORCID iD

Peter Behrendt  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0095-3517>

Note

1. While providing structured guidance aims at enhancing the job seeker's counseling-focused expectation that his or her active participation in this process will help ("process-efficacy"), activating resources aims at enhancing the job seeker's self-focused expectation that his or her personal job search behavior will succeed ("self-efficacy").

References

- Azrin, N. H., & Holz, W. C. (1966). Punishment. In W. K. Honig (Ed.), *Operant behavior: Areas of research and application* (pp. 380–447). New York, NY: Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, *84*, 191–215.
- Behrendt, P. (2006). Wirkung und Wirkfaktoren von psychodramatischem Coaching—Eine experimentelle Evaluationsstudie. *Zeitschrift für Psychodrama und Soziometrie*, *5*, 59–87.
- Behrendt, P. (2013). *Freiburger counselor behavior rating manual*. Unpublished manual.
- Behrendt, P., Göritz, A. S., & Heuer, K. (2019, this issue). Career counseling process quality promotes reemployment. *Journal of Career Development*.
- Behrendt, P., Matz, S., & Göritz, A. S. (2017). An integrative model of leadership behavior. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *28*, 229–244.
- Behrendt, P., Mühlberger, C., Göritz, A. S., & Jonas, E. (submitted). Relationship, purpose, and change—An integrative model of coach behavior. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*.
- Bloom, H., Hill, C. J., & Riccio, J. (2001). *Modeling the performance of welfare-to-work programs: The effects of program management and services, economic environment, and client characteristics* (MDRC Working Papers on research methodology). New York, NY: MDRC.
- Cicchetti, D. V. (1994). Guidelines, criteria, and rules of thumb for evaluating normed and standardized assessment instruments in psychology. *Psychological Assessment*, *6*, 284–290.
- Deb, P., Gallo, W. T., Ayyagari, P., Fletcher, J. M., & Sindelar, J. L. (2011). The effect of job loss on overweight and drinking. *Journal of Health Economics*, *30*, 317–327.
- Dolton, P., & O'Neill, D. (2002). The long-run effects of unemployment monitoring and work-search programs: Experimental evidence from the United Kingdom. *Journal of Labor Economics*, *20*, 381–403.
- Estes, W. K. (1944). An experimental study of punishment. *Psychological Monographs*, *57*, i–40. doi:10.1037/h0093550
- Farrington, D. P., Gallagher, B., Morley, L., St.Ledger, R. J., & West, D. J. (1986). Unemployment, school leaving, and crime. *The British Journal of Criminology*, *26*, 335–356.
- Fay, R. (1996). *Enhancing the effectiveness of active labour market policies: Evidence from programme evaluations in OECD countries* (OECD labour market and social policy occasional papers no. 18). Europe: OECD.
- Fergusson, D. M., Horwood, L. J., & Woodward, L. J. (2001). Unemployment and psychosocial adjustment in young adults: Causation or selection? *Social Science & Medicine*, *53*, 305–320.
- Fukkink, R. G., Trienekens, N., & Kramer, L. J. C. (2011). Video feedback in education and training: Putting learning in the picture. *Educational Psychology Review*, *23*, 45–63.
- Gassmann, D., & Grawe, K. (2006). Allgemeine Veränderungsmechanismen: Die Beziehung zwischen Problemmaktivierung und Ressourcenaktivierung in erfolgreichen und erfolglosen therapeutischen Interaktionen [General change mechanisms: The relation between problem activation and resource activation in successful and unsuccessful therapeutic interactions]. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, *13*, 1–11.
- Gessnitzer, S., & Kauffeld, S. (2015). The working alliance in coaching: Why behavior is the key to success. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *51*, 177–197.
- Ginevra, M. C., Pallini, S., Vecchio, G. M., Nota, L., & Soresi, S. (2016). Future orientation and attitudes mediate career adaptability and decidedness. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *95*, 102–110.
- Grawe, K. (2004). *Psychologische Therapie [Psychological therapy]*. Seattle, WA: Hogrefe.

