

## **EUROPEAN STUDIES ON INEQUALITIES AND SOCIAL COHESION**

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The European dimension of above mentioned phenomena should be taken into account by the contributors. Comparative approaches will be treated with specific attention.

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## **Editorial note**

„European Studies on Inequalities and Social Cohesion” has been established in the year 2005. The idea was to create a forum for dissemination of results of the research project PROFIT (Policy Responses Overcoming Factors in the Intergenerational Transmission of Inequalities) funded by the European Commission under the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme. The project was realized by the international consortium lead by the Institute of Sociology, University of Lodz. Journal Board and Editorial Board are constituted by the scholars from nine countries and twelve universities who took part in this successful research project. Since the beginning, we were publishing four volumes a year containing outcomes of the study in national and comparative articles, up to the termination of the project in the year 2007.

The current volume, as well as two forthcoming ones, will provide an opportunity to present the results of other research attempts undertaken by the scholars from the Institute of Sociology, University of Lodz in collaboration with partners from various universities and various countries.

However, we do not plan to limit the scope of the journal in any other way than via taking care of the quality of the articles and their relevance to the general subject area. We are open to any proposals from the academic community which will meet the guidelines for the authors. We hope to retain the international character of the journal and work hard in order to receive positive acclamation from an academic community.

We are pleased to invite potential contributors to read the rules regarding submission of the articles and not to hesitate to provide us with outcomes of their academic work.

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## **Biography Analysis on the Empirical Base of Autobiographical Narratives: How to Analyse Autobiographical Narrative Interviews – Part two**

### **SHORT DESCRIPTION**

In its second part, this text explicates the action scheme of autobiographical narrative interviewing, and it informs about the most general research steps of doing qualitative social research on the empirical base of narrative interviewing: text sort analysis, structural description, analytical abstraction, contrastive comparison, and developing theoretical models. All these steps of research, especially the first three for the realization of a single case analysis, are explicated and demonstrated on the empirical base of one autobiographical interview. The single case analysis of this interview especially addresses the intriguing phenomenon of biographical work.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To make the reader capable to conduct autobiographical narrative interviews.
2. To enable the reader to pursue the arc of work of scientific and/or professional biography analysis.
3. To let the reader understand the special epistemic importance of structural description and how it can be documented.
4. To let the reader understand how the arc of research work leads to analytical outcomes, which are building blocks for the construction of theoretical models. (The specific theoretical building block that comes out of our single case analysis and out of its incipient comparison with other cases is biographical work).

## **1. Extempore autobiographical story telling in the setting of the autobiographical narrative interview**

In the first part of the module – and also in the introductory module – we recognized that extempore autobiographical story telling could be very useful in counselling processes of vocational rehabilitation. During the last thirty years qualitative social research in sociology and educational science developed the special format of the autobiographical narrative interview. This interview format is sensible, if the researcher focuses on biographical processes of special relevancy for the study of interesting social worlds (e.g., professional social worlds as those of social work or psychological counselling), on problems of the life course (as to what would be the impact of a severe chronic illness on the life course of an afflicted person) and/or on social problems (e.g., being long-term unemployed because of a severe chronic illness, being in a process of occupational self-alienation and of losing one's work position, etc.), or on collective social processes in which biographical experiences and dynamics of identity development or impediments are prominent (e.g., social movements). The basic reason for the enactment of the autobiographical narrative interview is the assumption that social reality is not just experienced and bestowed with meaning by individual actors with their unique life histories, but in addition that it is produced, is supported and kept in force, is endured with pain and suffered, is protested at and turned over or even destroyed as well as it is gradually changed by individual actors with their personal life histories and involved biographical identity developments. There is the additional assumption that social reality more basically consists of social processes and less importantly of stable social structures since they are products of social processes and changing permanently. The two basic assumptions hold true for the production and changes of small segments of social reality, as in the development of a family or breaking away from it, in the course of a friendship relationship or the unfolding or deterioration of a work team, but this also holds true for the change of larger social contexts like the state of a national society (e.g. by a war conflict), the unfolding of a social and/or cultural movement, the establishment or reconstruction of a professional social world and its discourse arena, etc. There is a very close relationship between the unfolding of individual and collective identities; their "histories" and identity work are very much linked to each other. Thus, taking individual life histories and analysing them is a promising avenue to social reality.

### **1.1. Conditions for Autobiographical Narrative Interviewing; Scientific vs. Professional Interviewers**

But one has to take into account that letting somebody tell her or his life history is not a commonly known and public accepted type of interviewing. Instead it reveals very private aspects of the prospective informant, and therefore its enactment does not fit the routine proceedings of institutional, organizational or media localities and their logic of time. Therefore an autobiographical narrative interview should be done at the home place or in the protected inner office of the informant or the interviewer, if she or he is identical with the professional counsellor, or at least at an anonymous and, at the same time, somewhat protected park bench or place in a restaurant. And, in addition, the informant should have the feeling that it is just her or his time of minimally one and a half hours up to three or even more hours (and not the time of the work organization or public institution, where the informant is trained, counselled, treated or working in) that she or he is using up, e.g. preferably a time span in the late afternoon or evening after the work day or at the week end. Otherwise she or he would not find the inner tranquillity to embark on such a *recherche du temps perdu* (Marcel Proust), since such an extempore autobiographical narration of personal experiences is not only time consuming, but in addition personally engrossing, emotionally moving and intellectually challenging.

One must also take into account that the usual ways connected to standard types of interviewing as to how and where to get informants are not an option. Prospective informants of autobiographical narrative interviews cannot be picked from the files of the local residents' registration office by a random generator. One reason for this is, that the number of informants in a study through autobiographical narrative interviews must be extremely reduced compared with the number of informants in statistically representative random surveys, since the material produced in such an interview, the autobiographical narrative rendering, is so complex and must be studied as a uniquely shaped single case taking into account both form and content of the autobiographical narrative and the evolvement of personal identity expressed by it. Another reason for the non-viability of a random selection of interviewees is that prospective informants must be selected and contracted by criteria of certain biographical (and therefore quite personal or even quite unique) features one cannot make out in official social-statistical data files and the random type selection from it. The approached prospective informant must have the understanding that she or he was individually picked because she or he has to offer very specific biographical (experiential) data, which acknowledge and underline her or his personal uniqueness. Otherwise the establishment of the

autobiographical trust relationship between the two partners of the interview as the essential condition for autobiographical narration would not be possible. Involved in this is the mutual sharing of the two interaction postulates (a) of the analytical relevance of the informant's life history in its personal uniqueness for the ongoing research as well as (b) of the trustworthiness of the interviewer in respecting this personal uniqueness by its careful consideration as the empirical ground for new creative generalizations for professional or scientific theorizing and by protecting the strict anonymity of the informant at the same time. Therefore, the interviewer must plausibly explain to the prospective informant how she or he accomplished this special pick by talking to knowledgeable persons, who would know about the specific and very personal qualification of the prospective informant for the planned autobiographical narrative. These intermediate, contact-establishing persons, who as first instances would be factually approached in order to get contacts to persons topically relevant for the research could be friends or acquaintances of the prospective informant, and sometimes they could even be former participants, i.e. interviewees, of the ongoing study themselves; this would then be a felicitous outcome of the ethnographic snowball system of knowledgeable persons who freely and competently refer to additional knowledgeable persons.

Contrary to this first snowball way of recruiting the interviewees, the selection of prospective informants could also be – even much faster and more effectively – accomplished through the support of a work, service or counselling institution that specifically deals with a clear-cut circle of persons, which is defined by characteristic features of suffering or competencies and which is therefore also of special interest for the ongoing qualitative research. In a study on biographical counselling in vocational rehabilitation situations such a research-supporting contact institution could be a service organisation for the professional counselling of rehabilitation clients. Together with the researcher one of the counsellors would sift through the file of clients of vocational rehabilitation in her or his service organization and select clients with topically interesting features (e.g., clients with a strong interest in vocational rehabilitation vs. clients who have lost the courage to believe in their return to the world of occupational work). But one has to take into account that the clients selected for the conduct of an autobiographical narrative interview could feel hierarchically processed and controlled by the counselling organization, which quite often also is the provider, the door opener, the distributor, the mediator or assigner of the material and educational resources that the clients would like to receive. Therefore it could happen, albeit the researcher has sincerely assured not to forward any information from the interview, let alone the whole interview, to the counselling institution, that the client as prospective informant would not feel free to embark on an extempore narration and recollection of her or his own

authentic autobiographical experiences, since she or he would be afraid that some of the contents of such a free autobiographical rendering would be against the preferences of the counselling institution. The approached client could then fear to be excluded from the benefits of the service organization, in case the latter would gain knowledge about those disliked contents of the client's autobiographical rendering.

It would be almost impossible to successfully fight such a mistrust of prospective clients, in case it would have actually been elicited, even if the researcher thoroughly assured strict anonymity and identity protection of the informant. If and when mistrust becomes dominant in the awareness of the prospective informant, the researcher wouldn't be able to get open autobiographical narrative renderings proper from her or him. Then the researcher should take recourse to the slower snowball system of personal references and avenues to possible informants starting with questioning friends and acquaintances, whether they would know persons with social and personal features topically relevant in the planned or ongoing research project. Of course a professional counsellor undertaking such a study of biographical processes would receive the necessary system of first references to possible interview partners almost automatically from her or his colleagues in one's own or in – preferably – similar institutions. (Of course, on the other hand, the latter could turn out to be practically difficult, since the colleagues could be concerned about critical views of their clients). – In case the counsellor doesn't plan a broader research, but would just like to deepen the counselling process of her or his singular client through an analysis of her or his individual life history on the empirical base of an autobiographical narrative interview, she or he would just invite this client to participate in a narrative interview, and would assure her or him that any problematic personal information from the interview would not be given away (and, of course, the interview not forwarded as a whole) to other professionals, especially those involved in the case management, to the hierarchical control unit of the institution or to other organizations, especially those involved in the case management.

The following sketch how to conduct an autobiographical narrative interview is mainly focused on scientific researchers, who utilize the data collecting method of autobiographical narrative interviewing, since it was developed and practiced in the context of qualitative social research in sociology and educational science during the last thirty years. But the following short description of the action scheme and the communicative format of autobiographical narrative interviewing as it is used by social scientists holds also true for its utilization by professional counsellors. Of course there are some differences in the social arrangement of the action scheme of interviewing,

whether it is enacted by a qualitative researcher or whether by a professional counsellor.

Some of the problems of establishing and keeping the social arrangement of autobiographical narrative interviewing are more moderate for the professional than for the scientist. A professional counsellor doesn't have the search problem how to find and get in contact with informants, since she or he can approach them amongst her or his clients or amongst those of professional colleagues. A professional counsellor doesn't have to work under the risk not to be able to provide counselling or even psychotherapeutic help if she or he trespasses the narrow confines of the rules of restraint and modesty of a one-shot narrative interviewing session, e.g. not to criticise the informant, not to admonish her or him, not to argue or even quarrel with her or him as well as not to break her or his personal defence system, since a professional counsellor has established a longer-lasting professional work contract with the client and possibly even a therapeutic relationship, on the social base of which she or he would have the chance to repair mistakes of such a trespassing in the following sessions.

On the other hand, a professional counsellor is also confronted with additional problems of autobiographical interviewing, and some of the tasks of establishing and keeping the social arrangement of the interview are even more difficult to handle for her or him than for a scientific researcher. She or he has to fight the risk to oblige the client by moral constraint – or even to force the client by means of institutional procedure – to accept the task of autobiographical story telling. (It seems so easy to utilize one's power position in such a professional and/or institutional procedure). In addition, there is always the danger to mix certain rules of counselling and communicative psychotherapy with the very different rules of autobiographical narrative interviewing, especially those of communicative restraint for the interviewer just to elicit the informant's own topical line of self-evolving rendering, especially of autobiographical narration, and otherwise to keep one's mouth shut. E.g., the typical psychotherapeutic strategy of conversational mirroring, i.e. of permanent descriptive repetition and reformulation of the emotional states that the client reveals during the course of her or his problem presentation, would hinder the dynamic unfolding of the scheme of extempore narration and would distort the spirit of getting personally engrossed in narrative recollection. To avoid such a mixing might be quite difficult for a professional counsellor, since she or he developed a professional routine habit to use classical psychotherapeutic conversation strategies (which, of course, can be very productive in true counselling or psychotherapeutic sessions). Finally the professional counsellor is much more prone to break the rule of strict confidence and to share her or his knowledge extracted from a narrative interview with colleagues in one's own and in other social assistance institutions, since she or he works together with them on a daily base and the

others might know about the enactment of an autobiographical narrative interview with a certain client and would ask targeted person-specific questions. The sharing of problematic personal information from an autobiographical narrative interview understood as confidential by the client/interviewee would be a severe ethical fault, since the narrative interviewer is ethically bound not to give away any person-specific biographical information gained in a narrative interview, which the informant would like to confine to the trust relationship with her or his professional counsellor. (Of course, on the other hand, a professional counsellor could – and should – always share with her or his colleagues general insights into biographically crystallized and sedimentary problems of her or his group of clients).

For both types of interviewers, for the professional counsellor and for the scientific researcher, I will now start to shortly describe the communicative format of the autobiographical narrative interview. But it might now be understandable, that the following sketch will be explicitly addressed just to the case of the scientific researcher and not to the case of the professional counsellor. I would like to focus just on the rules and procedures of the autobiographical narrative interview, and I do not want to mix them with rules and procedures of professional counselling or psychotherapy. In case I would explicitly address the interview work of professional counsellors and psychotherapist, too, I would be forced permanently to differentiate between the two sets of rules and procedures, and this would be time-consuming. Professional readers will be able to help themselves to contextualize the rules and procedures of narrative interviewing within the cosmos of professional rules, procedures and practices. The rules and procedures of the autobiographical narrative interview are features of a scientific mode of data collection although they can be utilized in professional counselling practice, too. Nobody should transgress the confines of restraint (to just let the informant tell, describe, argue without interference) as well as of confidence (to keep the anonymity of the informant and to respect her or his personal uniqueness) that are essential for the social arrangement and the action scheme of the narrative interview. The professional counsellor is ethically bound to these confines, too.

## **1.2. Contact and Negotiation Phase, Explaining the Modus Operandi to the Informant**

Normally, at least in the case of the scientific narrative interview, the contact and negotiation work for the autobiographical narrative interview will be split into two engagements: a first communicative contact by letter and/or phone or by a short introductory visit as well as a second negotiation phase at the very

beginning of the interview session itself. For the sake of brevity, I will lump these two engagements together in the following sketch; the split of contact and negotiation activities according to these two engagements and contact situations should be flexibly decided on and circumspectly performed according to the specific nature of the case and situation. But one should take into consideration that the first interactive engagement should just have the function to open up the contact, give a first idea of the task of autobiographical story telling and set a first step for establishing a mutual trust relationship. It should be quite short and protected against the possible tendency of a prospective interviewer to communicatively blurt out and to start immediately to tell her or his life history, when and where there is no proper time and space for it, or to give an elaborate introductory rehearsal of it. Such a premature and partial autobiographical rendering before the main interview session would irritate and distort the autobiographical rendering of the informant within the main interview session. – The action scheme and the communicative format of the autobiographical narrative interview now are as follows:

The researcher tells the prospective informant about her or his research project without scientific terminology and theoretical hypotheses; it should be just the personal story how the researcher developed the idea to get in contact with the interview partner; this is the personal story that the researcher can reciprocally contribute to the communicative situation of the interview. The researcher explains that, from her or his perspective, the life historical experiences of the prospective informant seem to be pivotal for her or his research project. The informant should not assume – the researcher assures – that her or his life history would not be important at all. To the contrary, each autobiographical narrative in its authenticity, in the sense and so far as the respective informant would have been personally entangled within social processes topical to the research and the respective unfolding of life historical problems connected with them, would be of central importance for the research process. Social science generalizations would only be sound on the basis of detailed empirical primary material, as an autobiographical narrative interview would perfectly generate it. If the informant would ask her- or himself, whether the narrative process of presentation should be more or less detailed, the researcher would always prefer the more detailed alternative, since more details would mean sounder generalizations, which are better empirically grounded. The researcher – so she or he explains – would be interested exactly in the unique life history of the informant with all its specific personal features and their combination. But at the same time she or he, the researcher, would mask everything in the narrative rendering that could possibly lead to individually identify the prospective informant.

In most cases of interview negotiation the prospective informant reacts to the proposal of the researcher in a positive manner. This is the beginning of the necessary communicative trust relationship in the interview situation. Now the interviewer starts to explain the modus operandi of the narrative interview to the informant. A central concern in the data collection of the research process would be not to cut the red thread of autobiographical story telling of the informant. Exactly her or his perspective and relevancies would be of interest and not those of the researcher. Therefore she or he, the researcher, would ask the informant to tell her or his life history from the beginning up to the present. However, what the beginning of her or his life history would be, remains for the informant to decide strictly by her- or himself: it could be her or his birth date, it could be the first personal remembrance, it could be a central episode in the life of the parents or even the grandparents, it could be her or his entering school or the onset of a central problem in childhood that was difficult to control. Then, when he or she, the informant, had gotten started, the interviewer would not want to interrupt the informant with her or his own thematic questions, since this would draw the informant away from her or his own perspective and understanding of her or his life history. The interviewer would just attempt to be a good listener. Therefore she or he would restrict her- or himself just to look at the informant and to listen carefully – generally without asking questions or giving commentaries. Instead, she or he would show interest, only nod in order to show her or his understanding and would only ask topical questions, if and when she or he could not be a good listener anymore, and this would mean: if she or he would not be able anymore to follow up the narrative rendering of the informant.

The researcher as interviewer goes on with the explanation of the modus operandi of the interview: In order to be a really good listener, she or he, the researcher, would like to tape-record the autobiographical extempore story telling of the informant. In case an interviewer has to instantly write down what an informant would tell, she or he, the interviewer, would be distracted from the listening process, and there would be many pieces of important information one would not get correctly, or these parts would get lost altogether. Even during the period of the actually ongoing interview process the informant could still decide to keep the taped interview and not to leave it with the interviewer, if she or he would develop a feeling of uneasiness with giving away the original voice of the interview. Then, in case of the informant's decision not to give away the recorded cassette to the interviewer, she or he, the interviewer, would afterwards write down from her or his own memory and in her or his perspective the content of the interview. But of course, contrary to this, the interviewer would very much prefer to be allowed to keep the tape, since the perspective of the informant could then be taken into regard much more carefully, the objectivity

and density of information would be much higher and the empirical base for generalizations would be much better.

The researcher and interviewer still adds to her or his explanation of the *modus operandi* of the narrative interview: During the listening process he, the interviewer, would jot down just a few notes at especially interesting points of the informant's presentation process – at points, where the interviewer would like to know even a bit more than what the informant so interestingly alluded to, and sometimes a background picture (an additional story, a description of a situation or an explanation) might become important in order to better understand an obviously important situation or a biographical process that the interviewer hinted at. But those points of narrative rendering of the informant that would elicit a desire in the interviewer as listener for additional information would not mean that he or she, the interviewer, would not be able anymore to easily follow up the line of presentation of the informant, i.e. not be able anymore to be a good listener. And therefore the interviewer would not interrupt the informant; instead, she or he, the interviewer, would just take a few notes in order to ask her or him later. The latter would happen, when she or he, the informant, would have finished her or his commencing autobiographical rendering, i.e. her or his main narrative as the first part of the narrative interview. This point of finishing the main story would be called “narrative coda”. Through the very occurrence of the coda both parties would know very easily, when the first narrative rendering, i.e. the main narrative, of the informant would be finished, since such a coda as a communicative demonstration marker would be quite obvious. – The researcher as interviewer closes her or his explanation of the *modus operandi* of the interview: With such an additional questioning part the interview would last one and half hour up to three hours. If there would not be enough time to carry through the whole interview within one session, one could split the interview into two halves and could go on with the interview's second part a few days later. (It would be easy for her or him, the informant, to remember the first part).

### **1.3. The Phase of the Main Story**

After the researcher has explained the *modus operandi* of the autobiographical narrative interview to the informant, the latter will start with her or his narrative rendering. In case the informant still is too strictly oriented towards a laconic way of presentation as it is typical of a written “official” curriculum vitae, at a last time without severe communicative difficulties the interviewer can interrupt her or him immediately after she or he has finished the first or second narrative unit (i.e. after two to five minutes) and ask her or him to

tell about her or his sisters, brothers and/or family of origin and the childhood memories of play situations. In reaction to such an inserted “repair” request the level of detailing of the autobiographical presentation would normally rise considerably. Only in situations of presentation, in which the interviewer is not able anymore to follow up the line of presentation of the informant and to function as a good listener who understands the sequential logic of the evolving events and social processes (e.g., if she or he doesn’t know, who is being talked about and what kind of event constellation or situation it was where the narrator as story carrier was involved in), she or he should be allowed to interrupt the flow of the narrator’s presentation and ask for clarification. Any really topical question, which sets a new external theme stemming from the interviewer, is prone to cut the personal story line of the narrator. There are two reasons for this. Firstly many informants would assume that questions from the researcher would be much more important than their own line of topics, especially if general notions and argumentative potentials were involved in the questioning activity of the interviewer. In post-modern knowledge-based society abstract topics, general categorizations and the argumentative raising of problems and explanations would normally have a much stronger communicative power than the communicative scheme of narration. Secondly, the informant might raise the self-critical question: “What did I do wrong in my presentation, if the interviewer interrupted my course of presentation?” Such a self-critical questioning would again activate argumentative reflections. The informant, then, would leave the scheme of narration and would start to argue with self-accusations or, more probably, with self-legitimizing explanations, since she or he would feel the obligation to clear up the communicative mistakes she or he presumably made (Schütze 1978; Kallmeyer and Schütze 1977).

During the course of ongoing narration the listening interviewer takes short notes in two totally different types of presentational situations, in which the informant would convey signs of additional narrative potential: The first type is the situation of intentionally sending out hints to additional potentials for sub-stories as the following: “In this regard I could tell additional stories, but this would go too far right now” (Quite often the narrator would smile in such a situation of narrative rendering). The two versions of the second type of expressing an additional narrative potential, the type of implausibility of the present string of narrative rendering, are points of textual vagueness or even textual discrepancies. In the first version of implausible rendering, the one of textual vagueness, it is not clear how an event B (with its inner and outer aspects) would follow after event A (with its inner and/or outer aspects) in terms of intentionality, conditionality, causality, time sequence, compatibility, additional outer conditions, continuity and/or change of identity, etc. In the second version of implausible rendering, the rendering of a life-historical event

constellation (with its outer and/or inner aspects of change including change of personal identity) is so discrepant in itself that it becomes difficult to understand how this event constellation could proceed at all. This is the case when, e.g., the narrator claims that the situation of a new apprenticeship would have been totally easy-going, and at the same time – or immediately after this euphemistic or normalizing assessment and referring to the same situation – he states a serious problem of learning within the apprenticeship, as we could see in the interview with Mr. Funke in the first part of this module (Schütze 1976).

The main narrative of the interview will be finished through a specific formulaic expression such as the following: “This was it, Mrs. X. I have now arrived at the present. I am happy that I could finally get order into my life. The story of my life might be of interest for you. It is not really remarkable, but hopefully you can make use of it. I hope that this is what you wanted me to do for you”. With regard to the formulaic expressions, such a coda of the autobiographical narrative can be formulated quite differently, but it normally exhibits two functional parts: the first part ends the flux of the time of the reported life-historical story, and the second part focuses the awareness of both partners in the interview on the actually ongoing communicative situation of the interview conversation and its involved sequential order. This sequential order consists of the closing gesture of the presentational offer of the reported life history by the narrator as first pair part and the reactive evaluative acceptance of the listener as second pair part. In addition, quite often some sort of evaluation of the overall autobiographical story and of the present life situation by the narrator as third functional part is involved as well, but this is not necessarily the case. As I said already, for all of these three functions there are some formulaic standard expressions available, but they are normally connected with a very unique and very personal qualification of the narrator. The combination of all these formulaic and person-specific features makes it very easy for the listener (as interviewer) to identify the coda of the main autobiographical story intuitively. – In immediate reaction to the occurrence of the coda of the informant there will be an explicit expression of gratitude and positive evaluation of the interviewer, since the informant has freely given the recollection of her or his life to the researcher as listener and since she or he did the strenuous and time consuming recollection work.

#### **1.4. The Narrative Questioning Part of the Interview**

Then the first section of the questioning part of the narrative interview starts. It is very easy for the listener to refer to the intentionally given signs of the additional narrative potential, i.e. to the freely given hints of the narrator for

additional sub-stories, which have been jotted down before by the researcher as interviewer during her or his listening process in the course of the main story part of the interview. One has to just tip at these intentionally given hints and express the wish that the informant should exhaust this part of the additional story potential that she or he had before freely alluded to during her or his autobiographical story telling in the first part of the interview. In reaction to each “tipping at” of the interviewer the narrator would normally smile and would feel happily entitled to tell at least one additional sub-story of the additional story potential alluded to before at respective points of the former narrative rendering.

Contrary to this, the points of vagueness and of discrepancies in the course of autobiographical narrative rendering within the main story part of the interview are quite precarious points of reference to request further and more explicit presentation. Points of vagueness and discrepancies quite often hint at difficult biographical experiences of fading-out, of rationalization or of legitimising; they, then, are the result of the personal defence system of the informant and as such very important building blocks or construction bars, although possibly restricting ones, of the informant’s biographical identity and its unfolding. It would be unethical if the interviewer would attempt to crack such a personal defence system of the informant, since she or he is not a psychotherapist who offers treatment sessions to the informant as a client or patient regarding those personal problems. But what the interviewer is allowed to do is to return to the status quo ante of the vague or discrepant text passage in the main story line, i.e. to the last textual point of clarity expressing event A before the opaque passage B with a formulation like this: “I could imagine very well how event A happened. But then I did not realize how it went further on. Perhaps I did not pay enough attention or I misunderstood something. Could you, please, start again with the telling of event A and could you then go on?” In case the second narrative rendering generates the same points of implausibility regarding the sequential connection of event A and B, the interviewer is not allowed to ask and prod for an answer for a second time. The interviewer must practice this self-inhibition in order to protect the defence system of the informant. In addition, it would be detrimental if the interviewer would explicitly and critically address the vagueness or discrepancy of the sequential connection between events A and B, as a police officer would do it in an interrogation or a magistrate in a courtroom proceeding. In reaction to this the informant would get the immediate feeling that something in his presentation went “sinfully” wrong, and then she or he would start to defend, rationalize, legitimise, argumentatively explain her or his presentation or the depicted event constellation. In any case, the informant would be forcibly driven out of the communicative scheme of narration, be pushed into and entangled within the communicative scheme of argumentation that doesn’t deal with the details of

personally experienced events, but just with general predicates and abstract explanatory systems. This might be interesting in terms of research, too, especially for the study of reflective biographical work, but such an argumentative passage as part of an autobiographical presentation is only reliably interpretable if there is already a baseline of detailed narrative rendering. In addition, the basic communicative trust relationship that was eagerly established in the negotiation and commencement phase of the interview situation would be put at risk. And this could be the beginning of the breakdown of the interview situation altogether.

Of course, the narrator can make use of a set of additional narrative questions that were pre-formulated in a flexible question battery. The recourse to such a pre-formulated external question battery would become necessary, if the interviewer would like to be sure to get specific answers to certain pre-established issues of her or his research. As much as possible, and minimally at least tangentially, these “non-immanent” narrative questions should start from narrative text material produced by the informant her- or himself during the main story part of the interview. This is in order to reduce the risk that she or he would feel forced against her or his will or at least uneasily or unhappily prodded to dwell on imposed topics that don’t belong to her or his own course of presentation and biographical sedimentation of personal experiences. And the list of these non-immanent questions should be commenced only when the immanent part of narrative questioning is already finished, in order not to disturb the reconstructive exhaustion of the autonomous narrative presentation potential of the informant and not to irritate her or his feeling of freedom of creation connected with it. Quite often it turns out that the informant already dealt with most or all pre-formulated questions of the external question battery autonomously within the main story part and/or within the immanent narrative questioning section. Such an autonomous narrative rendering of the informant is always preferable to her or his answers to non-immanent questions, since it much more clearly reveals the authentic perspectives and relevancies of the informant and her or his socio-biographical processes. Therefore, in these cases the respective battery questions should not be raised at all. (In addition, the informant could feel that the mutual assumption of the interaction postulate of cooperativeness, which is pivotal for the establishment and keeping of the trust relationship within the shared action scheme of autobiographical narrative interviewing, is factually renounced by the imposition of superfluous non-immanent questions of the interviewer).

### **1.5. The Descriptive and Argumentative Questioning Phase of the Interview**

After the conclusion of the narrative questioning part of the interview with its exhaustion of the additional narrative potential, a descriptive immanent and non-immanent questioning part follows that deals with the explication of all types of social frames, event carriers, their mutual social relationships and their routine activities, which are relevant for the unfolding life history of the informant as revealed in the various narrative parts of the interview, especially in the main story part. E.g., when Mr. Funke was alluding to the elite sports gymnasium where he was accepted to, then for the interviewer as a non-insider it was not clear which would be the daily routines for the students, what would be the relationship between academic teaching and sports training, what would be the assessment processes for athletic achievements, what would be the hierarchy of athletic excellence among the students, who would decide about the career line of the students and what would be the procedures of assessment, etc. It is now decisive to activate the communicative scheme of description. This can be done by asking a more general question regarding the position of sports and athletic training in the life of the informant as schoolboy and adolescent. Formally the task for the informant conveyed by this type of questioning is to explicate a higher predicate, i.e. sports and athletic training, and to show its relationship to another higher predicate, i.e. position in life, which provides a biographical contextualization for it. In addition to the task of explicating higher predicates and their relationships to each other, there are much more concrete folios for describing features and processes of the (social) world: explicating and following up the social positions, personal features and relationships in a social group (a school class, a work team, a network of friends and acquaintances, etc., the presentational task here being that of following up social relationships and networks with their social categorizations as well as the (fitting, discrepant, ironic, identifying, etc.) relations between social positions and social roles on the one hand and personal characteristics on the other. Another more concrete folio of descriptive presentation activities would be the follow up of all types of paths taken, literally: moving through the city in order to accomplish the daily travel back and forth to two different work places, e.g. that of academic learning and that of athletic training as in the case of the Funke interview, or following up a career line in order to explicate the potential of occupational development in a certain work position or describing an urban milieu through the report of a walk through the city. Still another more concrete type of descriptive activity would be the recapitulation of all types of daily or weekly process routines, e.g. the description of a typical work day, a typical weekly team proceeding of the work and play of students in a reform school.

Another quite concrete folio for descriptive presentation would be all types of comparisons with categorical contrast sets as, e.g. in the Funke interview the contrast set between the world of manual work and the world of paper and management work. More complicated, but very important, too, are the formats of the characterization of individual and collective identity using the contrasts between the outer appearance and the inner reality or backstage as well as the figure of the circular stabilization and enforcement of a chain of fitting and contrasting features establishing a social figuration. Of course there are further important folios and formats for descriptive activities. I just wanted to convey the idea that it is so much easier for the informant to get encouraged by the offer of a folio or format of descriptive presentation. In the communicative scheme of description (Kallmeyer and Schütze 1997) the folios and formats are the pendant to the cognitive figures of extempore narration (see part one of this module).

Only at the very end of the proceedings of the autobiographical narrative interview is it sensible to raise – and then they should be raised – argumentative “why” questions: those immanent ones that the narrator has already asked her- or himself and quarrelled with, but did not systematically work through and answer explicitly, on the one hand, and the non-immanent ones of the interviewer, on the other hand. Answers to the argumentative “why” questions have to be produced within the communicative scheme of argumentation (Toulmin 1958; Schütze 1978, 1987). This scheme is powered by the presentational dynamics stemming from the systematic constraints of argumentation and by the specific ordering devices of the scheme of argumentation. One constraint of argumentation, e.g., – there are some others we cannot dwell on here for the sake of brevity – would be to take the stance and the perspective of the opponent against one’s own argumentative activities into regard, to compare them with the stance and perspective of oneself, the proponent, and to weigh both of them in terms of truth, trustworthiness as well as the “epistemic power” of exploration, of gaining insight and generating knowledge. From this stems the drive to take into systematic consideration the deeper meanings of the argumentative contributions of the opponent and – at least partially – to react to them even before they are uttered explicitly. In a narrative interview, the opponents as significant others or important “counter actors” (within the former or present course of life-historical events) are, of course, not physically present, but their practical and communicative counter activities with their specific argumentative meaning and function are remembered and imagined within the course of the ongoing interview presentation. In addition, the informant as story carrier and biography incumbent can become an opponent to some lines of consideration and argumentation of oneself as he is taking into regard the me-images of himself, in the sense of Mead (1934). By no means should the interviewer in an autobiographical

narrative interview act as an argumentative opponent in her or his own right, since she or he should not take the risk to damage the personal defence system of the informant, which could happen through contentious arguments of the interviewer in a communicative arrangement that has intensively and extensively opened up the inner identity development of the informant and in which her or his personal argumentative activities are always part of the deeper layers of reflective biographical work. As I said already, the interviewer cannot act and is not entitled to act as psychotherapist. But she or he can activate the informant's own inner turf of argumentation as an important part of her or his reflective biographical work, by asking her or him to formulate her or his own argumentative stances more explicitly. They might be already alluded to or even explicitly formulated in the course of her or his narrative and descriptive rendering or just be hinted at as a tacit or hidden potential of personal argumentation. – Of course a professional counsellor or psychotherapist could become an argumentative opponent in her or his own right in later sessions of the counselling or psychotherapeutic process, in which he would question arguments of her or his client stemming from an autobiographical narrative interview that was conducted in a former session of the counselling or treatment process. But then she or he has to take into account that the information that she or he got from the autobiographical interview could be quite sensitive or even risky in terms of endangering the personal defence system of the client. The counsellor or psychotherapist should then know what she or he dares to do and how she or he would be able to support the client in the ensuing crisis situation by means of professional assessment and procedures. But it should be clear that this doesn't belong to the acceptable procedures of the narrative interview itself.

In addition the interviewer can ask her or his own why questions, but she or he should present them and follow them up just in the consensual mode of argumentation which would not transgress the confinements of the own argumentative space of the informant. The ordering devices of the communicative scheme of argumentation are based on the basic communicative activities of argumentation: formulating propositions, giving explanations for the propositions, providing empirical warrants for the explanations, contesting a proposition by a counter proposition, questioning and doubting a proposition without a counter proposition, giving explanations for the counter propositions, giving empirical warrants for the explanations of the counter propositions as well as requesting statements of propositions, explanations and/or empirical warrants. All of these argumentative activities follow their specific procedures as shown by Toulmin (1958), and the informant and the interviewer should follow them up more or less automatically without unduly argumentative or even contentious enforcement. Such a circumspect and detained follow up will explicate the argumentative grid of the reflective biographical work of the

informant, which is important to get a full empirical picture of the unfolding and difficulties of biographical process structures, the identity development and the biographical work of the informant.

The descriptive and the argumentative questions should be asked in the very sequential order dealt with above. More abstract questions using, or searching for, abstract and general higher predicates should be asked later, since they turn the informant away from the more concrete tasks of detailed rendering, and quite often it is impossible to return from more abstract passages of rendering to more concrete ones. That means that the interviewer's provisions for abstract descriptions should preferably be done just after the potential for concrete descriptive activities is exhausted already. (But note that in a more concrete context of rendering an abstract or general questioning of the interviewer this could be the adequate means for eliciting a string of concrete description – giving the informant full leeway to turn to any topic that might be relevant for her or him). – In addition, the mixing of the elementary schemes of communication, i.e. of the schemes of narration, description and argumentation, in the same context and/or on the same level of presentation should be avoided in order to hinder the chaotic and irritating lumping together (as “scheme salad” – Schütze 1978, 1976) of the very different operation rules for the three elementary schemes of communication, since they would distort each other. In addition, the various epistemic, i.e. knowledge-generating, powers of the three elementary schemes of communication – specifically for each of them – would be hindered to evolve in an unhampered mode. Both would certainly disorient the informant in her or his presentation work; it could severely and harmfully reduce her or his circumspection regarding the ongoing presentation work, since she or he would be systematically irritated and could not be engrossed by the specific production dynamics of the respective scheme of communication in the sense of free-floating awareness towards the content and flux of rendering (Sigmund Freud).

## **1.6. Summary**

The autobiographical narrative interview as a professional arrangement and professional action scheme for the creative generation of knowledge is quite easy to handle, if there is total freedom of participation for the presumptive informant and if there is enough concern that a basic trust relationship will be successfully established during the introductory process of negotiating the possible interview. The autobiographical narrative interview is much easier to handle than, for example, focus groups can be established and successfully carried through, since there can be disinterested participants in the group, the

social relationship between the participants might not fit the shared task of embarking on a knowledge generating process, the logistics of bringing the participants together might be extremely difficult in terms of date, place and transportation, etc. Normally the informant is very much intrigued to embark on the task of recollecting her or his life history, since she or he experiences it as a second chance of getting into it and doing important biographical work not done up to now, through this first opportunity to tell one's life history as an overall gestalt. Unhampered autobiographical story telling is basic biographical work and strengthens the ordering capacity of one's personal identity; therefore, in a free social arrangement without any type of enforcement it supports personal autonomy and personal identity construction. All this also holds true for its use in professional contexts of vocational rehabilitation counselling.

To repeat the basic features of the social arrangement and the action scheme of narrative interviewing in the context of vocational counselling at the very end of this section:

a) To the client of vocational counselling, who quite often is not used to explore her or his biographical possibilities of further occupational work, the narrative interview offers a communicative field for unrestrained expression of personal experiences and personal points of view – as unguided by the interviewer as possible. The client of vocational counselling must be carefully oriented towards the importance of her or his own life history, which in the beginning she or he tends to consider as not so important and not a worthwhile topic of talk.

b) The sequential order of the action scheme of the narrative interview is: setting a narrative stimulus with the formulation of the central topic, i.e. the personal biography of the informant with a special focus on occupational life, systematic unemployment and the conditioning illness trajectory; the interview section of the main story line; the interview section of internal narrative questioning in order to exhaust the additional narrative potential of the main story line not dwelt on by the informant but intentionally alluded to (through narrative spigots), or at least symptomatically expressed without intention (points of implausibility and discrepancies); the interview section of external narrative questioning according to a categorical grid of expected typical events regarding rehabilitation situations of systematic unemployment as conditioned by a severe chronic illness and regarding the fight against it; the interview section of descriptive questioning regarding social frames, social routines, social situations and structural conditions having an impact on the biographical processes of the informant as biography incumbent, i.e. the rehabilitation client; the interview section of argumentative questioning regarding the self-theoretical reflections of the client of vocational counselling as informant and regarding the

overall theoretical potential of the narrative and descriptive renderings of the informant (activated through why-questions).

c) Extremely important is the contract work between the client of vocational counselling as prospective informant and the professional as interviewer. There must be an elaborate and sensitive orientation and negotiation phase before the actual beginning of the interview. Especially in this phase working on a trust relationship between the client as prospective informant and the interviewer is important in order to overcome the informant's difficulty to accept the narrative topic of her or his own life history. The interviewer has to make sure that she or he will just follow up the line of autobiographical rendering and biographical work of the client as prospective informant and that she or he will carefully keep her- or himself within this communicative confinement. In later phases of the interview the interviewer will always keep – and sensitively demonstrate to keep – to the basic rule of just supporting the task of the informant to render her or his biographical experiences, reconstruct this through her or his life history and to elaborate her or his biographical work.

d) The interviewer always keeps to the conversation role of a listening (and not talking) attitude in the interview communication during the unfolding of the main story line. Even an interviewer who works as professional counsellor should obey the general rule of communicative restraint. In the sections of narrative, descriptive and argumentative questioning the interviewer always attempts to just elicit the additional potential for the informant's own recollection, rendering and reflection in order to secure the self-evolving quality of the narrative, descriptive and argumentative rendering of the informant. She or he would always attempt to start from pieces of information and formulations questions that just set free the production power of the dominant scheme of communication, especially of narration, which the informant can follow up without any guidance and orientation towards enforced external topics. One basic mistake of the interviewer is cutting the line of rendering of the informant, especially cutting her or his autobiographical story line.

e) At points of recollecting difficult life-historical experiences difficult emotional phases can evolve in the interview conversation. The interviewer should make sure that she or he is an understanding listener and would just act as a cooperatively minded human being (and not as a therapeutic professional, which the interviewer cannot claim to be); and if the interviewer would also be a professional counsellor or psychotherapist, she or he should behave in the same way during the interview session; only in the next counselling or therapeutic session could this change, in case the informant as client would accept and/or like to do this. And the interviewer should consider that she or he is under the spell of common responsibility to be a humane interaction partner,

and this could involve all types of mundane (and not professional) support. In addition, the informant should create an atmosphere of trust into the constructive ordering capacity of the narrative rendering. She or he should convey: now there would be a sad phase in the narrative recollection, but autobiographical story telling would also provide ways out of it, and sad stories would be followed by better or even happy ones.

## **2. Research Steps for Single Case Analysis: Text Sort Differentiation, Structural Description, Analytical Abstraction**

There are three work steps for the analysis of a single narrative interview. (The comparison of the analytical outcomes of a single interview with that of other single interviews involves additional research steps). The three work steps for a single autobiographical narrative interview are: (a) text sort analysis or differentiation; (b) structural description and (c) analytical abstraction, especially reconstructing the overall biographical structuring of the life of the life of the client of vocational rehabilitation (Schütze 1983, 1984).

### **2.1. Text Sort Differentiation**

Every analysis of a single case autobiographical text material of a socio-biographical process like the Funke interview should start with an analysis of how it has been produced interactively (e.g., in a scientific interview conversation, in a professional counselling session, in a psychotherapeutic setting, etc.) and how it has been edited and rendered into empirical data. Although any qualitative sociological research based on empirical text material should take the verbal representations and interpretations of the interaction partners and biography incumbents seriously, it shouldn't take them at face value. They can be produced in a special social situation and for a special social purpose, e.g. to give a presentation in order to get access to a treatment programme. In addition, there can be some distortions in the recollection, reproduction and self-theoretical explanation of the informants' personal experiences. And, finally, the abbreviated storage and display of autobiographical data by means of summarized interview reports, quickly jotted down ethnographic notes, or some sort of informal transliteration can be highly biased, selective, partial, non-sequential, etc. Therefore it is centrally important to look at the mode of verbal production of the autobiographical data through specific schemes of communication, whether they are part of naturally occurring

encounters of social life or take place within more artificial interview communications, as well as at the way of how the data were stored and displayed by written reports on them.

It is obvious that the mode of interview conversation agreed upon by the researcher and informant, or mistakenly assumed by one interview party or the other, impinges on the nature of information given during the interview. By the mode of interviewing certain types of restrictions are set for recollecting personally experienced events and one's own reactions to them; highly emotional and "private" sections within the flow of recollection are supported or hindered by the communicative arrangement; and the expression of personal attitudes towards the reported sequence of events and of their assessment is freely given or thoroughly controlled and restrained within specific interview arrangements. Now, as we saw already, dense sociological analyses of biographical change connected with individual and collective social processes (like biographical trajectories of suffering or occupational careers as well as collective movements or the breakdown of a societal formation, as in the case of GDR state socialism) are only possible on the empirical base of autobiographical extempore narratives. They activate – as we saw – the cognitive potential and intellectual capacity for recollecting the stream of former life experiences that is stored within the memory of the biography incumbent. Therefore the mode of biographical interviewing should encourage the informant to indulge in the dynamics of recollection in extempore story telling as we showed in the last section. However, the normal understanding of interviewing in public life and of social science researchers is highly formal. Therefore the interviewing researcher might at least partially neglect the rules for autobiographical narrative interviewing and hence misunderstand his role, by asking questions aimed at "hard facts of life" or by immediately starting to elicit general expert statements of the informant. Or it could happen that she or he wouldn't be careful enough in establishing the informant's understanding to tell her or his really individual autobiography and personally reproduce the stream of her/his inner life experiences as freely as possible, following up the concatenation of personal life events. Therefore, in turn, the informant could mistakenly suppose the researcher would expect to hear just "important" life events of her or his encounters with just "alien" social processes, and therefore she or he could refrain from reporting highly personal experiences. Such a general attitude could seriously restrict, distort or even hinder the flow of recollection of biographical experiences.

It is a first decisive partial research task in qualitative sociological biography analysis to study such restrictions and mutual misunderstandings involved in the production of autobiographical materials – especially misunderstandings provoked by systematic restrictions or even communicative mistakes of autobiographical interviewing, as the most frequented avenue towards obtaining

biographical data. In assessing the experiential depths and authenticity of autobiographical text materials, the pivotal question is to what extent the text of the original conversation or interview communication would resemble an undirected extempore narration or off-the-cuff story telling, which is as little interrupted and topically guided by the interviewer as possible. As we saw, the communication scheme of narrating personal experiences is the basic communicative mechanism for producing autobiographical recollections, including inner experiences and slighter or bigger changes of personal identity. Especially the most typical common sense understanding and arrangement of interview communication (e.g. the standard “question-answer” type of interview) could considerably distort the flow of extempore narration or could even hinder it to start at all.

In addition to the disorders occurring within the ongoing (interview) communication in producing the narrative material, the task of text analysis could be further obfuscated by non-accurate transcription, vague transliteration, loose glossing, casual rendering or shortened summarizing of the text production in the interview. Especially by stating some general version of the contents or results of the autobiographical account, as understood by the interviewer, could hinder the researcher’s task to get a detailed process or “flow” picture of the interactive and narrative production of the interview. The researcher would be hindered to study the mode of how the informant not only depicted his personal experiences but also how she or he encountered her or his life historical events in the first place. (I.e., in a very good transcription the latter is largely expressed by the former, if the interviewing researcher had been able to obtain a freely produced extempore narrative of personal experiences from the informant as biography incumbent).

Thus, the first step of single case analysis could be called formal textual investigation” or “text sort differentiation”. This phase of biography research work entails the following mini-steps: First it has to be investigated, how the autobiographical text material has been produced and in what social activity it has been embedded. This is part of the methodical task of pragmatic refraction, which was discussed in the first part of this module. (E.g., the informant might have felt forced just to give a legitimating account of his personal mischance, difficulties, mistakes or mischief and not to search for her or his own hidden intentions, experiences and meanings that are part of the conditions of her or his present predicament, in order to gain entry into a retraining programme). Secondly, it must be studied how interviewer and informant understood the special interview arrangement of producing the life historical account in their interaction. (E.g., if we are confronted with a laconic type of rendering by the informant as we in the beginning of the Funke interview: had the informant really and explicitly been told and did she or he really understand that she or he

was expected to tell her or his personal life history and not just to present a formal curriculum vitae? We could look at the negotiation of the action scheme of interviewing in the introductory phase of the interview communication: Was the idea of the personal life history really conveyed to the informant? If yes: Is the laconic rendering a special way of authentic autobiographical narration and why? In the case of the Funke interview, although it starts quite laconically, we can see many features of extempore autobiographical narration, such as attempts to express feelings notwithstanding the emotional barriers as well as background constructions to repair former attempts of fading out in order to circumvent the expression of difficult feelings). And what would be the possible misunderstandings conditioned by the interview format and the communicative arrangement and what would be their impact on the ongoing interview communication? Thirdly it has to be delineated within the autobiographical text material where and how other communicative schemes than narration (namely, argumentation and description) occur and what their representational and communicative function would be (Schütze 1987). They could have supported the working and dynamics of the narrative scheme of communication – e.g. by drawing pictures of social situations or by “self-theoretical” activities stating and/or explaining the outcomes of (chains of) socio-biographical events and processes. But unfortunately they also could have helped the informant to circumvent autobiographical extempore narration of personal experiences proper by evading into thin abstract descriptions of social frames, without telling what happened in them and how the informant would have been involved, as well as by taking recourse to empty general statements of “world principles” allegedly connected with socio-biographical processes but without telling how oneself had been involved in them and how one was playing a responsible part in them. Fourthly (and again starting from the very beginning as seen in terms of practical research work): especially in cases where the autobiographical text material was not elicited and/or put on paper by the researcher her- or himself (e.g. when an external interviewer had been hired or when a collection of published edited interviews should be used as, for example the interview volumes of Studs Terkel), but also in cases where transcribing the researcher-conducted interview was done in a vague way and the analysis is done much later (i.e. if the interviewer and researcher cannot remember the interview communication in a detailed way), she or he additionally has to ask how much and in what direction the text material was edited. Of course, the same holds true for texts of autobiographical writers (as we have many published personal reports on severe chronic illness and or on predicaments of long-term unemployment). In all these cases one must ask in what direction the reworking of the original interview text or the authentic experiences has been accomplished. (E.g., if we take one of the famous monographs of the Chicago Sociology, “The Jack Roller”, ed. by

Clifford Shaw (1966), we can see how the narrator and author Stanley – prodded by his conversation partner Clifford Shaw – would attempt to demonstrate the successful career aspects of his life as a delinquent adolescent, fade out of his presentation awareness most experiences of depression, i.e. the trajectory aspects of suffering, and show the infectious function of personal contacts with other young criminals – especially during his times spent in houses of correction and prisons). And then one could use this information regarding the reworking and editing process in order to assess the text validity (in terms of expression of authentic experiences), the import of melodramatic or laconic strings of the edited text and the meaning of opaque textual formulations.