- Grawe, K. (2007). *Neuropsychotherapy: How the neurosciences inform effective psychotherapy. Counseling and psychotherapy investigating practice from scientific, historical, and cultural perspectives*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Grawe, K., Donati, R., & Bernauer, F. (1994). *Psychotherapie im Wandel: Von der Konfession zur Profession* [Psychotherapy changing from confession to profession]. Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe.
- Greif, S., Schmidt, F., & Thamm, A. (2010). *The rating of eight coaching success factors—Observation manual*. Retrieved August 4, 2015, from http://www.home.uni-osnabrueck.de/sgreif/downloads/Rating_of_Coaching_Success_Factors_Version4-May_2010.pdf
- Guan, Y., Guo, Y., Bond, M. H., Cai, Z., Zhou, X., Xu, J., . . . Ye, L. (2014). New job market entrants' future work self, career adaptability and job search outcomes: Examining mediating and moderating models. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 85*, 136–145.
- Hawthorn, R., & Alloway, J. (2009). *Smoothing the path: Advice about learning and work for disadvantaged adults*. London, England: City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development and the CfBT Education Trust.
- Heppner, M. J., & Heppner, P. P. (2003). Identifying process variables in career counseling: A research agenda. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 62*, 429–452.
- Heppner, P. P., & Dixon, D. N. (1981). A review of the interpersonal influence process in counseling. *Personnel and Guidance Journal, 59*, 542–550.
- Hooley, T. (2014). *Die Evidenzbasierung lebensbegleitender Beratung—Ein Wegweiser zu zentralen Forschungsergebnissen für eine effektive Politik und Praxis* (ELGPN Tools No. 3). Jyväskylä, Finland: European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network.
- Ianiro, P. M., Schermuly, C. C., & Kauffeld, S. (2013). Why interpersonal dominance and affiliation matter: An interaction analysis of the coach-client relationship. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice, 6*, 25–46.
- Kanfer, R., Wanberg, C. R., & Kantrowitz, T. M. (2001). Job search and employment: A personality-motivational analysis and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*, 837–855.
- Karver, M. S., Handelsman, J. B., Fields, S., & Bickman, L. (2005). A theoretical model of common process factors in youth and family therapy. *Mental Health Services Research, 7*, 35–51.
- Klonek, F. E., Lehmann-Willenbrock, N., & Kauffeld, S. (2014). Dynamics of resistance to change: A sequential analysis of change agents in action. *Journal of Change Management, 14*, 334–360.
- Klonek, F. E., Wunderlich, E., Spurk, D., & Kauffeld, S. (2016). Career counseling meets motivational interviewing: A sequential analysis of dynamic counselor–client interactions. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 94*, 28–38.
- Lipshits-Braziler, Y., Gati, I., & Tatar, M. (2015). Strategies for coping with career indecision: Concurrent and predictive validity. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 91*, 170–179.
- Liu, S., Huang, J. L., & Wang, M. (2014). Effectiveness of job search interventions: A meta-analytic review. *Psychological Bulletin, 140*, 1009–1041.
- Meyer, B. D. (1995). Lessons from the US unemployment insurance experiments. *Journal of Economic Literature, 33*, 91–131.
- Moyers, T. B., & Miller, W. R. (2013). Is low therapist empathy toxic? *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 27*, 878–884.
- O'Connor, B. P. (2000). SPSS and SAS programs for determining the number of components using parallel analysis and Velicer's MAP test. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments, & Computers, 32*, 396–402.
- Paul, K. I., & Moser, K. (2009). Unemployment impairs mental health: Meta-analyses. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 74*, 264–282.
- Shaw, B. F., Elkin, I., Yamaguchi, J., Olmsted, M., Vallis, T. M., Dobson, K. S., . . . Imber, S. D. (1999). Therapist competence ratings in relation to clinical outcome in cognitive therapy of depression. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 67*, 837–846.

- Smith, E. C., & Grawe, K. (2005). Welche therapeutischen Mechanismen funktionieren wann? [Which therapeutic mechanisms work when? A step towards the formulation of empirically validated guidelines for therapists' session-to-session decisions]. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, *12*, 112–123.
- Spurk, D., Kauffeld, S., Barthauer, L., & Heinemann, N. S. R. (2015). Fostering networking behavior, career planning and optimism, and subjective career success: An intervention study. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *87*, 134–144.
- Staatssekretariat für Wirtschaft SECO. (2015). *Vereinbarung RAV/LAM/KAS—Wirkungsmessung 2014*. Retrieved January 30, 2016, from www.tcnnet.seco.admin.ch/
- Statista. (2019). *Anzahl der Arbeitslosen weltweit von 2010 bis 2020 (in Millionen)*. Retrieved May 13, 2019, from <http://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/76156/umfrage/anzahl-der-arbeitslosen-weltweit/>
- Theeboom, T., Beersma, B., & van Vianen, A. E. M. (2014). Does coaching work? A meta-analysis on the effects of coaching on individual level outcomes in an organizational context. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, *9*, 1–18.
- Tschacher, W., Junghan, U. M., & Pfammatter, M. (2014). Towards a taxonomy of common factors in psychotherapy—Results of an expert survey. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, *21*, 82–96.
- Wampold, B. E. (2001). *The great psychotherapy debate: Models, methods, and findings*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Wampold, B. E. (2015). How important are the common factors in psychotherapy? An update. *World Psychiatry*, *14*, 270–277.
- Whiston, S. C. (2002). Application of the principles. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *30*, 218–237.
- Whiston, S. C., Brecheisen, B. K., & Stephens, J. (2003). Does treatment modality affect career counseling effectiveness? *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *62*, 390–410.
- Whiston, S. C., Rossier, J., & Barón, P. M. H. (2016). The working alliance in career counseling. *Journal of Career Assessment*, *24*, 591–604.
- Whiston, S. C., Sexton, T. L., & Lasoff, D. L. (1998). Career-intervention outcome: A replication and extension of Oliver and Spokane (1988). *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, *45*, 150–165.
- Wirtz, M., & Caspar, F. (2002). *Beurteilerübereinstimmung und Beurteilerreliabilität: Methoden zur Bestimmung und Verbesserung der Zuverlässigkeit von Einschätzungen mittels Kategoriensystemen und Ratingskalen*. Göttingen, Germany: Hogrefe.

Author Biographies

Peter Behrendt is psychologist and researcher, consultant, trainer and certified coach at the Freiburg Institut, Germany. He researches on success-relevant behavior in coaching, career counseling, leadership, innovation and customer service. His research studies received honors at the German Coaching Award in 2012 and 2014. His special interest is on objective behavior rating methods and the prediction of objective success data and KPIs. Outside of work, he spends time with his family and his three wonderful girls. Beside that, he is engaged for democratic innovation, reinvigoration and the strengthening of democratic values.

Katharina Heuer is psychologist, consultant, and research associate at the Technische Universität Braunschweig, Germany. She researches on behavior and interactions that are critical for team success. She is also interested in coaching dyads and combines behavioral and survey data for her studies. In her leisure time she is a lot into nature and hiking. Her favorite trail is the way of St. Jacques.

Anja S. Göritz is a full professor of Occupational and Consumer Psychology. Her research is on web-based data collection and on well-being at the workplace. She operates an online panel geared at collecting data for scientific studies at www.wisopanel.net. Outside of work, she enjoys spending time with her family.