## **2.2. Sequential Structural Description**

The second step of the interpretive analysis of a single case autobiographical text material is the sequential structural description of the textual presentation, i.e. its sequence of presentational units. If the communicative scheme of narration is dominant in the autobiographical interview or in the autobiographical text production, there are mostly “autonomous” narrative segments or units, as we saw in the first part of this module, because any of them could be a narrative by itself, although they are connected with each other in supra-segmental meta-units that express the biographical process structures, in which the biography incumbent is involved, and her or his longer range identity development. Of course in every autobiographical narrative interview, as we saw in the previous chapter, there will also be dominantly descriptive and argumentative presentational units, since there is the questioning part in the interview arrangement on social frames and the additional questioning part on the explication and expansion of theoretical consideration of the informant and the explanatory questions of the interviewer. And in addition, even in the beginning of the main story part that is freely produced by the informant without any prodding and thematic redirection by the interviewer, there is the pre-coda element and the coda element, which normally involve intensive argumentative presentation activities expressing the reflective biographical work of the informant. Finally, as we look into the single narrative units, there will quite often be descriptive explications of social frames and argumentative elaborations of higher predicates of experiences, of difficult questions regarding the course of outer events and inner developments and their relationships to each other as well as the reflective biographical work, i.e. argumentative commentaries connected to it. But basically the communicative scheme of narration will be dominant.

Therefore, the structural description has to be conducted mainly in orientation to the formal features, especially the presentation and demonstration

markers of the main narrative and the narrative units of the first questioning part, which reveal the relationships of the informant as biography incumbent to the narrated flow of life historical events, how she or he experienced them and how her or his personal identity and biographical work developed by the involvement in them. The formal presentation of the narrative scheme refers to single narrative units, to the supra-segmental markers of the biographical process structures and the global shape of the overall life history and its overall biographical structuring. Their careful observation will deliver the general grid for the picture of the flow of the biographical processes and the involved identity development. In addition, the structural description has to be concerned with the biographical and social contents transpired by the narrative. The narrative presentation and demonstration markers explicitly point out or latently express biographical and social processes with their perspective of outer events and their perspective of inner experiences and identity changes. Basically these contents have to be envisioned as structural processes (Glaser, Strauss 1968: chapter XI) of the various “self-historical” phases of the life course, of the overall biographical unfolding as such, of the social processes linked with life course phases and with the overall biographical unfolding (such as important relationships of significant others to the biography incumbent).

Of course, there are formal features of the communicative scheme of description and argumentation, too. They can be used in the same way as the scheme of narration is used in order to establish an empirical base of formal features for the research step of structural description, which can guide the analytical reconstruction of biographical and social processes without a freewheeling and loose interpretation. But their formal markers are different from those of the communicative scheme of narration (and, in addition, more complicated than those of narration). Since the scheme of narration is dominant in the textual rendering of the successful autobiographical narrative interview, the formal presentation markers of the two other communicative schemes are not that pivotal to accomplish the overall structural description of narrative interviews, and therefore they will be addressed in a more informal, interpretive way where it will be necessary, i.e. where the informant will embark on descriptive and argumentative activities. Especially the activities of reflective biographical work (as evolving in theoretical commentaries at the end of segments, in the pre-coda segment, in the coda segment as well as in the explanatory and questioning part of the interview) will harness the scheme of argumentation and present important subjects of the research task of structural description.

The systematic description of the biographical and social structural processes has to be done by both using the presentation and demonstration markers of the scheme of narration in general and of the biographical process structures

specifically (see the first part of this module). The substantive language of the informant contains features of distinctive personal experiences, general features of the concatenation of her or his life-historical events, of encountered social frames and of biographical identity unfolding and biographical work. These are partially just alluded to by generalizing higher predicates and partially formulated by means of more explicit argumentation and description. The informant's language also uses the language of sociological categories of structural processes and social frames (partially developed from the formal presentation markers of the narrative, descriptive and argumentative rendering of social and biographical processes) for the trans-individually reproducible interpretation and generalizing explanation of the biographical experiences. The language can be informant-formulated and –acknowledged (originally coined or personally adopted in its wording). The latter sociological categories of structural description operate as reconstructive connectors, explanation and generalization devices for the (implicitly general) presentation and demonstration markers of socio-biographical processes and of social frames, as well as translation and interpretation vocabulary for the interpretive exploitation of the case specific formulation of personal experiences, of hints of distinct or even extraordinary characteristics of the individual biographical case and implicit theoretical notions rendered by the informant's presentation markers, explanatory commentaries and self-theoretical characterizations. By means of conjunction of the formal presentation markers, of the substantive formulations of the informant and of the sociological process categories the informant's depictions can be approached analytically, and that means: they are seen “pragmatically refracted” in the context of the informant's actions, sufferings, enactments of institutional expectation patterns and metamorphosis processes as entangling, engrossing and involving biographical and social processes (see the first part of this module).

Central to structural description is the analysis of the single narrative units and of their sequential concatenation within supra-segmental process units. The central epistemic task of the research step of structural description, i.e. pragmatic refraction, can be accomplished by taking analytically into account these textual contexts. Pragmatic refraction doesn't take the textual formulations at face value. It searches for the social and biographical processes that are consciously and non-consciously expressed by the textual rendering. Part of these processes are just seen but unnoticed by the informant or even faded out of one's memory and awareness and only symptomatically expressed. Structural description reconstructs the textual microstructures of the narrative units and their supra-segmental concatenation by delineating the orientation and presentation perspective of the narrative unit, by focussing on the presentation markers of it and delineating the sequential unfolding of the presentation activities of the

narrative unit according to an elementary presentational order of the narrative unit, as well as searching for textual phenomena of experiential disorder and fading out, especially background constructions, and explaining their disorder within the contexts of the unfolding (chaotic) socio-biographical processes. Structural description reconstructs the polythetic presentation activities for the expression of socio-biographical processes, i.e. their introduction, their central statement in kernel sentences with an outer and an inner dimension, with situational detailing, with the depiction of social frames, with argumentative evaluations, critiques and self-theoretical commentaries as well as with attempts of fading out difficult experiences and the repair of these chaotic presentation activities by background constructions and other corrective devices. The polythetic presentation activities quite often are ambivalent in themselves, in mirroring the complicated (ambivalent or even contradictory or enigmatic) socio-biographical processes. The sequential reconstruction of the unfolding presentation activities and of their result, the textual microstructures of the narrative units and their supra-segmental sequences, allows the analytical view from the side line, which puts together general presentation perspectives, formulaic expressions and presentation disorder, on the one hand, and substantive renderings, on the other. Through this textual and socio-biographical contextualization, reconstruction and pragmatic refraction, the analytical depiction of even unnoticed or faded-out and ambivalent or enigmatic social and biographical processes will be possible. – In the next chapter we will deal in a detailed way with the analysis of the textual microstructures of extempore narrative rendering as the core of structural description, as the most central research step of qualitative text analysis.

### **2.3. Putting Together Partial Structural Descriptions of Topically Related Strings of Presentation in the Main Story Part and the Questioning Parts of the Interview**

The last important sub-step of structural description consists of putting together the informational chunks extracted from the analysis of strings of presentation in the three parts of the autobiographical narrative interview dealing with the same event constellation and the same process of biographical identity change. It is quite common that the main story line of a narrative interview is shorter than the combination of its several interrogatory parts. Such an “incremental” unfolding of the narrative interview especially happens to informants who are not very much experienced in looking into the inner realm of their identity development and/or who are not used to give presentations of their personal experiences. In addition, it is not so easy to manage the beginning of

the main story part, if there are biographical phases of incisive trajectory experiences and severe suffering to be reported, as we can see in the case of Bernd Funke, who was thrown out of the elite sports school in his adolescence, who was forced to learn an occupation he did not like, who was long-term unemployed, who contracted a severe chronic illness and who was finally abandoned by his girl friend. It is not easy to tell about these very sad experiences one after the other in the very first sections of an interview, and therefore one could understandably prefer to confine oneself to a very laconic rendering. (But normally after a while the constraints of story telling, especially those of going into details and of closing the presentational forms, and the overall aesthetic productivity of extempore story telling cause the informant – step by step – to tell his story more lively and more explicitly).

Nevertheless, even a quite short main story line of an autobiographical narrative interview can prove to be very enlightening, since it expresses the sequence and concatenation of biographical process structures (or biographical contexts) in the most straightforward way. Especially the high points of biographical processes, the changes between biographical processes, i.e. the turning points of biography, and the eclipses of socio-biographical processes are expressed in a quite condensed and sequentially contextualised way during a comparatively laconic presentation of the main story line. Such process-structural phenomena will be marked by fat letters in the shortened version of the structural description of the Funke interview to be documented in a later section of this module. – However, the more detailed interrogatory parts of the interviews which follow after the main story line can give important clarifications – especially regarding severe experiences of suffering or shame, which are not or only elusively dwelt on in the main story line. (Quite often they are treated in a quite laconic way or even faded out of awareness in the main story line).

Out of the following reasons the questioning parts of the narrative interview normally consist of textual strings of more detailed presentations: First of all, it is encouraging for the informant to realize that the interviewer is so much interested in her or his life history, as shown by her or his additional narrative questioning. Now the (quite often very modest) informant is emotionally able to believe, that something must be relevant regarding her or his life history. Secondly, through the permanently ongoing dynamics of the recollection power of extempore autobiographical story telling, in dealing with personal involvements and experiences, the informant is again drawn into her or his former life, she or he gets encouraged to see the importance of it; and in the very process of the ongoing autobiographical extempore narration she or he learns and gets used to express episodes, social frames and inner feelings of her or his life historical involvements (see the first part of the module). The recollection

power is mainly elicited by the very activity of autobiographical story telling and its constraints of extempore narration, but it is even more strengthened by the encouraging additional narrative questions of the interviewer exhausting the additional story potential as alluded to by the informant. Being confronted with the dynamics of extempore story telling in this double way is a very productive and even enthusiastic experience for the informant, since telling one's whole life history is quite often performed by the informant for the first time in his or her life by virtue of the interview arrangement. – Looking at the questioning parts of the narrative interview helps the researcher to clarify difficult phases and situations in the informant's life, to overcome the "rubber fence" of the informant's fading-out practices and to get at the more or less insightful or self-delusional self-explanations and self-theories of the informant regarding her or his life course. Especially two functions of combining the structural descriptions of topically connected or topically more or less identical strings of the main story part and the questioning part are important:

a) Explicating the laconic narrative kernel sentences of the main story line and their higher predicates by the analysis of topically related, more detailed textual strings in the internal narrative questioning part; as well as

b) Filling in the "gaps" of difficult life-historical experiences initially faded out of awareness in the main story line and their "analytical explication", by considering the topically related textual strings in the internal narrative questioning part of the interview, where at least some features of the experiences have finally been remembered, partially by virtue of background constructions elicited by the interviewer through asking narrative questions regarding the textual points of vagueness or discrepancies.

We can immediately recognize these two functions, when we consider the laconic character and vagueness of the two first segments of the Funke interview:

- 6 M yes (-) . it started/start/ &  
 7 where I would start the story now that was actually the normal vocational school/ well  
 8 normal school (,) .  
 9 I mhm  
 10 M tenth grade in the secondary school => that's what you call it now:<  
 11 I mhm  
 12 M : and ehm : . where I am saying that now that was a drastic change where I've thought  
 13 about that later on (,) & that was/ I was doing a lot of sport . and eh . before I had  
 14 : also : changed from the normal school to the . college of physical education (^)  
 15 I yes  
 16 M and ehm . well my sports carrier couldn't develop any further (-)



But, of course, this is not clear from the text. From the second higher predicate one could extract the idea that the apprenticeship would have developed into an unproblematic career line, but it isn't clear how. In addition, there seems to be an irritating discrepancy between experiences of occupational self-alienation and of an unproblematic straightforward educational and occupational career. In addition, there is some announcement of a gap of recollection and of postponed biographical work: "where I have thought about that later on" (lines 12 and 13), announcing the necessity of a background presentation. There is the allusion in the text of the first narrative unit onto such a necessary background presentation: the narrator gives the background information that he always loved and practiced a lot of sport and that therefore he decided to go to the elite sports school, and this small bit of an explanation (lines 13 and 14) thus hints at a tragedy of wrong biographical decision and a loss of several years of learning and education, of sound and realistic biographical planning, when he had to leave the special sports school. But this is just an elliptical conjecture; it could only be corroborated though a close analysis of respective more detailed presentations dealing with these topics again within the immanent narrative questioning part of the interview, since such presentations have been carefully elicited by the interviewer, who realized points of textual vagueness and discrepancy. Such a close analysis of the respective textual strings in the immanent narrative questioning part will be presented in the next section.

To combine the structural descriptions of the narrative or presentational units of the main story line with the structural descriptions of the topically corresponding presentational units of the questioning parts of the interview, especially of the narrative part(s), has the general methodological function of putting together multiple analytical insights into life historically and thematically concordant textual items from the various textual parts of the narrative interview. The deeper epistemological and methodological background considerations of this pasting or collating procedure are two: Firstly, one must consider the interplay between the power of structural ordering devices of narrative rendering regarding the cognitive figures of autobiographical narratives as, for example: "local" life-historical event constellations (partially episodes) and the related personal experiences, longer lasting biographical process structures of the life course as well as the overall whole life history, as a "gestalt", on the one hand, and the power of the narrative constraints and their chaotic dynamics with the effect to be drawn by disorderly narrative presentation activities, especially background constructions, into almost forgotten or faded-out disorderly experiential phenomena of the life history, on the other hand. Secondly, one must make use of the power of the knowledge-generating machinery of extempore autobiographical narration to be again drawn into and to be again emotionally engrossed within the stream of recollected former life-

historical experiences. During the course of the unfolding autobiographical extempore narration the creative impact of this machinery gets more and more powerful: the aesthetics and the insights by virtue of one's own presentation work in extempore narration are greatly enjoyable and sensitize the recollection and awareness of the informant: memories come back, biographical relevancies are seen again or become newly detected, and the aesthetic shaping and expressing of personal experiences creates more and more fun and pleasure.

#### **2.4. Analytical Abstraction of the Single Case**

The third step of single case analysis of an autobiographical narrative interview is the analytical abstraction of what is special "case distinctive" and of what are general features of the case, which are theoretically remarkable. It can be imagined that certain features of the case could also be found within other cases, some would help to theoretically differentiate between various types of cases, still others would demonstrate the case as essentially unique in the sense of its "self-historical gestalt", e.g. the combination of several severe trajectories in the life situation of Bernd Funke as an adolescent: being barred from a promising career line as elite state athlete and losing one's biographical meaning, being forced into a self-alienating vocational training and occupation, losing one's social contacts, being out of work for long periods and becoming afflicted by a severe chronic illness. The analytical abstraction explicates the pivotal features reoccurring throughout the case and combines them into overall biographical forms, which are constitutive for the case. In the case of Bernd Funke we can see his lack of competence to focus on himself and to do biographical work, as well as his vulnerability and disposition to accept any kind of institutional expectation and ascription without asking oneself and testing if it would fit his own development of personal identity.

Most important is the reconstruction of the linkage, concatenation, imbeddedness and domination, competition, overlap, intertwining of the various structural processes of biography: together they form a distinctive biographical whole or overall biographical structuring: in the case of Bernd Funke the sequential order and simultaneous interface of several types of trajectories (see above), of an institutional processing of therapeutic help and vocational retraining, of developing and following up a biographical action scheme of becoming an administrative clerk and of embarking on a metamorphosis process of stepping from the social world of manual work into the social world of paper work and mental work. Some aspects of the biographical process structures and the overall biographical structuring can of course be grasped by the biography incumbent herself or himself, by means of her or his own theories about herself

or himself; other aspects cannot be grasped. Therefore the research step of analytical abstraction also deals with the relationships between the accomplishments of the biography incumbent in self-reflection and self-theorizing on the one hand and the flow of the factual structural processes of biography on the other. For this purpose, all the interspersed self-theoretical activities of the informant should be collated and analyzed for a possible (partially latent) underlying theoretical system of self-explanation. In the case of Bernd Funke, part of it would be his distorted idea of the benign and productive function of his capacity and habit to identify with every type of external institutional task, as he might have learnt it in the people processing institutions of education and training in the GDR.

Finally the analytical abstraction addresses the interlink of biographical processes proper of the case and other social phenomena and collective changes as revealed in the case (e.g. the relationship between the breakdown of the societal formation of state socialism in the GDR, on the one hand, and the loss of work opportunities of Bernd Funke in his learned occupation as fitter of heavy machinery as well as his biographical trajectory of unemployment, on the other). Some of these interlinks endanger the autonomous development of personal identity, as the superimposition did of the non-preferred apprenticeship in the life of Bernd Funke, others support it tremendously – as Bernd Funke's introduction to the social world of administrative paper work.

### **3. The Analysis of the Textual Microstructures of Narrative Units as the Analytical Core of Structural Description**

Textual microstructures provide the sequential contexts for the constitution and functioning of the meso- and macro-structural textual phenomena of cognitive figures and the social and biographical processes they express (see the first part of the module). Only through the creative line-by-line production of textual micro-structures is the emergence of new textual expressions and respective socio-biographical phenomena possible, and only through this can the power of conditional relevancies of former presentation activities and phases of socio-biographical processes be set free, which they exert on later presentation activities and process phases. The research step of structural description closely reconstructs this creative productivity of extempore autobiographical narration for detecting and formulating new socio-biographical phenomena. The knowledge generating power of the communicative scheme of extempore narration of personal experiences thus becomes observable.

### 3.1. The Structure and Analysis of Narrative Units

The textual microstructure of an extempore autobiographical narrative is constituted by the sequential production of single narrative units. A single narrative unit or narrative segment is the basic building block of an overall autobiographical narrative. Each of these narrative units could be an autonomous narrative itself. The basic ingredient of an elementary extempore narration of personal experiences is minimally one kernel sentence depicting a social or biographical process that passes over a time threshold of a 'before' and a "later on". In addition, such a kernel sentence has another basic quality: it depicts an outer event or row of outer events, on the one hand, and the planning and production of the outer event(s) or the reaction to it or them by the story carrier (or biography incumbent), on the other hand, and the latter means: change of the inner state of the subject of that activity (or activities) and/or reaction(s). Thus, the minimal kernel sentence of extempore narration of personal experiences must normally have binominal characteristics: it depicts outer events and the related inner changes – at least smallest processes of identity change – of the subject of the experience(s) and activity (activities). If one of the two aspects of the binominal characteristics is missing, then that is a deviating presentation phenomenon and it expresses a certain type of disorderliness of personal experiences (e.g., it could be conditioned by the fact that the trajectory experience is so hurting that the narrator doesn't like or is even unable to depict his or her inner state). Quite often a single narrative unit produces more than one kernel sentence. In this case, one kernel sentence could depict the outer event(s) and another kernel sentence the change of the inner state of the subject (the story carrier and the biography incumbent). The elementary quality of a kernel sentence in autobiographical story telling is the expression of at least one minimal life historical gestalt or episodic life historical story. And the basic grammar of it is the mutual conditional relationship between outer event(s) and a change of identity of the subject involved in that event or those events. This we already called the self-historical gestalt of autobiographical story telling. – Many narrative units are much more elaborate than that minimal textual structure we were discussing just before. A full-sized narrative unit is constituted out of the following structural presentation activities: frame switching elements, introductions to narrative units, textual sections of narrative detailing, textual sections of descriptive or argumentative detailing, background constructions of narrative or argumentative nature for the better understanding of "difficult experiences", argumentative commentaries for explanation or legitimising, securing the results and evaluations.

Let us look at how the cognitive figures (Schütze 1984, 1987) are presented in a single narrative unit of the autobiographical rendering of a biographical process structure of the trajectory of occupational self-alienation. The narrator Bernd Funke has told how he was kicked out of a GDR elite sports school and transferred into an unloved apprenticeship of plumber and fitter for heavy machinery. Later he doesn't find a stable position in this occupation, since heavy machinery construction was totally dismantled in East Germany and because of his lack of identification with his learnt occupation and the lack of confidence connected with it, he did not dare to change to West Germany. In addition, he was afflicted by the severe chronic illness of Morbus Bechterev, which finally forced him out of his learnt occupation. He then was in a very depressive mood, and his girl friend left him. From this context of the unfolding of his life history emerges the following narrative unit:

6 I couldn't pay my rent anymore (-) were unemployed (°)  
7 I mhm  
8 M and eh . was alone (-) .  
9 well that was actually a really deep low point let me say that like that (,)  
10 I yes  
11 M yes(?) /// there  
12 I was actually really deep down (,). and eh . my life looked like that actually  
13 right (?) . a lot of alcohol came to that (°) . well practically . really (-) . well how  
14 should I say (-) just so . hanging/  
15 I mhm  
16 M hanging around (,)  
17 I yes yes  
18 M and ehm .  
19 I a lot of things are  
20 coming together then (-)  
21 M some things come together right (?) . that was going on  
22 to the eviction/ well eviction of my flat that/ had to leave the flat  
23/27 and and and (-) ./// there: my parents have actually then have helped me a lot (,)  
*(Funke interview, page 3, lines 6 to 27; the graphic sign of three slashes “///” designates the beginning and the end of the narrative unit)*

Just to name the general features of this narrative unit and the cognitive figures:

- securing the result and evaluation of the foregoing narrative segment:  
“9 well that was actually a really deep low point let me say that like that (,)”

- frame switching element between the two narrative units following each other:
 

”9 M (,)  
10 I yes  
11 M yes(?)”
- introduction to narrative unit and supra-segmental marker of trajectory:
 

“11 /// there  
I was actually really deep down (,)”
- kernel sentences of trajectory experience and identity change of the story carrier:
 

(a) “11 M /// there  
I was actually really deep down (,) and eh . my life looked like that actually right?”  
[first half of sentence sequence is depicting the inner state; second half the outer state]  
(b) “13 . a lot of alcohol came to that (˘)”
- textual sections of descriptive or argumentative detailing with rudimentary reference to the cognitive figure of situation:
 

“13 well practically . really (-) . well how  
14 hould I say (-) just so . hanging/  
15 I mhm  
16 M hanging around (,)  
17 I yes yes”
- textual sections of descriptive or argumentative detailing; here only incipiently realized:
 

“19 I a lot of things are  
20 coming together then (-)  
21 M some things come together right (?)”
- background constructions for the better understanding of difficult experiences:
 

*see below*
- securing the results and evaluations:
 

“21 M that was going on  
to the eviction/ well eviction of my flat that/ had to leave the flat”
- argumentative commentaries for explanation or legitimising, here realised only in an extremely rudimentary way, but alluding to the mechanisms of cumulative mess:
 

“23 and and and (-)”
- the cognitive figure of event carrier: the family members, who would help him in his predicament:
 

“23/27 there: my parents have actually then have helped me a lot (,)”
- The cognitive figure of social frame, in one case the absence of it, in the other its presence:
 

“M and eh . was alone (-)”  
“23/27 there: my parents have actually then have helped me a lot (,)”.

### 3.2. Background Constructions

Especially background constructions (Schütze 1981, 1987, 2001) demonstrate that extempore autobiographical narrations express even personal experiences that the narrator tended to fade out of her or his awareness, since they were so difficult, hurting or shameful. Background constructions are self-corrections of the narrator regarding the course of her or his narrative rendering at points of its implausibility. They are quite often initiated by the narrator her- or himself, when during her or his permanent self-monitoring she or he realizes that the course of presentation becomes questionable, inconsistent, discrepant or even contradictory, enigmatic, phony, etc. Then the narrator is driven by the narrative constraint of going into details. The narrator understands that something is missing between a rendering of event A and a following rendering of event B: e.g. having been kicked out from the career line of the elite sports school (event A) and embarking on the career schedule of the apprenticeship of heavy machinery fitter with the ordinary attitude of a young optimistic apprentice (event B). The missing link is the painful trajectory experience of occupational self-alienation, which the narrator inserts between the recapitulation of events A und B via a long background construction. And the insertion of the background construction then changes the former rendering of event B in a dramatic way: it changes the quality of an unproblematic attitude of an optimistic career expectation into the quality of a gloomy trajectory trap.

Of course the narrator looks at the point of implausibility from the presumed perspective of real and/or imagined addressees by means of the Meadian type of taking the role of the other (Mead 1934), but this doesn't mean that a favorable presentation of oneself to the others is the central concern of the narrator. Instead, in extempore autobiographical story telling she or he is most concerned about the plausibility of her recapitulation of personal experiences to her- or himself. The narrator would like to understand difficult experiences faded out (Schütze 1989, 1992) up to now or enigmatic experiences she or he had forgotten about. And she or he would like to assess their importance for her or his life history and identity development and to understand their origins and mechanisms of unfolding. Finally, she or he would like to assure her- or himself about the continuity and the inner logic of one's own identity development. Of course, in addition, it is important that these self-images are corroborated through the listener who by this becomes an important cooperation partner for the biographical work of the narrator. – Background constructions can also be initiated by the listener or interviewer; in this case the latter is pointing to the point of implausibility in a cautious way, just stating that she or he did not understand how the story line would go on, re-starting from the last plausible

sequence of rendering immediately before the occurrence of the textual point of implausibility. Aware of the fact that a point of implausibility always expresses a difficult life experience, the listener will be very careful and gentle in her or his questioning. Quite often the narrator then feels the encouragement to look at her or his faded out difficult experiences or at enigmatic turns of affairs and event constellations.

Background constructions react to chaotic phases in the extempore recollection of personal experiences; in a certain sense their repair mechanism should bring back order into the chaotic phases of narrative rendering and the connected recollections of sedimented biographical experiences. But they normally accomplish this without any polishing, refurbishing and euphemistic reinterpretation of the recollected experiences, if and when they can fully unfold and carry through their repair job. Insofar the insertion of background constructions is the diametrical contrast to fading out, rationalisation and legitimising, on the level of the dominant line of narrative rendering. The order that is introduced by the fully accomplished background construction is much more complicated than the original order of the narrative rendering. Therefore background constructions are an important means for creative biographical work. – In their origin, their unfolding and finishing, background constructions are the result of the impact of the three narrative constraints in their competition.

### **3.3. Fading Out, Narrative Constraints and Background Constructions**

Firstly, on the level of the dominant story line there operates the narrative constraint of condensing and of grading the relevancies of life historical experiences to be recalled. It serves as a device to recapitulate only the central knots of the experienced life history and its biographical process structures. On the one hand, this enhances the transparency and the analytical insight into one's own life history, because the overall biographical structuring has to be abstracted and assessed. And in addition, the constraint of condensing also exerts an epistemic power to construct and reassess hierarchies of what is more important and what is less important during the overall course of one's own life history. On the other hand, the narrative constraint of condensing strengthens the simplifying tendency of just focusing on the features and life historical involvements of the story carrier as rational actor, who tends to be seen by the narrator as to be without any remarkable change of her or his very transparent and action-efficient identity, and to fade out of one's awareness as narrator the multiple identity changes of the biography incumbent on her or his way through the overall biographical course and structuring of life history and identity development. This means that due to the constraint of condensing there also is a permanent



In the first narrative unit, which has just finished in line 12, the interviewee had told about the beginning of his trajectory experience of occupational self-alienation: that he had been thrown out of the elite sports school, that it would have put him down like “struck by lightning” (page 10 of the Funke interview, lines 41 and 42), that he would have formally finished his school education and that he was directed into an apprenticeship for the fitting of heavy machinery without any real counseling and without any deeper consideration taking into account his personal identity development and working on a mutually shared decision regarding the future course of his occupational life. The narrator starts with the narrative unit, which is basically a kernel sentence with a twofold expressed higher predicate of trajectory experience (i.e., of having slipped into a predicament): “and zap!, chop-chop, that was it and I’ve been slipped into that” (page 11, lines 12 and 13). But the wording, which is initially and actually announcing a trap situation of occupational self-alienation, gets then re-interpreted by the next kernel sentence: “and there I’ve made my two/two and a half years ((quieter till+)) ...made my training for fitter of power-plant then + “ (lines 13 to 15) into the presentation of an ordinary course of apprenticeship career, i.e. into an normatively oriented expectation pattern. Of course, this is the impact of the narrative constraint of condensing. If one could get away as narrator (as well as listener, monitoring one’s own narrative rendering of personal experiences) with this neutralizing or down-playing interpretation of the occupational course after having been kicked out of a satisfying career line and having been put into a superimposed and unloved apprenticeship instead, it wouldn’t be necessary to deal with any biographical complications in the autobiographical rendering, and the course of presentation could be kept unproblematic and short. In order to accomplish this neutralizing interpretation, the narrator adds a self-theoretical commentary: “that as I said was that what actually everybody did here (,)...> o.k.(?)<:” (lines 17 to 20), which underlines the usual, regular, common, normal quality of what had happened to him in having been put into that apprenticeship as machine fitter. Of course, all these are activities of fading-out practices regarding the real quality of the biographical process structure in the life situation of Bernd Funke after having been thrown out of the elite sport school.

But then, still focused upon the phenomena on the level of the dominant story line, the narrator monitors her- or himself and realizes that these fading-out and re-normalizing practices of presentation cause the occurrence of points of implausibility in the course of her or his narrative rendering. These phenomena of implausibility must not have been expressed in palpable linguistic phenomena on the text surface of the dominant presentation level of the story line (like linguistic contradictions such as “a little bit awful”, the massive occurrence of hesitation phenomena or phenomena of self-corrections). It can be just the

phenomenon of non-sequitur of the rendering of event B following the rendering of event A, if and when the two are integrated typical parts of totally different biographical process structures, which do not fit each other. In our textual example of the Funke interview there is the contrast between the trajectory language and the language of a normal career in the same narrative unit. This discrepancy documents, that at this point of narrative presentation, there is something wrong with the presentation of the essential features of the biographical process structure(s) that are dominant here and now. I.e., there is the narrator's superimposition of a career concept of biographical process structure (regarding the vocational training as machine fitter) on the authentic trajectory experiences of occupational self-alienation of the biography incumbent, as we have seen already (e. g., "that was all of a sudden ('). that was like struck by lightning (')+. everything at once (-)" – page 10, lines 41 and 42; "(('). and zap!, chop-chop, that was it and I've been slipped into that" – page 11, line 13), and consequentially, by this superimposition, the latter expression of suffering gets a normalizing re-interpretation and tends to be faded out. There is the feeling of a non-sequitur regarding the event(s) A connected to the experience of the biographical process structure of trajectory and the presumed event(s) B of a normal, smoothly going career development.

As we said already, the narrator is permanently monitoring her- or himself from the imagined standpoint of the listener through the interactive mechanism of role taking, and at such points of implausibility she or he becomes concerned to be inconsistent in her or his narrative presentation – regarding the correct temporal succession, the correct conditional implication, the correct intentional orientation, the correct logic of the unfolding of involved, especially dominant, biographical process structures, etc. Such an inconsistency not only causes the problem of presumed untrustworthiness in the eyes of the listener, but at the same time it provokes the poignant question or even the self-accusation of being inauthentic to oneself. And here the narrative constraint of going into details starts to exert its epistemic power. It is focused on the attempt to restore the plausibility of one's narrative rendering. It starts a background search of the hidden and/or faded out experiences of life-historical events between the reported event(s) A and B as well as for the inner and outer reasons of the renormalizing or even fading-out activities of presentation. Hidden experiences are "suppressed" by the superimposition of another, i.e. renormalizing type of categorization and rendering.

In our textual example there first is the doubtful question "[:> o.k.(?)<:" (page 11, line 20) of the narrator himself, whether his re-normalization statement regarding the ordinary quality of the institutional expectation and career pattern of the apprenticeship of becoming a machine fitter would be convincing at all, and therefore the interviewer feels entitled to step in with cautious and

sympathetic questions regarding Bernd Funke's passing from the elite sports school to his apprenticeship as machine fitter, by alluding to the trajectory experience (here marked by grey shadowing):

- 17 M                                    that as I said was that what actually everybody did  
 18                                    here (,).  
 19 I                                    yeah. yeah.  
 20 M                                    :> o.k.(?)<:  
 21 I                                    ///  
 22                                    the transition to the first training better now (,)  
 23 M                                    yes  
 24 I                                    well you  
 25                                    indicate that earlier on but/ so in all the dimensions I could  
 26                                    understand that argument ehm. ehm. did you have in that situation  
 27                                    when that (-) . that must have come very sudden (-)  
 28 M                                    yes  
 29 I                                    . suddenly it was clear  
 30                                    that the development in the direction of sports didn't go any further(-)  
 31                                    you haven't been chosen (-) . did you have any ideas for yourself  
 32                                    at all what you want to do (?)  
 33 M                                    no not at all  
 34 I                                    did you not have ( )  
 35 M                                    I couldn't think  
 36                                    of anything ( ' )  
 37 I                                    yes  
 38 M                                    ehm. there haven't been any ideas (,). nothing (,)
- (page 11, lines 17 to 38; the beginning of the background construction is marked by gray shadowing)

This narrative background construction is elicited by the listening interviewer, but we saw that it is pre-arranged by the narrator, since he is addressing his doubtful "o.k.?" – question to the listener. And then the narrator cooperatively starts to embark on the trajectory experience he wanted to skip first: "I couldn't think of anything ( ' ) ... ehm. There haven't been any ideas (,). nothing (,)" (line 35 to 38). After this stammering beginning of his background presentation the narrator then goes on to deal with the gloomy future auspices of the trajectory quite elaborately: "and then maybe doorkeeper with 50 sometime( ' ) . and that was it then (, ) . right ( ? )" (page 12, lines 7 and 8). But finally, in his autobiographical recapitulation the narrator cannot emotionally stand this first future projection, i.e. the former conclusion as young apprentice



at the organization of the GDR riot police after having met knowledgeable persons in the paramilitary youth organization for “Sports and Technique” (GST). But this rescue way would have been a move equivalent to falling from the frying pan into the fire, since the narrator makes totally clear that he wouldn’t have liked to use this way out; rather he was talked into it by other persons, including his father. (In addition, it was later on made impossible by the breakdown of the GDR). Thus, the second order background construction further elaborates the features of the trajectory process of occupational self-alienation, in which Bernd Funke had been trapped in during his imposed apprenticeship: especially the feature, that there was no real way out of the trajectory trap in the true sense of biographical rescue from self-alienation. If we remember that the first order background construction also elaborated the features of the trajectory process – the disorientation (“empty head”), the mental paralysis, the gloomy future auspices with its fateful character, etc. – we can draw the more general conclusion, that, as we said above, background constructions bring back order to the chaotic phases of narrative rendering and the connected recollections of chaotic biographical experiences sedimented in one’s memory. But the secondary order accomplished by the means of background construction is the higher order of the dynamic unfolding of chaos character, connected with deep suffering, of the biographical process structure of trajectory. (Those chaotic phenomena of life history and biographical unfolding have their own conditional and sequential order of being forces and estranged, which we cannot deal with here). The insight into this higher order of dynamic unfolding of the chaos character of biographical trajectory and into the process of coming to terms with it is a central feature of biographical work as seen in the presentation activities and the textual forms of background constructions.

### **3.5. Closing-up of Background Constructions**

At the very end of a background construction the narrative constraint of closing the textual forms becomes dominant. Background constructions, although devises of “healing” or self-correction of a discrepancy or of a vagueness of textual rendering at points of implausibility, nevertheless interrupt and cut the cognitive form of the dominant narrative unit, where they occur, and its supra-segmental sequential linking with other narrative units that depicts a specific biographical process structure. After the provocation and commencement of a background construction, the gestalt of the narrative unit and the gestalt of the supra-segmental context of a specific biographical process structure remain unfinished. Remarkably, almost no narrator forgets the unfinished cognitive figure of the specific biographical process structure and the interrupted gestalt of

the narrative unit, even if the background construction turns out to be extremely long. This is the impact of the narrative constraint of closing the textual form. Usually the interrupted textual form of the narrative unit and the biographical process structure re-commences exactly at that point where it had been cut. Quite often even the same type of wording is used; sometimes even a “quoting” or repeating of exactly that wording can be observed, which was used exactly before the insertion of the background construction. In our empirical example – just to remind us – the last formulation before the onset of the first order background construction is as follows:

13 and I've been slipped into that and there I've made my two/two and a half years  
 14 ((quieter till+)) I believe it was to that time. made my training for fitter of  
 15 power-plant then +  
 16 I mhm. Ye es  
 17 M that as I said was that what actually everybody did  
 18 here (,).  
 (page 11, lines 13 to 18)

The first formulation after the closing up of the background construction is:

9 and eh . well the occupational apprenticeship but was really finished in an orderly way (') .  
 10 but then already . to that time we were already one Germany right (?)  
 11 Yes  
 12 And that was all . in one (,)  
 (page 13, lines 9 to 13)

The presentation context of career training and its language are the same in both quotations. The constraint of closing the form forces the narrator to finish both gestalts: the one of the narrative unit and the one of the cognitive figure of the specifically depicted biographical process structure, i.e. the institutional expectation pattern of career line, although it is clear at the same time, that it is just the facade of a trajectory of occupational self-alienation as rendered before. (In the narrator's rendering, this trajectory process went on with unemployment forcibly conditioned and prolonged by the German re-unification process, which destroyed the East German industry of heavy machinery production – a macro-process against which Bernd Funke could have only been able to protect himself by migrating to West Germany. But he did not have the courage to do this, since he was not really identified with what he felt was a superimposed occupation).

### 3.6. Summary

Extempore story telling of personal experiences as elicited in an autobiographical narrative interview and analyzed in a structural description exerts the epistemic power of expressing:

- outer and inner experiences;
- identity changes of the narrator as story carrier;
- fading-out, rationalization and legitimising activities of the narrator as story carrier;
- difficult experiences that had been faded out from her or his awareness;
- the sequence and the interface of biographical process structures that had an impact on the life history and the identity change of the narrator;
- the overall biographical structuring of the life history and the involved identity changes;
- the biographical work of the narrator and the involved self-theoretical activities.

Thus, extempore narrative interviewing is a powerful epistemic mechanism for the generation of knowledge. This is due to the constraints of extempore story telling, the orderly macro-presentation procedures of the cognitive figures, the orderly micro-presentation procedures of the narrative units, and the device of background construction, which transfers chaotic experiences that were faded out of awareness before into consciously ordered meta-structures of the logic of the chaotic. Due to the methodological principle of pragmatic refraction, the structural description of textual microstructures of narrative units (including background constructions) reveals the powerful epistemic power of extempore story telling and depicts even non-noticed and/or faded out socio-biographical processes.

## 4. Single Case Analysis of the Funke Interview

In the following section I would like to show the structural description and analytical abstraction of the Funke interview as an example. This might make it easier to do one's own single case analysis of an autobiographical narrative interview.

#### **4.1. A Shortened Version of the Structural Description of the Funke Interview**

One has to differentiate between the analytical description as a research step in single case analysis and the writing up of portrait chapters as the textual presentation of such an analysis. In order to find out what is the case in a life history, as revealed by an autobiographical narrative interview it is pivotal to do the analytical work step of a structural description as part of the research proper for the whole interview. The analytical work step consists of segmenting the whole interview, doing the formal and substantive analysis of each narrative unit following up the sequence of narrative units, collating the outcomes of analysis of topically related or identical narrative units of the main story part of the interview and the questioning parts as well as finding out the supra-segmental markers of biographical process structures.

A special focus should be put on formal phenomena, such as especially vague strings of presentations, symptomatic barriers to work something through in one's presentation and the related attempts at fading-out, a sudden rise of the level of detailing, background constructions and the combination of first order and second order background constructions, as symptoms or self-declarations of forgetting and especially repeated forgetting (respectively delayed sudden remembering), as the mixing up of different event carriers and episodes of high symbolic importance for the narrator and biography incumbent (e.g. an old lady could partially mix up her marriage sixty years ago and her present birthday party, when she becomes eighty years old; she would like to be in the centre of a family festivity again, although she is almost forgotten by her family), as stubborn presentation of iterated arguments without a productive unfolding of the communicative scheme of argumentation (for doing biographical work – see parts 5 and 6 in the introductory module) and with related restraining of the communicative scheme of narration – this can be observed most dramatically in pre-coda positions –, special attempts to rationalize and legitimize, as well as narrative codas split and separated into their two parts and invaded by elaborate and iterated arguments regarding unsolved biographical problems. Any of these formal phenomena could legitimize an especially close analysis of the narrative units involved.

Another special import must be laid on remarkable substantive phenomena of biographical process structures, as they are obvious in the narrative interview, e.g. in the Funke interview: a cumulative mess of various trajectory experiences (being systematically deprived in his biographical action scheme of becoming a state athlete, being forced into an alienating apprenticeship, being long-term unemployed, having contracted a severe chronic illness, being abandoned by his

girlfriend); powerful structural conditions of being hindered to learn and to do biographical work, like the imposition of occupational career lines on individual lives in state socialist societies and its alienating impact on biographical identity; biographical experiences and institutional conditions that fight the trajectory dynamics, e.g. moratoriums situation to find oneself; learning to think about oneself and starting to do biographical work. Here again the researcher finds hindsight, regarding which narrative units it would be especially worthwhile to deepen her or his structural description.

The researcher should then also decide, which parts of the structural description should be written down in an especially careful mode. Normally it is not sensible to write down the whole outcome of the structural description in an elaborate way. The reader and maybe the researcher, too, would then have severe difficulties to find out what are the central relevancies of biographical process structures and their hierarchy in the analyzed life history. Therefore, after having done the structural description as an analytic research step, graphically represented by horizontal lines between the narrative units, by horizontal lines between sub-segments, etc., and as jotted down by short notes characterizing remarkable formal and substantive phenomena in the interview, it must be decided which strings of narrative units should be worked out in the detailed written form and what would be the criteria for selection. The other parts of the interview should be analytically sketched by drawing the lines of biographical process structures using the analytical support by the supra-segmental markers. – Again: it is most important to differentiate between the research step of structural description proper and the writing up of structural descriptions in the form of portrait chapters. In order to document this difference, I will represent my total structural description of the Funke interview by just showing my short notes done while actually doing the research step proper of structural description.

### **A. Main Story Part of the Funke Interview**

1. Specialized education of the informant, i.e. the boy and adolescent Bernd Funke, in an elite school of sports training is a biographical cul-de-sac, because he is not good enough for becoming a professional handball athlete (1,6–1,18).

2. Start of the first biographical trajectory of Bernd Funke: being thrown into an occupation that – at least in the beginning – is not connected to personal biographical sense and later on becomes superfluous. Imposition of a special plumber apprenticeship for becoming a specialist in establishing and fitting heavy industrial machinery on the life of the adolescent Bernd Funke (1,19–1,34).

3. No opportunity for Bernd Funke to work in this heavy machinery occupation later, since after the German unification the industrial structure of East Germany for the production of heavy machinery broke down (loss of 60 000 work places) (1,35–1,38).

4. Work as plumber for four years; Mr. Funke's personal experience of the every day life impact of the breakdown of GDR industrial structure; Mr. Funke's specialized occupation of establisher and fitter of heavy machinery is becoming more and more obsolete (1,38–1,44).

5. Service of Mr. Funke in the united German army: he has been put into ordinance service. The army service seems to be a suitable biographical moratorium for the informant, so he properly learns to work in a service occupation (as waiter); he is able to identify with those quasi-occupational service tasks. First transgression of the limits of technical work, and in later life this might prove to become important for his retraining as office worker. – On the other hand, the army service of Mr. Funke seems to be connected to a loss of his biographical time and to somewhat losing control over his athletic body: He gets fat (1,44–1,53).

6. Mr. Funke's experience of occupational disorientation and long-term unemployment. Small jobs, partially in the plumbing occupation (2,1–2,12).

7. Chance of an occupational comeback, i.e. to work again in metal construction. By chance and personal connections Mr. Funke finds work in a small firm for metal construction; Mr. Funke's expectation of the consolidation of his life situation. However, the informant gives the following – almost disguised – two qualifications: he says that he slid (“reingerutscht”) into the position, and the firm was just some sort of small hut or shackle (a “Butze”) (2,12–2,16).

8. Eclipse of Mr. Funke's first trajectory of having learnt a superfluous, an obsolete occupation. Breakdown of expectation: the small firm of metal construction doesn't pay his salary. Start of the second trajectory of becoming socially isolated and losing significant others; it might also be seen as a transformation of the first trajectory (somebody who is in permanent material difficulties and doesn't find a stance to it, tends to lose his life partner and his or her friends). His girlfriend breaks away from him. Start of the third biographical trajectory of suffering from a severe chronic disease. Bernd Funke gets a permanent pain in his back connected to his spine. He is not able anymore to work in his plumbing occupation. Change of corporeal identity and personal attitude to his body again: he gets extremely slim (2,16–2,29).

9. After a while an MD finds out that he contracted Morbus Bechterev: a stiffening of the spine by overproduction of bone material. (Until today this chronic illness cannot be healed, but its trajectory course can be slowed down).

Realization that he has lost the capacity to do manual work. Alienation from one's own biographical identity (2,30–2,44).

10. Ending of Mr. Funke's contract with the small metal construction firm that doesn't pay his salary. Mr. Funke is physically disabled and cannot continue the work in his learnt occupation. Transformation of the first trajectory: Amassing of debts, since he did not get any salary payments from the small metal construction firm. Systematic trap through debts and danger of losing his flat, of becoming homeless (2,44–3,11).

11. Mr. Funke experiences the deepest, biographically most difficult stage of the unfolding of the three connected trajectories of suffering (being systematically unemployed; losing one's social and love relationship; suffering a severe disease): breakdown of every day life organization. He formulates: "I was deep down" ("Da war ich eigentlich sehr weit unten"). And he formulates: "There are many things, which came together." Additional transformation of trajectory: Bernd Funke becomes an alcoholic (3,11–3,23).

12. Intervention activities of controlling the trajectory dynamics in the disastrous life situation of Bernd Funke: Help ("first aid") of mother and grandparents. Stepping-in of the health insurance company: Mr. Funke can spend five weeks in a spa. There he gets the clarification and confirmation of the diagnosis of his disease: Morbus Bechterev. Situation of biographical moratorium: first time for Mr. Funke of getting some distance from all the experiences of suffering that had an impact on him for such a long time (3,23–3,31).

13. Intervention and getting processed by the labour exchange administration. After some interrogation and testing the labour exchange bureau raises the idea that Bernd Funke could be re-schooled and retrained, i.e. rehabilitated as an industrial business clerk or administrative office worker. The informant assesses that the psycho-social "case study" of the labour exchange bureau on him was not very circumspect and systematic. The decision of the labour exchange bureau to offer a re-schooling and retraining for the occupation of business clerk to Mr. Funke seems to not have been informed by personal ideas and wishes of Mr. Funke; the decision of the labour exchange bureau might have been done in a quite haphazard way. – The tests of the labour exchange bureau administered on Mr. Funke show that he needs a special preparation for the upcoming apprenticeship in a vocational training school (3,31–5,3).

14. Rehabilitative re-schooling and retraining of Mr. Funke. The subjects are: German and English language, budget/accounting, and mathematics. Contrast set of the cleavage between young and old students in class; the danger felt by Bernd Funke of getting de-motivated by the discouraged and weary older students in class. But Mr. Funke understands the deeper social or theatrical

meaning of this contrast set and positions himself as young and interested. He re-activates his old biographical capacity of intensive identification with the occupational tasks put in front of him. He does the biographical work of defining his present life situation: that it is a chance for a new biographical and material beginning. Mr. Funke realises that there are no material, physical, social and biographical resources left for his going on as he did before or for an additional other alternative course of occupational development than the one that was offered to him already (5,4–6,17).

15. Emotional realization that the dynamics of the trajectory development are arrested: For Mr. Funke life becomes beautiful again. Mr. Funke's biographical plan of, and focussing on, his successful finishing of the rehabilitative education and training in the vocational training centre. Change of biographical process structures: (a) undergoing an educational career and (b) intentional biographical action scheme of finishing the educational career course. There is an important significant other in the training centre: social worker Mrs. Brühl, who counsels and helps individually. She conveys biographical strength to Mr. Funke; she teaches him that he counts personally and biographically. Especially because of her personal caring Mr. Funke can overcome his devastating feelings of total loneliness and of total personal incapability. Mrs. Brühl helps him to develop orientations for his own biographical future. She teaches him to do the biographical work of creatively and realistically shaping one's own future. She also trains him to become circumspect regarding the provisions for everyday life and biographically pivotal situations (e.g. job interviews). And, finally, she teaches him to authentically present himself in biographically decisive situations. Looking to all of these deep learning and training experiences there might even be some bit of a metamorphosis experience in this stage of Mr. Funke's life – a metamorphosis experience that is defined by the more or less non-organizable dynamics of creative identity change (6,17–6,42).

16. It is a very good firm that takes Mr. Funke in as an apprentice: the convention centre hall of the city he lives in. In this firm there are many different sorts and features of occupational work. Mr. Funke gets many opportunities to learn anew. Background construction (7,14–7,33) which expresses the shock of first beginning as apprentice: Mr. Funke's experiencing the (for him) totally strange and different work discipline of service administration and the involved paper work, and he has to accept the admonitions of the quite stern but righteous female boss. In the vocational school he has to attend on a steady basis Mr. Funke gets social encouragement by his peers who are in the same or in a comparable situation of rehabilitation (6,42–7,40).

17. Mr. Funke now works in a permanent position of public administration (in the convention centre hall). In addition, he follows up a part time (evening

hours) study of business administration; biographical auspices of getting further ahead in his occupational career (7,40–7,52).

18.Pre-coda commentary with positive overall biographical evaluation and balancing: “Now I am a happy man. I am content, except that there might be too much work. It virtually cannot get better” (8,1–8,14).

19.Coda with cautious, very modest commentary on the kind of narrative presentation the informant did accomplish: “I hope that you wanted to hear this type of biographical rendering” (8,15–8,20).

## **B. Answers of the Informant to Narrative and Descriptive Questioning**

The questioning activity of the interviewer is immediately connected to the finishing of the coda: start of the second half of the autobiographical narrative interview, i.e. the interview section for raising immanent and non-immanent narrative, descriptive and argumentative questions, in order to make the autobiographical rendering of the main story line more detailed (8,20–23,41).

20.The informant tells about his personal experiences with the GDR selection system of getting chosen for the various fields of competitive elite sports; at least in his case it functioned like an illusionary, treacherous entrapment device (“The door of the classroom went open: “We support the development of sports” – They don’t say: “We would like to support your personal development in sports”). Then the informant talks about his own intake into this elite training and control system and to attending an elite sports „grammar school“. There he specializes in handball sports (8,20–9,23).

21.The whole school life of the sports grammar school is adapted to the state institutionalised training schedule. The individual biographical counterpart of this is Mr. Funke’s super-focusing on his handball training and general sports training; he gets into some sort of addiction from sports (9,24–10,10).

22.Mr. Funke’s great expectation – according to the institutionally promised and expected career line – of becoming a handball professional (or, to what was the counterpart to this in the GDR sports system: of becoming a state actor in sports – comparable to a state writer, state artist or state scientist, who maximises the reputation of the GDR) (10,10–10,30).

23.Getting thrown out of the specialized sports school. Mr. Funke experiences his elimination from the elite sports school like a stroke of lightning smashing down on him. Start of the first trajectory of being put into an alienating occupation that is not connected to any biographical sense making activities of Mr. Funke as well as of the professionals in the labour exchange bureau or in the apprenticeship education. No traces of institutional support for overcoming Mr. Funke’s suffering of having lost one’s own biographical orientation. No traces of

biographical work of young Bernd Funke himself towards re-orientation of his future life and interpretation of his past life history. Mr. Funke has been put into an apprenticeship that was just available. No traces of educational considerations in the informant's depiction of the exclusion decision and the respective activities of his teachers in the elite sports school. (This might not have been extraordinary, since the GDR system of being selected for, and placed in, the occupational system was one of generalized top-down planning just taking into account the requirements of the "societal macro-household" of occupational demands, and not listening to any types of biographical considerations of the involved and afflicted individuals). Mr. Funke becomes an apprentice for the occupation of placing and fitting heavy machinery (a technically advanced and specialised version of the plumber occupation). Bernd Funke's trajectory experience of being institutionally processed without taking into regard one's own personal considerations: alienation from one's biographical identity (10,30–11,12).

24. The apprenticeship forces Mr. Funke into a severe trajectory situation: he feels having an empty head, being numb, undergoing a condition of severe disorientation. First order (11,20–14,8) and second order (12,16–13,37) background construction: every expectation of a biographical escape from the trajectory trap of having been forced and introduced into the wrong occupation seems to be far away. This is an extremely hurting experience that Bernd Funke then, in that former life situation, and now, as present narrator and interview partner, attempts to fade out of his awareness. (Exactly this is what the utterance "empty head" means). Mr. Funke's dim, remote contemplation over a way out: of becoming a non-commissioned officer in the East German army; this should later on – that is the vague expectation of Mr. Funke – be followed by a career in the military branch of the GDR central police task force ("Bereitschaftspolizei"). Mr. Funke finishes his apprenticeship. At the same time: breakdown of the East German state, transformation of the East German society and unification of the two German states. Through these macro-changes of social structure the occupation of establishing and fitting heavy machinery becomes superfluous for the East German economy. Loss of 60 000 occupational positions in the heavy machinery industry in East Germany, especially in that area of the country, where the informant lives in. In addition, the East German occupation of machine fitter and establisher as such doesn't seem to be totally acceptable in West Germany. Loss of the red thread of narrative presentation (14,13): it is difficult for the informant to recollect and re-live this extremely difficult phase of his trajectory of occupational alienation and misplacement (11,12–14,13).

25. Contemplating the possible biographical alternatives in the present interview retrospect – but not in the narrated former actual situation –: Mr. Funke should have gone to West Germany, but instead, after finishing the

apprenticeship, he stays in the firm of his vocational training on a contract without any pay (14,14–15,4).

26.Mr. Funke experiences the collective trajectory of partial dismantling of the industrial structure of East Germany; loss of occupational positions and opportunities of heavy industry in East Germany on a large scale. Mr. Funke's witnesses the societal and social chaos of the breakdown of a society's socio-structural formation and its economic sub-structure. He is forced to do superfluous occupational work ("to collect dirt and to shovel the sand from one hip to the other") (15,4–15,50).

27.Mr. Funke works as a plumber without any pay and contract. Mr. Funke lives in the state of unstable equilibrium of the first trajectory of being trapped within a superfluous occupation and being alienated by it in his personal identity structure (15,50–16,37).

28.Intersection of the occupational trajectory and the newly appearing illness trajectory. Mutual re-enforcement of two or even multiple trajectory courses. Mr. Funke's eclipse of his multi-faceted personal trajectory experience of being systematically unemployed; of being severely ill; of being socially isolated and totally alone; as well as of being in a debt trap. ("And suddenly all of that went downhill. This really went deeply under point zero" – The last quotation is a supra-segmental narrative marker of trajectory experience – 16,50/51) (16,38–17,3).

29.Mr. Funke quits his job as plumber: from his former boss he has to get reimbursed by 3 000 Euros (6000 Marks), which he never receives. (He didn't work under a formal contract). The labour exchange office discourages him to sue the firm. ("They say: „You cannot get anything from such a firm that has many unpaid creditors"). The labour exchange office gives no emotional support regarding the devastating feeling of having been cheated by his boss he trusted in and having been abandoned by everybody (17,3–18,31).

30.Suddenly struck down by the illness trajectory: Morbus Bechterev. His quitting of all types of sports exercises, games and competitions personally means for Mr. Funke: loss of his sports friends, who are biographically very important peers (18,31–19,9).

31.Psycho-bodily transformation of the combined dynamics of two or more trajectories of Mr. Funke into a severe state of alcoholism. Bernd Funke did not understand what happened to him (multi-problem trajectory, and fading out of the suffering from one's own awareness) (19,10–20,6).

32.The health insurance company and the labour exchange office intervene:

- Mr. Funke's biographical moratorium in a spa.

- Sitting in the classroom of the vocational training centre is seen by Mr. Funke as the opportunity to start a new life. (“It was like drawing a closing line to former life and now beginning a new life”).

- Bernd Funke is positioned anew within the co-ordinate system of the social structure. Background construction (20,45–21,43): reflection of not having been sensibly and fairly positioned in society at all before the start of this new period of life.

- Being psychologically tested.

- Getting money for living on a stable base. Formation of the biographical action scheme of becoming a business clerk – as suggested by the labour exchange office. (Some features of accidental offer and decision: during this period of societal transformation in East Germany administratively organised schematic opportunities of job training were available, such as for the position of a business clerk. – But contrary to the lack of biographical counselling, the labour exchange office does take into consideration the bodily condition of Mr. Funke, e. g. that he would not be able anymore to be trained and to work in a manual occupation with lots of body movements such as, e.g., land surveyor – an occupation, which he did wish to enter quite a bit) (20,7–22,30).

33. Bernd Funke attends two job interviews; he gives an authentic biographical presentation (22,30–23,18).

34. Shock of the first days in the new occupational position: doing secretarial paper work, which in his organizational logic is totally strange to Mr. Funke. But Mr. Funke is fascinated by the complexity of the various work lines of the multi-feature firm “Convention Centre Hall”. And he is being “adopted” by the middle-aged women of the work department he is assigned to (23,19–23,41).

### **C. Replies of the Informant to Argumentative Questioning**

The interviewer gives a general commentary on the accidental nature of Mr. Funke’s second occupational career line. This puts the re-learning achievement of Mr. Funke and the felicitousness of his second biographical beginning into question. The general commentary of the interviewer elicits general argumentative assessments of the informant. He now adopts the communicative scheme of argumentation (23,41–28,16).

35. Interviewer-introduced discussion of the accidental nature of the circumstances through which Mr. Funke got the offer to be trained as business clerk. But this accidental decision did and still does make biographical sense to Mr. Funke: it was his straw to grip under the combined impact of the severe occupational and illness trajectories (biographical sense making practices). After a short while Mr. Funke is able to transform this accidental decision into

a professional identification. He is fascinated by the complexity of the multi-feature firm he is accepted to learn in. The intensive identification with his new work situation is based on the biographical work that Mr. Funke did in-between (especially supported by the professional counsellor Mrs. Brühl in the vocational rehabilitation centre). – Experience of being placed or even positioned in the structure of social relations in the firm: he gets “adopted” as a “son” by the middle-aged women of the firm. – In doing his biographical work– and he does this even in the actual interview situation – Mr. Funke reaches at the final recovery state of working–through his trajectory experiences: he becomes self-aware of having matured. He shows understanding and compassion with the much younger female apprentice, who gets into difficulties in the firm. – Some features of metamorphosis: for the informant it is fun to work; self-awareness of his maturation; he is able to focus on every important feature of his new work situation, and he is astonished that he is able to handle it easily. (23,41–26,11).

36. Self-explanation of the informant why he underwent an intensive biographical maturation: in his perspective, most pivotal for this is his biographical caretaker or even significant other Mrs. Brühl. What she does for her client is:

- She trains him in elementary organisational culture.
- She counsels him how to become aware of his own personal strengths and identity features.
- She demonstrates circumspection as a role model, and, in addition, she even teaches circumspection in a direct educational way.
- She educates her client how to present himself as applicant: a good application must be authentic and presented in a biographical language: E.g. during the job interview one should say something like: „I have set out to search for a new orientation in life”.
- She provides useful paraphernalia for her client’s application situations (e.g. transparent envelopes for the application documents).
- For her client she checks the possibility and the adequacy of his placement in two firms under consideration.
- She gives biographical encouragement to her client.
- She explains teaching materials of the vocational school Mr. Funke did not understand; and she prepares him for his final examination of his apprenticeship.
- Very important also is: Mrs. Brühl gives Mr. Funke the feeling to be cared for.

- The general biographical insight that the trajectory incumbent himself brings into the rehabilitative educational situation of the vocational training centre is as follows: He knows that he has to move biographically after having undergone several complex biographical trajectories and/or their transformations: that of occupational misplacement, that of a severe chronic disease, that of getting socially isolated and that of getting into the debt trap. Of course, this insight of her client makes the counselling work of Mrs. Brühl much easier (26,12–28,16).

#### **4.2. First Sub-Step of Analytical Abstraction: Outlining the Overall Biographical Structuring**

The reconstructed “gestalt” of the overall biographical structuring (Riemann 1987; Schütze 1981, 1983, 1984; Perleberg, Schütze, Heine 2006) is the outcome of the following three procedures:

a) Looking at the sequential order and the supra-segmental markers of the narrative units of the main story line and delineating the start, the evolvment and the ending of biographical process structures, their sequential combination and their competition and/or mutual support during the same biographical period;

b) looking at the more detailed renderings of the personally painful and shameful experiential contexts as well as the subliminal creative experiences, as dealt with in the questioning parts of the interview;

c) Looking at the argumentative commentary activities of the main story line as they are interpretatively assessing, explaining, legitimating and/or evaluating the experiences of biographical process structures, their sequential combination and their actual mutual impact (competition, support, substitution, etc).

The overall biographical structuring of the life history of Mr. Funke can now be outlined in terms of the following sequence of biographical process structures and their internal phases:

1. Bernd Funke embarks on a career as an elite student of competitive sports in an elite sports gymnasium in order to become a state athlete in the GDR sports system; the latter is a vague, but not unreasonable biographical action scheme.

2. The career auspices of Bernd Funke are destroyed when he is in the tenth grade (16 years of age), since after several years of training and studying in the elite sports gymnasium his trainers and teachers suddenly see his achievements in competitive athletic activities by as insufficient for the biographical action scheme to become a professional state athlete. The biographical career scheme

and the related biographical action scheme of becoming a state athlete have finally turned into a dead end lane and biographical trap.

3. This conditions Bernd Funke's start of a self-alienating trajectory of being processed by a superimposed vocational training that is not grounded in any practice of biographical sense making. There is a protracted evolvement of this occupational trajectory experience: Bernd Funke is processed in a self-estranging vocational training and, on top of this, he has to endure an additional (biographical trajectory) trap quality of this vocational training, i.e. being driven into long-term unemployment after the breakdown of the GDR heavy machinery industry.

4. After becoming unemployed, respectively after having been in a pseudo-occupational state of working without pay, the self-alienating occupational trajectory becomes dynamic. There are typical symptoms of the dynamisation of an alienating occupational and unemployment trajectory and its realisation in the case of Mr. Funke: experiencing an "empty head" and feeling undermined in his own personal identity structure, losing his important social relationships (Bernd Funke's girl friend splits away from him), an incremental building up of a debt trap; as well as becoming an alcoholic.

5. There is a sudden first precipitation and a later overwhelming evolvement of a trajectory of severe chronic illness (Morbus Bechterev). Mr. Funke is not able to practice sports anymore; this is connected to a sudden and total loss of his peers and his pivotal social relationships in the field of sports. The illness trajectory now intersects with the alienating occupational and unemployment trajectory and their ensuing transformations. Bernd Funke must endure the cumulative mess of the interface of several trajectories and/or of their transformations that he is afflicted and labouring with. A breakdown of his action capacity to organise his every-day life follows. This is conditioned especially through the permanent drinking of alcohol as a fading-out practice as well as through the nagging and fatiguing danger of imminent eviction from his apartment and, thus, the risk of becoming a homeless person.

6. Bernd Funke's family and his health insurance company intervene, and they immediately enact a decisive rescue action scheme: to circumvent the eviction as well as to curb the rapid downward move of the trajectory or trajectory transformation of severe alcoholism, with its imminent danger of a total orientation breakdown.

7. Bernd Funke is offered a decisive biographical moratorium in a health spa to the extent that it conditions an arresting or "freezing" of the multiple trajectory dynamics and of the involved trajectory transformation dynamics (e.g. to become economically insolvent, progressively isolated, a notorious alcoholic, etc).

8. Bernd Funke undergoes a flexible institutional retraining program by a public avantgarde Vocational Retraining Agency (an occupational retraining, assistance and mediating agency) as mediated and offered by the state official labour exchange organisation. In this vocational retraining are built-in structural chances for biographical reconsideration, for biographical learning and for biographical work of all sorts as well as for new biographical starts and for the built-up of new biographical action schemes. The institutional retraining program offers moratorium time to its client for new inner developments. For the professional counsellor, this entails the following work tasks: providing an overall school educational arrangement focused on the client's learning new features of the occupational world and on self-encouragement as a dependable and capable learner; establishing self-reflective learning situations of personal training in a coach-client relationship; giving leeway for the client's fighting and overcoming his or her relapses into old trajectory reactions and into the involved personal difficulties; teaching the client to exert dynamic control on biographical inertia (of being fatigued); as well as providing for several conditions of limited procedural "timeout" in order to allow for the client's additional inner time of personal change and growth;

9. During the course of his retraining program the personal identification of Mr. Funke develops with this chance that suddenly appeared for a new learning and retraining career as apprentice. Mr. Funke enacts the biographical action scheme of winning a new vocational identity and getting a promising occupational position; he learns to do biographical work by looking at his own personal weaknesses and mistakes, especially at his systematic vulnerability dispositions, as having been fatal in the past;

10. Mr. Funke's becomes a successful initiate within his newly acquired occupational world. He makes new experiences in the field of social relationships, he learns work ethics, and he acquires creativity in his occupational dealings. He is especially doing more intensive and more reflective biographical work – now partially focused on the future (biographical action scheme of being a part time student of business administration); some features of biographical metamorphosis are observable from his change from the world of manual labour to the world of white collar work, especially secretarial paper work and management work.

To the reconstruction of overall biographical structuring also belongs the sub-step of analysing the self-theoretical insights and rationalisations of the informant, as realized through argumentative strings of text (stemming from the communicative scheme of argumentation). In the general lay-out of autobiographical narrative interviews there are the following features for self-theorizing and argumentation:

- Systematic textual positions for self-theoretical activities (Schütze 1987) in the autobiographical narrative interview: e.g., commentaries to narrative presentations of the peak phase, turning point and eclipse experiences of biographical process structures as well as pre-coda re-evaluations of one's own history and present life situation, etc.;

- Self-theoretical insights and shortcomings of the informant as biography incumbent: e.g. the insight into the trap situation of a vocational training or an occupational situation, on the one hand, and the delusion to be always a competent analyst of one's own difficulties, on the other. To take the example of Mr. Funke: he understands to some extent the self-alienating character of his first apprenticeship of becoming a heavy machinery plumber, on the one hand, but he fades out of his awareness his notorious lack of biographical planning regarding any work position offered to him, on the other: he doesn't ask himself if these offers of a new occupational position or training program fit his personal identity, he always shows the attitude of automatic acceptance and identification with such positions, and he develops the inadequate self-theory that his notorious identification with new job offers would always be just a virtue and personal strength. Bernd Funke's belief that his attitude and capacity to personally identify with every required or even superimposed institutional task and his aptitude to carry it through would be a moral virtue and personal strength, is in fact one of the central conditions for his undergoing a protracted trajectory course of occupational self-alienation, for he accepts the unloved plumber apprenticeship and remains in it without any protest. For example, he states near the end of his interview:

50 but actually that was always like that (-).  
 51 I made every effort everywhere I liked to do everything then (,).  
 52 in my other fields of work too at that time (-). in the  
 53 steal construction or  
 1 as a plumber (-) . ehm . that was always a fulfilment for me (,).  
 4 But when it was over with that it was said then "so that's it (,) from (-) .  
 now on 5 it's done with". then a new thing came up (-) . you got to (...) again  
 (page 25, line 50 to page 26, line 5).

Self-theoretical activities can be central constituents of biographical work, on the one hand, and they can be central means to hinder biographical work, on the other. Some of the self-theories are self-produced ("authentic") theories, and some of them are borrowed theoretical explanations and orientations as handed over by professionals and lay people (especially peers); the borrowed theories could cause a theoretical loss of authenticity, if they would not fit the

biographical experiences of the informant. The most important methodological step in order to find out about the biographical work function and the several delusional, legitimating and rationalizing functions of self-theoretical and argumentative textual strings is their pragmatic refraction or contextualizing them with the socio-biographical processes as rendered by the narrative units and their sequences.

### **4.3. Procedures and Topics of Analytical Abstraction**

The research activities of (a) reconstructing the sequence and interface of biographical process structures as the first sub-step of the overall biographical structuring and of (b) dealing with the argumentative (self-theoretical and rationalising) presentation activities of the informant as the second sub-task of the reconstruction of the overall biographical structuring are integral parts of the epistemic realm of analytical abstraction already. In addition, there are the case specific and universal theoretical insights of the researcher into the process mechanisms and social frames of the life history of the informant. On the one hand, the insights into biographical process mechanisms and social frames are partially the final result from all the research steps done up to now on the single interview (or case). On the other hand, the insights partially have to be produced by two specific additional research procedures.

1. Firstly one should ask what are the most important specific and universal features and process mechanisms of the life history under study in its special relationship to the rehabilitation situation – as empirically based on the analytical procedures for the study of single interviews that were done already. In the case of Mr. Funke one could list the following features:

a) Not having learnt to do biographical work – especially in regard to choosing a biographically adequate vocation.

In order to get a deeper insight here, it is helpful to consider in some bit more detail (than in section 1 of the first part of this module), what biographical work (Corbin and Strauss 1988: chapter 4 and 5) is. Just to list its most important features:

- to see yourself as a developing entity that matters
- to realize that it makes a big difference whether you focus on that development or not: that you try to support it, if it is benign, or to stop it, if it is detrimental
- to understand that, at the beginning, you don't really know what is the quality and the dynamics of the unfolding of that development: therefore you have to find out about it

- to acknowledge, that the task to find out basically means to tell your life history: by autobiographical story telling you will express to yourself, what are possible overarching features of your life; to understand that it is important to see the self-historical shape of your biography
  - to delineate the nature of these overarching features of life:
    - autobiographical self-thematizations of your life history as a whole: especially far-reaching plans and expectations as well as severe disappointments and experiences of having been personally hurt)
    - resources of sense making: delineating the self-historical gestalt of your life and identity development as well as realizing the alternative ways of interpreting and following up its self-historical shape
    - potentials of getting distracted from that self-historical shape and of getting personally hurt (e.g. by the breakdown of favourable social and societal conditions, by discrepancies and disappointments in significant social relationships, by failures of following up your own life expectations or those of others referring to you, by getting disoriented through unrealistic, personally unfitting, trap-like competing life orientations, etc.).
    - basic positions, what life in general and especially your own is all about; as well as the relevancies and responsibilities of those basic positions
    - the sequence and competition of biographical process structures of biographical action schemes, of trajectories of suffering, of institutional expectation patterns, especially careers, and of biographical metamorphosis developments: how to follow up and to work on (or fight) each of their specific dynamics and to realize their factual and potential interconnections in order that you can find a realistic overall shape of biography
    - the connectedness with, and distance from, requirements of important collectivities, cultures as well as significant social relationships of your life; the involvement in problems of cultural marginality/hybridity and in discrepancies within and between central social relationships
    - social relationships, media, social words as well as cultural styles that enable you – or at least to assist you – in order to follow up the overall shape of biography: (i.e. your autobiographical self thematizations)
  - to deal in a circumspect way with your autobiographical knowledge used up to the present; this knowledge consists of:
    - elementary classifications and assumptions: e.g. that you would not belong to the breed of cultured persons, who would be entitled and intelligent enough to embark on programmes of higher education, in order to get a position in a white collar vocation, i.e. that you would just have the capacities of your own body at your disposal and not so much those of your

brain in order to fulfil the requirements of your occupational work (here the powerful contrast set of social categories for orientation is one of “primitive classification” in the sense of Durkheim and Mauss (1903): manual work vs. non-manual work or, to put it in a Marxian language, hand work vs. brain work);

- elementary assumptions regarding adopted responsibilities towards collectivities you would belong to (e.g. to sacrifice yourself for your family; to obey any type of institutional expectation pattern of society, since the present society as you see it embodies the essential, alternative-less order of your world; to stand for the causes of your nation whatever they might be; etc.);
- adopted professional explanation theories regarding your personal difficulties and potentials, that might fit or not;
- delusional self-theories you have developed in order to explain difficulties and shortcomings in your life live up to now;
- assumption about your own abilities and disabilities regarding learning, understanding, looking-through, harnessing personal energy, making use of your own body, etc.

37. This lack of the ability to do biographical work is biographically conditioned by the following circumstances:

- by the socialisation into a state management system of administered allocation and imposition of occupational career tracks – a system which virtually ignores personal inclinations, wishes, choices;
- by the absence of those significant others and biographical care takers who would teach the young person, that the personal choice of one’s own occupation is biographically important, since occupational work is one of the most important conditions for self realisation; instead, especially in lower class life situations occupational work is just seen as the opportunity to earn one’s material subsistence and not as an institutional structure for personal cultivation and self-realisation; as well as
- by the experience of the destruction of the occupational opportunity structure of the GDR during the rapid societal transformation process after the eclipse of the societal formation of the GDR; the ensuing systematic discouragement process could force individuals to assume that a personal occupational career line with strenuous vocational training and retraining as well as biographical planning and re-evaluation would be senseless, since it could again be suddenly destroyed by the unexpected historical occurrence of new powerful societal conditions. (Regarding the case of the GDR transformation this conclusion would nevertheless partially be a fallacy: the institutional

structure of the vocational system of the GDR society basically remained valid during and after the transformation, since it was widely identical with the West German institutional structure of occupations. However, the occupational opportunity structure within the labour market was partially annihilated).

38. The rehabilitation counsellor Mrs. Brühl intuitively understands the importance of letting Mr. Funke learn biographical work. Most important preconditions for learning biographical work are (and Mrs. Brühl provides for them):

- The existence of a biographical care taker who teaches the afflicted person that she or he is personally important and counts; the afflicted person has to gain identity strength;
- The care taker's showing of personal solidarity and supportiveness towards the attempts of the afflicted person to overcome her or his predicament;
- The provision for a moratorium and learning situations of experiencing the world and oneself anew – moratorium and learning situations allow the afflicted person some regressive relapses without serious existential consequences into her or his former difficulties, in order to re-experience and to re-evaluate what happened, which induces the client to work through these experiences, i.e. to do biographical work.

39. Only after having learned how to do biographical work Mr. Funke is capable of starting or taking over a biographical action scheme of becoming socialised into a new vocation.

2. Secondly, one should develop a generalised grid structure of analytical categories regarding the specific predicament of the rehabilitation situation. Important categories of this grid structure are:

a) the kind of trajectories and their combinations – or other biographical processes – which result in severe situations of unemployment and/or of chronic illness and the connected inability to perform certain types of work, both connected with psychosomatic and psychiatric phenomena of suffering. (In the case of Mr. Funke's life history, these trajectories and their transformations are: the educational trap of the elite sports school; the self-alienating occupational training; the loss of work through the transformation process; the severe illness and the sudden inability of Mr. Funke to do sports and to participate in a leisure-time community, which was biographically very important for him; Mr. Funke's loss of intimate social relationships; his debts trap; the cumulative mess through the intersection and dynamisation of trajectories and the ensuing transformation of them into severe alcoholism).

b) the kind of biographical preconditions for being hindered to learn to do biographical work (in the case of the life history of Mr. Funke: administrative

system of job selection and its imposition on the individual; lack of understanding of the biographical sense of vocational training and doing one's occupational work as means for self-realisation; lack of significant others and biographical care takers for supporting the young person to choose a biographically appropriate vocation and – later on – for supporting the afflicted person to work on her or his occupational difficulties and their emotional implications; being discouraged to follow up an occupational career line by the destruction of the opportunity structure of the East German labour market);

c) necessary supportive conditions for successful rehabilitation (in the case of Mr. Funke's life history: professional providing for an institutional moratorium and learning situation as well as providing for an institutional leeway regarding possible relapses into trajectory difficulties within the retraining and re-socialisation process and regarding their working-through; self-establishment of the rehabilitation counsellor as biographical care taker of the client who lets the client learn that he or she counts individually and personally; training relationship; focus of the counsellor on the client's learning of biographical work);

d) necessary capabilities of the rehabilitation counsellor to do biographical and organisational counselling:

- understanding the biographical process structures and overall biographical structuring of the life history of the client,
- understanding the biographical situation of the client here and now,
- understanding the biographical potentials of the client of being vulnerable in his identity structure,
- understanding the biographical basic stances of the client regarding his or her occupational life,
- understanding the biographical resources of the client for the required personal change,
- understanding the self-theoretical work of the client as part of his or her productive biographical work or as part of his or her self-delusional rationalisation, legitimising and fading out,
- encouraging the client to do biographical work in a generalised moratorium and learning situation, as well as
- drawing the client into a training situation of becoming sensitive, circumspect, assertive, systematic and persevering in doing planning, ordering and assessment work regarding biographical organisation as well as mundane local enactments.

e) Potentials for mistakes at work of the counsellor in the counselling process:

- not realising the biographical key symbols of the life history of the client,
- not realising the hidden, disguised, faded-out biographical background experiences of the client,
  - superimposing on the client his or her initial understanding of the pivotal features of the life history of the client and the difficulties of her or his trajectory predicament, as well as the shortcomings in her or his biographical work – thereby neglecting the point of view and personal interpretation of the client.
- f) Possible special difficulties in the biographical counselling process:
  - the biographical work of the client could remain systematically missing,
  - the client might not have the inner energy and/or the situational conditions for the enactment of a biographical action scheme;
  - there could be ambivalent attitudes of the client regarding the rehabilitation process and the biographical work of identity change involved in it, and/or
    - there could be detrimental biographical basic positions of the client regarding the retraining and counselling process of rehabilitation – e.g. mistrust;
    - favourable biographical basic stances in one's life situation could turn detrimental in others (e.g., Mr. Funke's attitude of unconditioned identification with any type of occupational career offer put in front of him was helpful for moving from manual work to office paperwork, but was infelicitous in other occupational situations, for example in the situation of almost automatically accepting the offered work position in the small metal work company without a formal contract. The over-identification with any type of work opportunities could hinder Mr. Funke to develop his own red thread of a personal biographical career line and might retard him to start a critical reflection and biographical working-through of occupational trap situations).

## **5. A Short Note on the Further Research Steps: Contrastive Comparison and Developing a Theoretical Model**

Having reached the stage of analytical abstraction for at least two cases (however, it is not necessary that these cases have been written up as portrait chapters already; it could moreover be possible that other cases come up later that represent the theoretical variation much better), the researcher has to empirically check the overall theoretical variation of the biographical and/or social phenomena under study and to analytically check their contrastive features. This is the research step of contrastive comparison. The check of the

overall theoretical variation becomes possible when the researcher has been sensitized for the general dimensions of biographical and collective process structures in the topical field under study by the close single case analysis of more than one autobiographical narrative interview. She or he then starts to imagine possible variations of case developments in terms of biographical and/or social processes and search for them in the empirical field under study. This will possibly lead to contacts with new informants and to conducting new autobiographical narrative interviews. In an ideal research process, this would end up with the complete theoretical saturation of the selection process regarding new cases to be collected and studied. In such an ideal state of research any additional approach to a new case wouldn't generate new theoretical insights anymore. Of course, in many situations of counselling-connected case analysis and even praxis-oriented scientific research there will not be the time and work resources to carry through the epistemic process of theoretical comparison and search for saturation to its complete end. Nevertheless, this process will lead to a considerably differentiated and integrated overview over the theoretical dimensions of the biographical and collective processes involved in the topical field under study.

After the collection and study of at least two single cases the researcher must, broadly speaking, compare the fundamentally general, the differentiating typological and the remarkably distinctive features of the first case, which she or he has studied, with the fundamentally general, the differentiating typological and the remarkably distinctive features of other cases. (Of course, the qualifications of the researcher, what should be envisioned as general, alternative or distinct, can only be understood as preliminary). The researcher has to take into account, that very often the remarkably distinct phenomenon reveals underlying general features, as compared with the distinct traits of other cases. The general task of contrastive comparison in a biography-analytical research, then, is to identify and to sharpen the contours of the overall structural processes of biography and collective processes that have been analysed within the single cases of separate interviews as nuclei for the generation of theoretical models.

There are two different general strategies of contrastive comparison: following up the line of the comparison of cases that would contrast maximally and the line of comparison of those that would contrast minimally. The first strategy of maximal contrasting would be conducted in order to generate insights into as many new and different category dimensions as possible. This is the epistemic strategy to rapidly explore and map a new field under study. The second strategy aims at the meticulous analysis of the workings of a biographical process structure or of the function of a social frame already identified and selected for a closer theoretical study. This epistemic strategy would be oriented

towards the theoretical spelling out of process mechanisms of biographical or social developments or “unfoldings” that seem to be especially promising in terms of theoretical insight. The second strategy can only be accomplished through the close point-to-point comparison of certain aspects and stages of corresponding empirical cases. The sub-step of close point-to-point comparison of corresponding cases immediately leads to the built-up of partial regions of an integrated theoretical model that later will cover the whole theoretical variation within the topical field under study. (And for finding out about its architecture, the comparison strategy of maximal contrasting is important again).

The research step of contrastive comparison of autobiographical narrative interviews with clients of occupational rehabilitation, then, could start with the following considerations, if we would take as first case the Funke interview:

- There must be a comparison of the Funke interview with other German interviews in which the rehabilitation process was seen as less felicitous. One condition of this infelicity might be impaired biographical work. This would be pursuing the strategy of maximal comparison.

- In addition, there should be a comparison of German and Polish interviews (See the Golczyńska-Grondas' module) regarding similarities: e.g. regarding the lack of biographical work in former life courses and lack of biographical care takers as preconditioned by a state socialist society with its macro-structural occupational selection and allocation system. This would be the comparison strategy of minimal comparison. There should also be a comparison of German and Polish or British interviews regarding sharp differences of the institutional handling of prospective rehabilitation clients. One of these sharp differences could be the systematic provision of a structural moratorium and leeway situation in the institutional organisation of the German rehabilitation process and the almost total lack of this in the institutional organization of the Polish or British rehabilitation process. One question belonging to this comparison strategy of maximal contrast is how to be able to do circumspect and sensitive biographical rehabilitation counselling under such different structural conditions. Another question would be under what biographical and institutional conditions clients of rehabilitation could productively use such an offer of a moratorium situation, and under what institutional and biographical conditions this would be biographically less productive.

Tightly intertwined with the research step of contrastive comparison are the activities of the research step of developing one or several theoretical models. These theoretical models are pathways for linking the general, alternative and distinctive features of types of socio-biographical processes, e.g. empirically appropriate and theoretically revealing processual schemes, resulting from the analytical abstractions of the several cases which have been under close study. In

research projects on biographical phenomena the relationship between biographical and (other) social processes is always essential. This basic “problem constellation” of theory construction implies two different research strategies for the building of theoretical models in sociological biography research that nevertheless complementarily support each other.

The research strategy of letting oneself be theoretically guided by the natural history of a social process has to spell out biographical alternatives for realizing its stages and turning points. In a study of vocational rehabilitation the alternative institutional processing of clients could be studied with an in-built organized moratorium phase, e.g. a two-year retraining programme, and their processing without it. And then it could be asked how the clients in these two totally different treatment situations would be able or not to be able to make productive biographical use of the institutional and professional offerings. The theoretical notions of biographical alternatives to be adopted here are the result of a thinking and construction process in the fashion of a sub-dominant research strategy focused on biographical processes.

In turn, the other dominant research strategy, of letting oneself be theoretically guided by the unfolding of biographical structural processes, must also study the different social conditions for the enactment of, or succumbing to, biographical process structures. In a biography-analytical study of vocational rehabilitation there should always be a focus on the question, how the client could escape from the cumulative mess trap of the combined biographical trajectories (a) of chronic illness and its discouraging impact on an active handling of one’s life course as well as (b) of long term unemployment and its paralysing impact on everyday life. (Of course, as we could see in the Funke interview, they have a mutually enforcing impact on each other). Our central assumption is that one decisive condition for a way out of the cumulative mess of these two intersected biographical trajectories is the start and the unfolding of biographical work of the client, mainly consisting in the working-through of the trajectory experiences. But many of the clients did not learn reflective biographical work during their life courses. One of the social and socio-structural conditions for this lack of learning is, as we saw, the systematic strategy of state-socialist work administration to allocate the citizens to work positions and to vocational training courses without encouraging them to consider for themselves what kind of occupation would fit to their unique biographical identities. Another set of socio-structural conditions could be working class socialization processes that would not stress values of individual independence. The built-up of those two social and social-structural conditions that hinder the learning of biographical work during the process of primary and secondary socialization also has process character. Hence, the theoretical explication of different social conditions of biographical processes sub-

dominantly also employs the social process philosophy of constructing theoretical models. In addition, adequate social arrangements and social processes have to be considered, if the agency for vocational rehabilitation would like to support the acquisition and activation process of the client to learn and to do biographical work, in order to come to terms with the cumulative mess of the intersection of the two trajectories and to overcome their discouraging and fatiguing impact.

However, it should not be obfuscated that the dominant adoption of one or the other of the two research strategies for the construction of theoretical models in sociological bio-graphy analysis is a decision for either a “sociological study” of societal, organizational or institutional processes or a “social psychological study” of the individual and/or collective biographical enactment, of undergoing, interpreting, carrying-through, fighting, reworking and/or changing objectified social processes and structures, which are conditions of biographical processes on the one hand and objects of biographical work on the other. The partial theoretical model for biographical counselling documented in the introductory module, which is focused on supporting the biographical work of the clients through the professional counselling process in vocational rehabilitation, is a typical example of the social psychological strategy to develop a theoretical model.

## 6. Exercises

- Take an autobiographical narrative interview and identify the various phases of it. Are deviations from the strict rules of narrative interviewing in this interview? What might be the reasons for them? What is the impact of these deviations on the presentation activities of the informant?
- Assess the social relationship between informant and interviewer for this interview. Does the interviewee feel comfortable? Are there special stress situations in the course of the interview? What are the reasons for these? How is the interviewer handling such stress situations?
- Please conduct an autobiographical narrative interview yourself and formulate your experiences with the interview activity. What was easy, what was difficult? Was the interviewee satisfied with the course of the interview? How do you feel yourself about the autobiographical text you got? Is it mainly extempore narration or is it something else? Please perform a text sort analysis of this interview.

- Take an autobiographical narrative interview or a published literary autobiography and do the structural description of some part of the text. Put the result of the structural description down in sketch words, as it was done for the Funke interview. What are the difficulties of writing down the structural description? Do you feel that you were able to state more as the informer said already?
- Try to outline some features of analytical abstraction for the chosen interview. Do you find one or two central phenomena, which are worthwhile to study in additional interviews, too?
- Do you think you have learnt from your analytic activities? Does a deeper understanding of the life course of a possible client of yours come out of it? And did you get additional insights into your own counselling work (even if the conclusion would be implied that you might have made some mistakes or that you at least might have been used to perform sub-optimal activities)? Start to list the additional insights you got through the proceedings and the analysis of the interview.

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## **Conversation Analysis of Counselling Interaction. The Action Scheme of Counselling, Problem Versus Solution Orientation, and the Place for Biographical Counselling**

### **SHORT DESCRIPTION**

This module uses conversational analysis and interactional sociolinguistics to analyse an authentic counselling session within the context of the action scheme of counselling.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To be able to engage with a detailed analysis of conversational structure.
2. To recognise the importance of language and conversation in the counselling process.
3. To develop awareness of communicative tasks and linguistic expression.
4. To understand and apply the Action Scheme of Counselling.
5. To understand the importance of biographical processes in counselling.

### **1. Introduction**

The sequence of modules approaches the topic of biographical counselling from a variety of different angles. Theoretical discussions of biography analysis and biographical processes are given, as well as empirical examples from counselling practice in the different countries that are participating in the project. Among the empirical data are case descriptions and descriptions of ongoing counselling processes, interviews with counsellors about their professional work and about their interaction history with particular clients, and biographical

interviews with clients who had undergone counselling in situations of professional rehabilitation. Whereas some of the empirical material is available in the form of ethnographic descriptions, the interviews with counsellors and the biographical interviews are tape recorded and transcribed and made available to a contextualized analysis, that takes into account the development of content *and* processes of the linguistic rendering of content. When comparing content and form, researchers do not only have access to what is being said, but also to how it is said; this surplus of procedural information provides researchers with valuable insights into the inner attitudes of their informants and into the larger biographical and social processes their accounts are embedded in.

This module among other things deals with a very particular kind of empirical data, so far not looked at in other modules, namely an authentic counselling session, which was tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis. This type of data gives a rather direct view on what is being done in counselling, since it allows the reader to follow a counselling session just as it once unfolded – and not through the filter of an interpreter who talks about his or her perception of it. It is very obvious, though, that access to real counselling is difficult to get, and we are very grateful to those counsellors and clients, who allowed us to not only attend but also to tape record their counselling sessions!

The transcript sheds light on an authentic session between a counsellor and her client in a centre for vocational training and professional rehabilitation in Germany, where the counsellor and her client meet for the first time to talk about the problems and needs of the client and the resources the center can offer in order to help the client (*Erstinformationsgespräch*). The counselling sessions occurs within an institutional framework; the client has been sent to the center by the authorities, and the center is responsible for providing some sort of services to the client. As one can imagine, the institutional framework has quite some influence on what is going on in the counselling session: The client has to present herself at the center, the center has a certain repertoire of services that can be suggested to the client, the counsellor has developed a particular style of counselling, and when the client enters the center, it is up to the center to structure the interaction, of course taking into account the client's needs and history. The data as presented in this paper is an English translation from the authentic tape-recorded counselling session, which was originally in German.

For reasons of contrastive comparison, this module introduces another set of data. It is from a counsellor's description of his counselling, that he gave to a client over a longer period of time and on different occasions. This second type of material does not provide direct access to any of those counselling sessions, since it consists in the rendering of the counsellor thereof. It is, however, an

excellent example for the potential of biographical counselling and how it can be included in a very successful counselling process<sup>1</sup>.

When analysing talk in interaction, I am drawing from *ethno-methodological conversation analysis* (Sacks, 1995; Kallmeyer, 1994) and from *interactional sociolinguistics* (Schiffrin, 1994; Gumperz, 1982; Dittmar, 1997). Emphasis on one or the other theoretical framework is more a matter of whether researchers see the analysis of conversation as anchored within the context of sociology or within the context of linguistics. As Harvey Sacks suggested in his lectures, a detailed analysis of talk in interaction provides the ground for *doing sociology with different means*. The sociolinguist Deborah Schiffrin described the field of interactional sociolinguistics as being concerned with the *contextualization* of what is said, that is, “how language is situated in particular circumstances of social life, and how it reflects, and adds, meaning and structure in those circumstances” (Schiffrin, 1994, p. 97).

When looking at actually ongoing counselling as tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis, we are dealing with situated, that is socially embedded, communication, that refers to social life, which it reflects and interprets; we are dealing with communication that is meaningful to interactants and at times may produce new interpretations to account for the social circumstances reflected upon. Interactants can rely on the existence of communicative processes that lead them through the exchange: They have means at their disposal to refer to each other and they have knowledge of communicative genres, as for example of what needs to be done in counselling. The existence of communicative processes, which are intuitively known by the interactants, helps them through the interaction and gives it an orderly appearance – however difficult the tasks to be performed may be. By the very means of communication, some sort of reliable structure is produced and laid over the circumstances of social life. And to look at counselling from Harvey Sacks’ point of view, a detailed analysis of conversational structure is necessary to let the underlying order emerge and to analyse social circumstances as they materialize by means of talking.

## 2. Interpretation

One of the fundamental assumptions in conversation analysis is that social and conversational order is continuously created by the interactants through their practices of interpretation and the generation of meaning while speaking. As

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<sup>1</sup> We are very grateful to Erika Gleisner, who worked as a research assistant in the Leonardo project, for her excellent work in transcribing and translating into English many of our interviews!

Goffman (1981) suggested in his book “Forms of Talk”, the exchange of utterances cannot be conceived of in terms of a sender-receiver model of communication, where the sender produces an utterance that is conveyed to the receiver in a one-to-one fashion. Goffman rather suggests we see the complexity of the speaker and listener roles: A speaker has a large repertoire to modulate his or her utterances with respect to truth claims and inner engagement, whereas a listener may be less attentive at times and display different amounts of interest. Goffman describes communicative interaction in terms of complex participation frameworks and production formats: Interactants change their footing quite frequently, that is, their alignment to each other and to the things to be talked about. They may be serious or joking with regard to the topic of discourse, hostile or friendly, formal or informal towards each other and contribute to the entire interaction with more or less inner engagement. They generate sociality while speaking and allude to different social contexts, which they make relevant for the current interaction. The repertoire of means interactants have at their disposal to modulate their involvement in the interaction as well as the strength and seriousness of their propositions suggests we not only look at what is said but also at how it is said. Only a contextualized analysis, that is, an analysis that compares what is said to how it is said, helps to more clearly determine what a speaker means with his or her utterances, what activities he or she performs while speaking, how these fit into the larger action scheme and communicative genre, and how the attitudinal framework is established between the interactants.

### **3. Order at All Points**

Harvey Sacks’ lectures are based on the insight from ethnomethodology that “human activities are descriptably methodical” (Sacks, 1995, Part VII, Appendix I, p. 805; cf. Garfinkel, 1967). Interactants create and reproduce the social order that is operating in the interaction at hand by means of communication, and therefore structural order can be found and described in communicative interaction.

When looking at transcripts of conversations, we at first have the feeling that communication develops in a disorderly way. The impression of disorder is, however, largely the result of our very unfamiliar reading experience of following a piece of written discourse that was originally spoken. As interactants in the real world, as speakers who are actually speaking, we are capable of participating in communicative interactions more or less easily, and even if things get complicated, the conversation may still go on. As everyday interactants, we have a notion of communicative order and disorder, and we

have a repertoire of communicative means to cope with order and disorder. Communicative processes display the underlying order that is innate to all meaningful communication. As Harvey Sacks suggested in his lectures, “persons will use ways to not ignore what they properly ought to do” (Sacks, 1995, Part I, Lecture 1, p. 7) – even if they linguistically act counter to expectations. In other words, when a complication occurs, interactants show to each other that they have a notion of some sort of normal communicative unfolding of events: They use repair mechanisms and make reference to communicative order despite an – only apparent – lack thereof. Harvey Sacks has examples from telephone conversations in a suicide prevention center, where people for some obvious reasons are unwilling to give their names. What they do instead is use complex communicative strategies to make sure the relevant communicative slot for giving their names is never opened.

The analyst makes use of the inherent order in conversation and of the fact that communicative order refers to, enforces and renews aspects of the social order that are relevant for the interactional exchange at hand. With respect to transcripts of counselling sessions, the linguistic surface is symptomatic for many of the phenomena the analyst wants to study. It provides the analyst with the means to say something about the interaction from an analytical standpoint. Thanks to this analytic approach anchored in discourse analysis he or she can say more about the conversation than the interactants themselves may be able to do. This is why it is worthwhile to study thematic development *and* structural unfolding of counselling interactions even for experts in counselling, as it provides a different perspective on the counselling process. More detailed accounts of the theoretical foundations and methodological repertoire of conversation analysis are given in Deppermann (2001), ten Have (1999), Linell (1998), Hutchby and Wooffitt (1998), Kallmeyer & Schütze (1976), Kallmeyer (1988), Bergmann (2001).

#### **4. Levels of Analysis**

When analysing conversational interaction with methods of conversation analysis, there are at least four levels that need to be considered. These levels are fundamental to the constitution of the interaction, and they make reference to different aspects of reality. The conversational phenomena that are of interest have a different range of local extension and are to be distinguished on different analytical levels: They may concern the linear unfolding and sequential ordering of speech (4.2), they may be anchored mainly on the structural surface level of

speech (4.3), or they may consist of a variety of structural features that comprise larger stretches or the entire discourse (4.1, 4.4).

What needs to be done in order to not just summarize content is to consider what is being talked about, how it is done, and to what ends.

#### **4.1. The Overall Gestalt of the Conversation, i.e., the Communicative Genre**

Counselling is a particular communicative genre that poses certain requirements for the interactants as to what can be dealt with, how this can formally be done, and as to the interactional identities of the contributors. Further considerations refer to the institutional embedding of the counselling and to what extent it has an influence on the counselling interaction (for a discussion of communicative genres, cf. Luckmann, 1986; Keppler, 1994; Ehlich, 1986; Rehbein, 1988; much work has been done on the institutional embedding of conversation, e.g., Günthner & Kotthoff, 1992; Erickson & Shultz, 1982; Hinnenkamp, 1985). In terms of major formal patterns, it is necessary to look at the dominating communication scheme of presentation, that is, one has to determine by what major structural formats the interactants unfold their themes. These can be the communication schemes of narration, description, and argumentation.

#### **4.2. Sequential Unfolding**

In conversation analysis, social reality is considered as a procedural phenomenon, that is, social reality unfolds as a process in concrete situations of communicative interaction, when interactants show to each other what to consider in what order. The development of topics and major topical lines is therefore relevant for the procedural construction of reality in discourse. The linearization of topics in discourse informs about temporal, causal, spatial, and social relations. Researchers concerned with text linguistics sometimes speak of *experiential iconicism*, when the discourse, by means of its linear order, becomes an icon of the reality it constructs (Enkvist, 1981).

#### **4.3. Formal Structure of the Conversation**

The analysis of the formal structure of the conversation says something about the *ethno-methods* the interactants employ while they converse. In terms of

ethnomethodology, those are the techniques of understanding and making oneself understood. Another term used in the literature is *contextualization cues* (Gumperz, 1982): Through linguistic means, interactants refer to parameters of the social framing of the exchange, to status, age, gender, emotional quality of the relationship, as well as to the relevance of the biographical dimension.

In particular, it is useful to look at the following phenomena: *Fluent versus disfluent speech*: In any conversation, there are stretches of speech, which are obviously more fluent than others. Variations in speech pause patterns, speech errors, and linguistic markers of reflection display different degrees of fluency and may be interpreted in terms of degrees of ease or difficulty in the formulation of ideas. *Intonation contours* inform about the conclusion of idea units and of larger segments of speech as perceived by the interlocutors. Quite a variety of linguistic means are employed to symbolize the *strange and foreign* versus *attitudinal closeness* as for example hedges (in a certain sense, to a certain degree, some sort of) or deictic markers of closeness and distance (here-there, this-that, I, we – one). Also, *vagueness of expression* may sometimes be interpreted as an indicator of alienation. The *modality of speech*, that is, degrees of seriousness, joking, or irony, informs about inner attitudes towards what is said. Finally, the creation of *reciprocity* says something about the quality of the interaction, that is to what extent interactants refer to each other, pick up ideas and show support or competition.

Questions to be asked relative to a particular counselling interaction may be what characterizes the interaction on the formal side and are there major ruptures or transformations in the formal patterns as displayed.

#### **4.4. Identities to be Negotiated**

Interactants use a variety of linguistic means to express on a more general level aspects of social identity: They may display expertise or helplessness, age and gender, counsellor or client behaviour, professional identity, education, social and regional belonging, or simply their wish or disinclination to cooperate in counselling for professional rehabilitation. As Garfinkel pointed out, as interactants in the social world, we do not act in terms of fixed social roles, that only need to be spelled out. We rather have to make sure that the features we want to strengthen during the exchange are somehow demonstrated to the partner. For a counselling session this means that counsellor and client have to actively design their interactional identities for the ongoing interaction and demonstrate to each other what kind of counsellor and client they are. Also, the setting of the counselling interaction is a matter of interactional work: The counsellor is for example up to decide how decisive or open-ended he or she

wishes to design the setting, how much he or she refers to the institutional framing of the exchange, and at what points he or she lets the particularities of the client's situation enter the framework. The client demonstrates through his or her interactional work how he or she designs herself within the interaction, how much he or she wishes to contribute, and how he or she relates to the counsellor and the interactional framework and topics to be discussed.

The formal features as discussed in 4.3 are now taken together and interpreted to come to some higher level considerations with regard to the discourse and the construction of identities as they emerge from the interaction.

## **5. The Action Scheme of Counselling**

As discussed above, the communicative genre of counselling causes interactants to pay attention to a number of thematic and formal requirements. When going through the communicative process of counselling, they have to fulfill and linguistically spell out a sequence of tasks, that are suggested by the action scheme of counselling.

I am referring here to Werner Kallmeyer's (2000) outline of the component parts of counselling, that is, the tasks the interactants have to fulfill when being engaged in a counselling session.

a) Definition of the situation and establishment of the action scheme of counselling

In the beginning of a counselling session (which may be the first in a series), the necessity of counselling has to be stated and the counsellor has to be elected as the person doing the counselling. The first few exchanges are therefore concerned with establishing the communicative genre of counselling. This has to do with the negotiation of responsibilities, competence, and trust. These dimensions are the enabling conditions for carrying through the action scheme of counselling, and the setting of parameters at this stage will play a major role in any further exchange to come, for example as to the emotional quality of the exchange or the way the institution enters the framework.

b) Presentation of the problem

The client presents his or her case, making reference to how it developed and how it became problematic, and what means have been taken so far to solve the problem.

c) Development of a definition of the problem

The counsellor asks questions in order to understand the problem, and counsellor and client work on the development of a definition of the problem as a basis for the counselling process.

d) Redefinition of the problem and definition of the topic of counselling

When knowledge about the nature of the counselling need increases, the interactants can state more clearly what the topics and tasks of the exchange should be.

e) Development of a solution

The interactants think about means of solving the problem as defined, they reflect on the conditions that need to be fulfilled, give and reflect on pieces of advice, and evaluate their problem solving.

f) Processing and digesting the piece of advice

The client thinks through what has been offered to him or her as a piece of advice, evaluates it and may decide to accept the piece of advice as the result of the counselling.

g) Preparation for realization

Client and counsellor mentally enact the viability and consequences of the advice and decide whether the advice is feasible.

h) Release of the counsellor

The client more or less explicitly states that the task of the counselling session is fulfilled and possibly thanks the counsellor.

Kallmeyer's flow scheme of the communicative tasks of counselling has been developed as the result of empirical studies of a variety of counselling processes in different contexts. It presents an idealized version of the tasks to be fulfilled in a counselling session. Kallmeyer remarks that these steps of counselling do not always occur in the order as presented, and that the demarcation lines between the sequences are often fluid rather than fixed. To use Harvey Sacks' terminology one more time, a context-free scheme such as the one presented by Kallmeyer can be applied to rehabilitation counselling and with context-sensitivity refined, so that new insights may emerge about counselling in general and about rehabilitation counselling in particular. One of the topics that this sequence of modules is concerned with is the biographical dimension as it materializes in rehabilitation counselling.

***EXERCISE: Suggested Discussion***

When looking at the flow scheme of the tasks to be performed in counselling as presented in section 5, one can certainly identify slots where biographical considerations are very likely to occur. In order to get more familiar with the

model, it is useful to identify stages in the counselling process as described, which are particularly prone to biographical considerations.

## 6. Case Analysis

In this section, larger excerpts from an authentic counselling session are presented and described in terms of the model of the action scheme of counselling. Attention will be paid to the rendering of content within the different activity stages as described in Kallmeyer's action scheme model of counselling, as well as to the formal rendering of the interactional moves. One segment will be selected for a closer discussion of the biographical input being dealt with by the interactants.

The case unfolds as follows: When the transcript sets in, the interlocutors have already managed to negotiate their interactional roles as counsellor and client. Their share is suggested by the institutional framework in which the interaction occurs: The client has been sent to the counsellor in order to be provided with a help scheme for professional rehabilitation. The requirements for stage a of the model, the definition of the situation, have been fulfilled, and the action scheme of counselling could be established by the interactants.

In the first few lines to be discussed now, the client (Cl) *presents her problem* (stage b). She is asked by the counsellor (Co) to do so.

Co: ehm . generally it is like that/ & I don't know say it again (-) . the health problem is (-) .  
 Cl: skin (-) . (dampness)  
 Co: contact/ contact . allergy

The client is a hairdresser, and because of allergy problems with her skin she cannot continue to work in her learned profession. The major problem the client has is formulated in terms of one medical category.

The next few exchanges are concerned with the development of a *definition of the problem* (stage c). This is quite an interesting phase in the counselling interaction, since client and counsellor need to share a more thorough understanding of the problem at hand and therefore work on different aspects of the problem.

Co: ehm . to certain things (?)  
 Cl: no . everything wet (,)  
 Co: only dampness (?) .

- Cl: yes (.) . well and nickel . very strong (.)
- Co: well (-) . [comments on what she has written down till +] damp . ness . . + but not those things which are used in the trade of hair dresser's (?)
- Cl: there is nothing (.) . there is nothing at all nay (-)
- Co: that was tested (?)
- Cl: yes . . but it is already enough when I take a wet cloth in my hand or something like that (.)  
 . with me it is always something wet (.)
- Co: and what happens then (?) how is it at home when you take something in your hand/
- Cl: well I get then/ . well then I get ( ) and I get small blisters (.)
- Co: and at home (-) . what are you doing there (?)
- Cl: well (-) . most of the time I use gloves (.) .
- Co: mhm (-) . . that works out (?)
- Cl: it has to (-) . ((quick laugh))
- Co: mhm
- Cl: but there I have myself well (-) . where I have worked it was much worse of course (.) .
- Co: mhm
- Cl: but I have been out of this trade (-) for over a year now (-) . and nevertheless . well this won't change . I think that that (-) . that that is there with my (-) . skin problem & and (-) .
- Co: mhm . and this is (-) predominant on your hands yes (?) .
- Cl: yes only on my hands (.)
- Co: not anywhere else . that this is simply going on or so (?)
- Cl: nay only on the hands nay
- Co: mhm (.)

The counsellor needs a more thorough understanding of the problem and asks questions as to the substances that cause the allergy, to the symptoms that occur and in what contexts. It is worthwhile to note that the definition of the problem appears to be a rather complex task in the counselling process, which requires a few exchanges between counsellor and client. Counsellors should not expect the problem or set of problems to be presented right away; lengthy exchanges around the problem statement are more the rule than the exception.

As Kallmeyer points out, stretches of the presentation and definition of the problem can occur in different phases of the counselling process, so that a refined view of the problem can even emerge rather late during the counselling session.

Client and counsellor then proceed to the *definition of the topic of counselling*, that is, clarification is needed as to what the counselling should focus upon. In our example, the counsellor is now becoming very active in that she explains what the institution has on offer for the client (stage d). Sometimes

reflexions about the possible contributions of counselling may again include a redefinition of the problem.

- Co: basically it is like that (‘) . that we (-) ehm (-) train on a dual basis (,) . do you know what we mean with dual (?)
- Cl: regarding that now no . nay (-)
- Co: yes (-) . well you do one part at the vocational school (‘) . the whole theoretical part (‘)
- Cl: mhm
- Co: for instance if it is office administrator (‘) you go twice a/ one week you go once a week to the vocational school and one week twice in the week (-) . and . the rest time/ of the time (-) . ehm . for the rest of the time we are looking for an apprenticing company for you . where you are working (-) . on a permanent basis there (,)
- Cl: mhm
- Co: where you can gain practical experiences (-) . trying to contribute things to the team (-) . taking over tasks (-) . and there has to be a trainer (,) who is responsible for you (-) . who also has such a schedule for you (,) . is kinda accompanying you a bit (,) . that means dual well connected (-) . theory and practise (,) . alright (?)
- Cl: mhm
- Co: that is our way of retraining here (‘) . there are other possibilities (-) . other educational stablishments . ehm . they offer (-) . that one is doing an apprenticeship for two years and sits at the school desk (‘) and only for a quarter of the year . one is doing practical work (,)
- Cl: mhm
- Co: somewhere in a firm (,) . alright (?) .
- Cl: mhm
- Co: then you are a real on-the-job trainee (-) . whereas you are a real retrainee with us here (-) . or a trainee (-) . only you ‘ve got a shortened training period (,) . well (-) . a trainee . for a second time . right (?) . .
- ehm (-) . in general it has a lot of advantages (‘) . because you are integrated in a firm for two years of course (‘) . and you can contribute to it already (,) . you can take over certain areas of responsibility (-) . especially when someone maybe is going into maternity leave. or someone will be :leaving: (-) . or in general . it is an expanding business & then you have the opportunity very quickly if they have been knowing you for two years (-) . to slip in very quickly in this field (,) .
- Cl: mhm
- Co: but . it is a proven fact (‘) . often it is independent of (-) . or most of the time it is independent of whether you are really good or not good (-) . the mon/ er . business has no money (-) :then: . often there is no takeover (,) .
- Cl: mhm
- Co: nevertheless because of the loads of practical experiences (-) . you’ve got a very good base after it to apply (,) . then you can of course include in your application that you have

done a „two-year training with a lot of practical experience . in . (faster till +) these those these those those fields“ (,) + . right (?) .

Cl: mhm

Co: is an advantage for (-) . everyone (,) . . the firm (-) . doesn't have to pay a training allowance for you (^) . right (?) . but the pension scheme is doing the whole lot for you (-) . in your case now the cooperative union (,) .

Cl: mhm

Co: who pays the bridging benefits (-) . and the firm got you for free for two years (,) . right (?) . is simple (-) . you've got a disadvantage because of your handicap (^) . right (?) . the allergy (^) . but an advantage in this way (,) . to get integrated there . right (?) . so a financial advantage (,) .

Cl: mhm

In the first part the counsellor takes on an institutional perspective: She focusses very much on the rehabilitation center and explains its philosophy. In the second part the counsellor brings in the perspective of the companies that accept trainees from the center; they usually have a lot of benefit from them. Only in the third part the counsellor concentrates on the perspective of the client, who also benefits from the training scheme as presented.

It appears that there is hardly any time allotted to questions from the client. The center perspective is very dominant, and since phase d is also concerned with a redefinition of the problem, one can see from the structuring work of the counsellor that she makes it very much a problem that is to be dealt with institutionally, with only minor emphasis on and input from the client.

It is, however, very evident that the professional rehabilitation center runs a very strong programme for retrainees, that rigorously combines theory and practice and that includes a philosophy to seriously accompany their clients once they are in the retraining process.

In the next segment of the counselling session counsellor and client are concerned with the *development of a solution* (stage e, ca. 8 transcribed pages), the most demanding task in a counselling process, and also one which can benefit much from a lively exchange of the interlocutors. As one might suspect from the foregoing exchange, the counsellor again takes the initiative and presents the scope of occupational activities that can be supported by the center. The counsellor goes through a long list of professions. Since this enumeration goes on for quite some time, I am presenting just a few excerpts in order provide an impression of the solution of the problem work in this particular counselling.

Co: that are the occupations (^) . which we (-) . ehm . up to now (-) . we have been working here I believe since ninety one (^) . :in: (-) . the field of vocational rehabilitation\_in firms

- (^) . and here are the\_\_occupations which we have trained up to now (,) . right (?) . . .  
 :ehm: . let's go through them slowly (,) & businessman in the retail trade (-) . well that  
 are retail outlets where things get sold (-) . businessman in wholesale and foreign trade (-)  
 . that would be for instance (-) . we have to look for leanings abilities interests . right (?) .  
 for example I could imagine if we have a chemist's wholesale trade or something like that  
 . you know about the products there . or so (,)
- Cl: mhm
- Co: there we would have to look especially for wholesale . trades . where you say "well (-) .  
 I've got knowledge . abilities and leanings there too (-) . and I could imagine this  
 quite well . ehm . as a businessman of wholesale and foreign trade to make a training (,) .  
 there" . right: (?) .
- Cl: mhm
- Co: ehm . a lot of . those who come from the construction sites (-) . and who 've got  
 knowledge about building materials :or: (-) . I've got a builder for tiled stoves there and  
 he says that "I've got a lot of knowledge about this and that field" . those prefer to go into  
 the building material/ wholesale of building materials (-) . or in a DIY superstore or (-) .  
 in a special electrical wholesale if someone was an electrician (,) . right (?) . so . we  
 simply have to look for the leanings and interests (-) . where you would like to go . but (-)  
 . as I said (-) . that really starts where the in/ interests are (^) . right (?) . where we find an  
 apprenticing company (,) . :ehm: . businessman in the estate and housing industry (-) .  
 that's the estate agent (^) . right (?)
- Cl: mhm
- Co: I think you know all this & just say stop if you don't know (,)
- Cl: mhm

It is characteristic for the exchange that it is very much dominated by the counsellor, who lists the occupational opportunities that are on offer in the center. Reference to the client perspective is made mainly by means of giving examples from other clients, who were brought into professional training. Of course, the counsellor mentions that it is a matter of the "leanings and interests" whether a training programme will be successful – with respect to that category, however, the listing of professions must appear rather random to the client.

The counsellor has a particular way of pre-structuring her presentation, in that she mentions for some of the professions that they put high demands on the trainee – too high demands in her assessment of the client.

- Co: assistant to solicitor articulated clerk national insurance agent and administration employee  
 (-) . their training is quite of high demand (,) . so nearly on the level of the A-levels . so  
 there . ehm . one . to get the opportunity to find a place to train (-) . you have to bring very  
good certificates with you (-) . and the training is very demanding (,) . I've got to know

that from those who we have(-) . tried to integrate (,) . in addition considerable expenses for intermediate exams and additional courses come up (,) . where you would probably get support in/from your cooperative union too(-) . but . if others get it from other cost bearers then it's always a bit different isn't it (?) . . . ((softer till +)) is there (?) . (a . b) (?) + .

Cl: I informed myself about assistant to solicitor before I started my apprenticeship & but when you say it's with A-levels and (-) .

Co: nay not only (,) . well I think you just have to look (,) . we would have to look into it again  
(,) . I tick this box alright (?) .

Although the training as an assistant to solicitor is judged to be of too high demand for the client, the client informs the counsellor that she had an interest in that profession. A short exchange starts between counsellor and client, which ends in the counsellor ticking a box on her questionnaire.

The solution development phase is a very long one in the exchange. This is in part due to the fact that the counsellor has a large number of professions on offer. On the other hand, the solution development phase poses the most complex tasks for the interlocutors. With respect to the segment at hand, it has to be mentioned that the counsellor uses *shortening strategies* in order to get through with her counselling scheme: Although the client expresses some interest in a particular profession, the counsellor does not further inquire about what in particular appealed to the client with respect to a particular profession. Even if she may be right in her assessment that a training as assistant to solicitor may be too demanding for the client, it should certainly be of interest for her further counselling to explore the dimensions that are of interest for her client, such as for example whether it is office work, customer contact, communication, interesting subject matters, variability of tasks, etc., that appealed to her client. Even though the client communicates her interest, the counsellor is not very talented in using her client's reactions to produce more client orientation in her counselling.

Besides the suspected intellectual ability of the client to work in particular professions and not in others, the counsellor focusses very much on the health dimension.

Co: expert for hotels and restaurants (,) . .

Cl: I would have liked to work (,) . in a hotel too (-) . and what is that exactly (,) .expert for ho/ well for restaurants (?)

Co: yeah well you are (-) . responsible for catering trade/ catering stuff

Cl: but that would be wet as well or not (?)

Co: I think you will have to wipe tables you will have to/

Cl: that's (,) . well that is it (-) .

- Co: both (,) . I think with the expert for . hotels it's the same too . as far as I am informed (-)
- Cl: one always starts at the bottom (,)
- Co: if you start at the bottom then you will be responsible of course for the room service and so on
- Cl: ((louder till +)) I mean (-) . ehm I would always have fun with that . but ehm . I know that I was written on sick leave now and when I go into such a occupation again (-) .
- Co: mhm
- Cl: I don't know what the GRBA says to that . but (-) .
- Co: well we have to see (,) . well we have to be careful there & and if you are not sure about that (,) . well we can tick the box anyway (,) . then you just got to check this out medical wise (,) .
- Cl: mhm
- Co: we can check this out via internet later on (,) . there we find always the conditions healthwise (,) . well if it says there (-) . ehm . eh . no respiratory disease and no contact allergies or anything like that or (-) . ehm .ehm . a healthy skin for one hundred percent (-) . then we can skip that (,) . right (?) . well for the beginning (-) . I ticked the box (,)

Again, the client points at a profession that appealed to her. This time, the profession is discussed entirely relative to the health conditions it requires, and again, the counsellor does not further inquire what else it is that made it attractive for her client.

It should be interesting now to look at the particular passage in the counselling process where a profession is finally selected for the client (still stage e). This happens after the counsellor is through with her list of professions, and when the client gets a chance to talk.

- Co: that are the occupations which we have here now (-) . :ehm: . on offer (,)
- Cl: well to me it's important that I am not only sitting at the computer but also that I am dealing with people (-) . here for instance with the health system (-) . well I had to do too . with hair dresser with ol/ let me say old people (-) . that you could talk to them and I enjoyed that a lot (,) .
- Co: mhm
- Cl: that you can help a bit or so (-) . . .
- Co: we have to see (-) . whether it is like that (,) . right (?) . I've got two (-) participants in the [Blindenförderungswerk] here in Dresden who I got a place as businesswoman in the health system (-) . because they got diverse institutions (-) . ehm . it's quite well possible (,) . one has to go through the hall (-) . meet the people (-) . especially old people are always specially grateful for friendly words and for a wee chat in between or so (-) . it has to be like that . I believe one has to be the person for that right (?)
- Cl: mhm

- Co: and you simply have to say friendly words for once and again . and to be willing to listen (,) . right (?) . . but (-) . I think for the most part it is an office job (,) .
- Cl: yes but it is the old people or (-) . let me say that where you do (-) . get a change or so (-) .
- Co: yes . mhm . yes (-) . . but that is possible with the office administrator as well . because the office administrator is varied usable there you could sit at the reception of a car dealership (-)
- Cl: mhm
- Co: for instance we've got an office administrator (-) .who . ehm . ehm is doing her training at the reception of the vet (,) right (?)
- Cl: mhm . . that is nice as well yes (-) . ((short laughter))
- Co: well only as examples (-) . ehm . you also could be put in a real administrative body of a hospital (,) . and you hardly ever have contact to any . people who are ill (,) . right (?)
- Cl: mhm
- Co: it doesn't have to be like that (,) . I think this is the individual/ the field is so wide (,) . that you . yeah can have a look (-) . where . ehm. you find a field right (?)
- Cl: mhm
- Co: with the office administrator (-)

After the counsellor is through with her script, a negotiation phase sets in, in which the client says a little more about her leanings and expectations. Office administrator, which was one of the items on the counsellor's list, gets into the focus of attention through an intervention of the counsellor, who thinks that this profession responds to quite a number of demands and in her view should be interesting to the client. Rather through indirect communicative acts ("but that is possible with the office administrator as well"), office administrator is strongly suggested as a possible profession for training to the client by the counsellor. It is therefore worthwhile to note that office administrator, the choice that is made only a few exchanges later, is basically a choice of the counsellor!

The counsellor is not too much encouraging her client to elaborate on her interests, but rather proceeds to describing how two other participants in the training programme are very successful as businesswomen. The sort of client orientation this counsellor displays consists very much in her experience with other clients. With her help, services could be provided for a considerable number of clients, and she uses these cases as a basis of comparison when she has to find placements for new clients.

Comparing cases is a useful means to feed professional experience into new counselling processes. The shortcut of this method, however, consists in a lack of consideration for the individuality of the actual client. The counsellor does not seem to have a repertoire at her disposal that would allow her to further elaborate on the particular case structure of her actual client.

The solution that is reached for the client in this counselling – to take up training as an office administrator – goes back to an uneven exchange between counsellor and client, that is largely dominated by the counsellor, guided by an institutional perspective and by the experience the counsellor has with other clients. The counselling suffers from a lack of client orientation in that the counsellor provides little space for her client to present and further develop her own wishes and needs.

In the next segment to come, counsellor and client have the chance to think through the result of the counselling so far reached (stage f, processing and digesting the piece of advice) and to introduce some reflexivity into the counselling: The client inquires about the conditions that will affect where one will get placed as a trainee for office administrator later on. The counsellor reflects about the demands of particular placements. The overall goal is to reflect on the decision taken so far and to look at it from different perspectives. The client lets the counsellor further elaborate on the particular profession, when she says: “well that sounded nice earlier on what you have said”. At the end of the exchange, the solution “office administrator” can be fixed:

Co: would that be then let me say & your decision (‘)

Cl: yes

As has been said before about the general ductus of the counselling session, the counsellor uses shortening strategies in order to come to a solution. She goes through a list of professions that is not pre-configured for the need of her client, and she does not let her client discuss the various options. Some professions are mentioned but immediately sorted out by the counsellor, because she thinks that these are too demanding for her client. When the client expresses some vague interest, the counsellor is unable to further inquire into the concrete dimensions that seem interesting for her client. These might have been of great help for the ongoing counselling process. The counsellor does not even ask her client about her motives for selecting her first profession.

There is, however, one part in the exchange where the counsellor allows further discussion: When the decision has been taken to start a training as an office administrator, the counsellor could have easily concluded the selection process and proceeded to the next step in the counselling, namely to clarify what needs to be done in practice to start the programme. These tasks can be summarized as *preparation for realization* activities (stage g). However, before coming to the preparation phase, the counsellor opens the floor again and goes through some other professions that were selected beside office administrator.

For example, she asks “to what extent does it look assistant . to lawyer . (?) . what are your concerns so (?) ... or why would you go for it (?) .”

The very final decision is left to the client:

Co: think about it in more detail again (,) . . . so (-) . anything else which jumped out to you (?) (( 6 sec.)) mhm (-) . . I've understood it that way that you've got to think about these occupations again right (?) . or (-) . would you already do an evaluation . on what you have written . down & which should be on first place on second place and on third place (,) .

Cl: ((soft till +)) only offic/ office administrator (,) + .

Co: yeah (?) . (( 4 sec.))

Beside the deficiencies as discussed, which are the price for the shortening strategies as employed by the counsellor, the counsellor does allow some sort of counter-movement in her counselling, in that she does not conclude the counselling after the first solution has been found, but goes through a couple of other options, before the solution is finally fixed. It is in this phase of the interaction, that the counsellor allows open-endedness of the counselling at least to a certain degree. The reconsideration of further options might have caused a complete reorganization of the counselling, so that further development of solution and processing of advice activities might have been necessary. This, however, does not happen, office administrator remains the final choice, and its realization is in the focus of the exchange to come.

When looking at the entire counselling interaction from some distance, it appears that we get a rather differentiated picture of the professional training institution, what their repertoire is, how they organize the training, how they recruit their trainees and what they do for them. Also, the counsellor conveys a lot about her script of counselling. When we look at the client, however, her picture remains amazingly opaque. Her selection is based on the vague assessment that the profession is very varied. How the client relates to this new profession, which might dominate her whole professional life – or lead to a new retraining, if it turns out to be the wrong one – does not at all come out from the exchange.

### **EXERCISE:** Suggested Discussion

The counsellor for professional rehabilitation uses a number of shortening strategies, when she goes through her counselling. Where is she rather concise in her counselling work? What are the benefits of her shortening strategies? In

which stages of the model of action schemes could she have done more? What are the problems of her using shortening strategies in her counselling?

The professional rehabilitation centre supports a large repertoire of professions to the benefit of their clients, and they are very successful in bringing large numbers of clients into new professions. The great strength of their work lies in the very elaborate system to accompany their clients who are in training processes: Days of practical training in companies alternate with days of class at the vocational school in the centre, and clients have their personal counsellors from the centre at their disposal, who are in constant exchange with their trainees about the progress of their retraining. So there is a lot of discussion and reflexivity in the retraining framework in later stages of the programme. As we know from many clients who gave us biographical interviews, these counsellors often have become very significant for their professional as well as for their personal biographies. The criticism that has been formulated in this module relative to an individual transcribed counselling session is by no means meant to run down the excellent work of the professional rehabilitation center. Only with reference to the action scheme of counselling as developed from research in conversation analysis and with reference to sociological biography analysis, some suggestions for improvement of the first counselling could be made. Counsellors do of course look at the biographies of their clients. It is in the particular focus of the Leonardo project, however, to develop a more comprehensive, process oriented understanding of the biographical dimension and to make it fertile for further counselling. Opportunities to compare counselling in the different countries contribute to sharpening the view of biographical counselling.

Another set of data will be introduced now, that shows the work of a counsellor from another of the countries contributing to the Leonardo project. This counsellor is more aware of biographical categories as defined in this sequence of modules, and his approach can be termed process oriented. Also, compared to the foregoing set of data, his work focuses on different stages of the action scheme model of counselling.

The second set of data is from an interview with a counsellor, who is offering his services to a hospice. He is talking about a particular case which he presents as it unfolds. The counselling is not on professional rehabilitation, but it is a good example for a very successful counselling process, that does include biographical counselling. On the general level of action schemes of counselling, it can be used as an example for contrastive comparison in order to show at what stages of the model biographical counselling is likely to occur and how it is included into the task scheme to be realized. Also on the thematic level, it can be assumed that biographical counselling is relevant in both contexts: Just as

professional life is very much connected to biographical processes of the people concerned, the confrontation with death affects the biographies of the patients and of close relatives. The second set of data thus informs very well about the complexity of biographical concerns as they are discussed within the framework of this sequence of modules on biographical counselling.

The hospice staff calls up the counsellor in an immediate emergency situation, when the hospice staff cannot cope with the difficult behaviour of the wife of one of its patients:

- Co: I was first introduced to her because the sister in charge of the day hospit/ hospice . . came running to me saying “:Uhh: (‘) . . John, yeah ((fast till +)) John you must have this with this woman she is a terrible woman (‘) + she ‘s been on the :phone: she is going to :throw: him out of the house she ‘s had mental health services involved (,) We don’t know/ ( ) we can’t cope with it! You are a counsellor you must deal with it . . Here is the telephone number “(,) . . ((laughs))
- I: ((laughs))
- Co: So I thought “Oh my goodness what/ what is this?” Not at all what I have been expecting to have to do. So with some fear: and apprehension I telephoned ((laughs)) her

The counsellor is approached by the hospice staff in an emergency situation and confronted with the vague and at the same time complex task of taking care of the wife of a patient, who is behaving very much counter to all expectations and therefore causing trouble on the ward. Not without some dramatizing means in his presentation – he formulates the exchange with the sister in charge and his own thinking rather directly as experienced speech and with some degree of imitation and movement in his tone of voice – the counsellor tells how he got into contact with this particular client.

He further tells how he could establish the action scheme of counselling. Also, he says that their relationship developed in a positive manner and that his client “obviously decided that I was someone with whom she would choose not to have a robust ((laughs)) relationship” (stage a, definition of the situation and establishment of the action scheme of counselling).

It is very often the case that counselling evolves from a rather difficult and complex situation. The focus of counselling, however, is only loosely defined, and further work of the interactants is needed to get a clearer picture of the set of problems at hand and an idea about the means to solve them. The complexity on the problem side of the counselling is reflected in stages b to c of the counselling model, where the problem is presented, defined and redefined, and the topic of the counselling is negotiated. This applies to counselling in general, and as we can see from the examples given so far, it applies to professional rehabilitation

counselling as well as to hospice counselling. The two cases differ, however, in how this task is fulfilled. Whereas the rehabilitation counsellor puts in an institutional perspective and focuses very much on the symptoms of the allergy, the hospice counsellor now enters into a deep inquiry into the various perspectives of the problem in order to come to a deeper understanding of the behaviour of his client.

Co: So we've had a really nice . time talking (,) The basic thing is . she was terrified: of dealing with her husband's . . illness (,) . And he had ehm . . a tumor of the bowel (') . and ehm they had a marriage in which there was very little personal sharing. They didn't discuss their feelings, they didn't discuss any important matters even . questions of money. He handled all the :money: and the insurance and/ she/ and that was another aspect. She was terrified of how is she going to manage when he had :died:

The client was perceived by the hospice staff to be unable to adequately relate to her husband. As the counsellor finds out, there are two areas of difficulties for the client: One results from the emotional side of it, the other from a very practical side. So, what the counsellor does is start a detailed inquiry into the circumstances of his case and client in order to come to a deeper understanding of the problem and to a more informed definition of the topic of counselling – or rather of the topics, since there are quite a few (stages c & d).

After the counsellor had understood more about the perspective of his client, he brings in another perspective, namely that of the society and its conception of illness (stage d):

Co: as you probably know from the media and films and stories and so forth. We have a rather . . unrealistic idea that the moment: somebody becomes the victim of cancer . they are almost sanctified somehow that person however difficult they were in life .

I: mhm

Co: However difficult they are with their illness. You/ they must be put in the centre of the life of the family.

I: mhm

Co: even though they may not in the past of it ((laughs)) deserved such a position

I: mhm

Co: So the people who are in the caring professions (,) the people with cancer find it very difficult when the relatives . or the carers of someone with illness are not . putting their own . needs in a very . secondary position

I: mhm

Co: to the person who has the cancer.

The counsellor broadens the scope of his case consideration. The emotional side, the practical side, and the society's perspective taken together allow the counsellor to formulate a first explanation for the hospice staff's rejection of his client:

Co: So, the things that this lady had been saying over the phone to the hospice staff about . . you know "what's going to happen to :me:/ and I'm in a/ this is making my life very difficult this years so"/ they found out very difficult to accept/ and they had/they developed a very negative attitude to this :wife: . . . And that wasn't helping the situation because

I: mhm

Co: she was clearly picking that up every time she had contact with them. They were thoroughly disapproving of this woman who is putting her own fears .

I: mhm

Co: for the future before . what they felt was a . wifely duty to put her husband in ( ) .

From the case description presented so far, the topic of counselling is not reduced to the misbehaviour of the client as perceived by the hospice staff, but lies in the manifold dimensions this particular case has in its complex embedding in biographical and social processes. The counsellor then proceeds to formulate his expert opinion about the case, in that he presents his own judgement and combines all the perspectives so far discussed.

Co: This lead to a quite a lot of incidents where . . ehm she ran away from the home for a weekend leaving him to . go/ ((faster till +)) I mean he was able to :cope:+ . but he wasn't :well: and that further made people think what a terrible woman this is for running away

I: mhm mhm

Co: Instead of staying at home (.) Erm . . on one occasion it was reported she'd threatened to commit suicide

I: mhm

Co: because she couldn't face . life/not so much life without him emotionally but life without . his practical and financial and financial :know-how: (.)

I: mhm mhm

Co: and that's the big thing (.) . Eh however as I got to know her and I got to know him ((fast till +)) because a lovely thing about it was + I/I knew him because he started to come into the day hospice and he and I found . a sort of a friendship . . And when I saw them :together: ((quieter till+)) both when they were in the hospice together having lunch or when they came to see me together or when I visited them at home + (.) I could see that they really did love each other (.) . This was something which . the other staff in the

hospice had . . . not really had an opportunity to see but also didn't wish to see (.) They already made up their minds: . . . that this was . . . selfish woman (.)

I: mhm

Co: Ehm but I found no no no that there was a warmth in this relationship, they liked :walking: in the hills together that was one of their hobbies (') they actually spent a great deal of time together (') . . . and ehm . . . So I helped them to value that. I helped the couple . . . because the man himself realised how terrified she was about being left on her own (.) And he didn't seem to mind: that she . . . was putting her own fears ahead of his well-fare. So he didn't have a problem with it, it was just the staff in the hospice that had a problem with it (.) And of course they'd become increasingly important people in their :lives: because as he became more ill . . . and had to spend more time in the hospice (.) their circle of friends outside the hospice became less important and their circle of . . . professionals in the hospice became more important (.) So therefore the negative attitude of the staff to this woman . . . was even more significant in how she was fearing . . . the future

We can see from this segment that the definition of the topic of counselling and the development of a solution (stages d & e) ideally go hand in hand. The counsellor works with the client on her attitude towards her husband and the situation of upcoming death, he makes the staff see her in a different light, and he also includes the patient's perspective.

This variety of perspectives enters into his counselling plan: He organizes support for her in practical affairs in that he arranges for husband and wife to sit together and discuss how he was keeping accounts and to sort out things about the pension. He helps the client to better express her feelings and receive some validation for what she contributes, so that husband and wife can concentrate more on their emotional relationship and develop it further. And he separates these kinds of processes from the professional work to be done on the patient, so that the hospice staff can concentrate on their patient and gain a more positive view of his wife.

Co: So . . . although I say it myself and perhaps I shouldn't . . . I think my being . . . a resource at the hospice (.) made the lives of everybody in this/ for this particular couple much better (.) Because by allowing :her: to express her feelings and get some degree of validation for them (.) and then to find a practical . . . solution to the problem (') . . . helped her . . . spent a little bit more time emphasising with her husband

I: mhm

Co: allowed the husband to . . . get his treatment and his support as necessary

I: mhm mhm

Co: and also allowed the hospice staff not to be . . . bombarded with all this information

## 7. Discussion

In comparing the two counselling processes so far discussed, there is one important sentence the hospice counsellor says, that I would like to start with: “There wasn’t an overall counselling plan”.

Whereas in the rehabilitation counselling, the counsellor goes through a list of professions with the goal of ending up with a definite choice, the hospice counsellor enters into an open-ended counselling process, in which much time is spent on exploring the multidimensionality of the problem at hand and the various perspectives of all the actors involved. He can do this in concentrating very much on the problem definition and on the extensive work done on the development of a topic of counselling (stages c & d). On this background, the hospice counselling can be termed problem-centred, whereas the rehabilitation counselling is more solution-oriented (focus on stage e).

Another difference lies in the strategies employed by the counsellors to enable their clients to talk about their cases. In our everyday linguistic activities, we do not normally acquire all the linguistic means we need to easily master a counselling exchange: While everyday language is to a large degree concerned with practical activities and concrete events in the past and present (Malinowski 1923; social scientists often refer to the talking about past events in terms of reconstructive communicative genres), we do not have very much training in everyday life in communicative genres that require the capacity to talk about inner feelings and leanings and dispositions. The hospice counsellor works with his client to enable her to express her inner feelings and her needs, so that she comes out of the counselling process as a more competent individual in speech as well as in everyday social interaction. The reason why the professional rehabilitation client remains so pale in her personality in the interview lies partly in the fact that she lacks the language to express her leanings and dispositions, and the counsellor does little to offer her the means to do so. Quite the contrary happens in some segments of the professional rehabilitation exchange: The counsellor rather cuts off her client’s efforts to expand on one or the other topic and rapidly proceeds to the next item on her list or mental schedule.

The problem of linguistic expression goes even deeper in that some of the things that are highly relevant in a counselling process can never be expressed at all but need to be reconstructed by the experienced counsellor. The hospice counsellor pays much attention to his client’s means of expression, and it can be suspected that he uses these insights to come to a second grade perspective on his case, that is, he develops a quasi-scientific perspective, which combines what his client explicitly says with how she says it and under what biographical and social conditions.

These considerations lead us more directly to the biographical dimension as reflected in those two cases of counselling: The hospice counsellor finds some of the reasons for his client's inadequate behaviour in earlier experiences and social frames. His client has not learned to organize everyday life on her own, which is very much a result of the traditional orientation of the couple's marriage. The worries she has make her blind to the emotional side of her relationship with her husband in a situation of upcoming death. Also, the counsellor finds out that his client has had an early bad experience with death in her family, which makes her panic, when she has to cope with the upcoming death of her husband.

In terms of process structures of the life course, we can say that she is in a *trajectory of suffering* (Riemann, Schütze 1991; Schütze 1995), and that her life is threatened by severe practical and emotional disorganization. The counsellor explores the various dimensions that keep her trajectory going, and with his help some of these dimensions can be eliminated. Her life can be stabilized again, and this helps her to develop the emotional relationship with her husband, to cope with his upcoming death, and to enter into a more adequate relationship with the hospice staff. The counselling process not only gets rid of some of the trajectory dimensions, but also leads her into a process of *biographical transformation*, in that it enables her to be a more competent individual in life affairs than before. Also, her reflexive capacities grow, which is partly the result of the linguistic means to refer to inner states and to talk things through, which she has acquired in the counselling process.

The professional rehabilitation counsellor clearly has less sensitivity for the biographical processes of her client; sometimes she does not even pick up minor biographical facts. She does not look at the biographical conditions and the social framings of the case structure she encounters. She for example overhears her client ask what will affect where she will get placed. This information is highly relevant to the client, since, as it turns out later, she has a small child and can only work close to her hometown. The counsellor's relative ignorance to biographical considerations is rather amazing, since the counselling need is caused by an allergy, which makes it impossible for the client to continue in her profession. The counsellor spends very little time on further inquiring into the life conditions of her client. She takes the fact that she is suffering from an allergy as the starting point of her counselling and searches for new professions for her client. The allergy may very well be just a reaction to the wet substances the client had to work with. On the other hand, allergies are very often the symptomatic expression of other conditions an individual has difficulties with: The client may have been in a difficult biographical period, possibly a trajectory of suffering, that makes her vulnerable to all sorts of symptoms and that may as well have heightened her disposition to develop some sort of allergy. Such

circumstances can be grasped better with a clearer perspective on biographical processes, as developed in this sequence of modules.

Also, the client has quite some difficulty of expression as to her wishes and needs. In this respect, the rehabilitation counsellor does not reach a perspective beyond what has explicitly been said; she relies on what is in the interview, however scarce this may be.

The little negotiation that goes on in the rehabilitation counselling session points at another problem, that clearly is beyond the scope of the counsellor's action plan: When training for an entirely new profession is initiated, this does not only affect the professional life of the client, but may develop into a process structure of biographical transformation. The rehabilitation counsellor, as she presents herself in the session as described, has no means to detect, guide, and accompany such a transformation<sup>2</sup>.

## 8. Concluding Remarks

In this module, an analysis is presented that looks at two counselling processes in terms of an action scheme model of counselling. This model is based on research in the field of conversation analysis, and it conceives of counselling as a sequence of communicative tasks to be performed by counsellor and client interactively. When proceeding through the sequence of tasks, emphasis can be put on different tasks in the action scheme model, for example on the solution development stage (as in the professional rehabilitation counselling) or on the problem definition, redefinition and topic development stages (as in the hospice counselling). Biographical considerations fit in on various stages, and it is a matter of degrees of open-endedness and the inclusion of perspectives in the individual counselling design, whether these are allowed to play a major role in the counselling.

Another line of argument was developed relative to the linguistic means of expression a client brings into the counselling exchange. These may be more or less elaborate and often show different degrees of development for the presentation of inner experiences as compared to outer events. Sensitivity to linguistic means of expression may help counsellors to understand disorder, scarcity of expression, or a "robust" communicative approach as something to look deeper into. The hospice counsellor works with his client on the

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<sup>2</sup> This criticism only refers to the counselling session as discussed. The professional rehabilitation center does excellent work in accompanying and supporting their clients once they are in the retraining process, their professional and personal development being part of it!

development of her means of expression for inner attitudes. Also, he shows his reconstructive capacities in the counselling process, since some of the things, which are important to a client, can hardly be expressed at all but have to be reconstructed by the counsellor, again with reference to biographical processes, to discourse processes and to the microstructure of linguistic expression. As shown in other modules of this programme, there is a relationship between process structures of the life course and their linguistic expression (cf. also Treichel 2004).

As Harvey Sacks suggested in his lectures, we should *analyse language where it is deep and interesting* (Sacks 1995, Part III, Lecture 23). I cannot think of any communicative genre where this requirement is met with more distinctness than in counselling. Counselling is concerned with the negotiation of meaning: In the process of interpreting each other's utterances, the interactants have to find out what is relevant, what weight should be assigned to the things that are talked about or may be left out, all this within the overall framework of giving advice that provides orientation and may have far reaching consequences for quite an extended period of biography. Sensitivity to process structures of the life course, knowledge of the action scheme of counselling, and awareness of the means of the linguistic expression of outer events and inner attitudes will help counsellors to better understand their cases and to provide better counselling.

I would finally like to mention that counsellors in their professional practice usually do not have available transcripts of their sessions. Going through transcripts in this sequence of modules will help to develop the capacity of doing conversation analysis. In professional everyday business, the repertoire of the analysis can only be applied in an abbreviated form, and expertise in conversation analysis helps to raise awareness for discourse phenomena that are relevant for an analytic approach. Being familiar with discourse phenomena and how they relate to biographical categories and social life circumstances sensitizes analysts for the concatenation of phenomena, which are all relevant for good counselling practice.

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## Key to signs of transcription

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| .                 | short break                             |
| ..                | medium break                            |
| ...               | longer break                            |
| (( 5 sec.))       | long break                              |
| ( )               | word not understood/ possible utterance |
| <u>emphasised</u> | word emphasised                         |
| :lengthened:      | utterance lengthened                    |
| :>softer<:        | softer in comparison to normal volume   |
| :<louder>:        | louder in comparison to normal volume   |
| &                 | „fast connection“                       |
| „we go ..“        | quotation                               |
| ((faster till +)) | comment on utterance                    |
| (.)               | voice goes down                         |
| (^)               | voice goes up                           |
| (-)               | voice in the balance                    |
| (?)               | question                                |
| th/ the           | self-correction                         |
| [...]             | remark of the interviewer               |
| Cl                | client                                  |
| Co                | counsellor                              |
| I                 | interview                               |



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## **Some Reflections on Developing the Use of Biographical Interviewing in Counselling Practice as part of Occupational Rehabilitation**

### **SHORT DESCRIPTION**

This paper considers how an emphasis on the importance of biography in counselling has developed out of a critique of more traditional ways of taking and using a subject's "history". The potential for the incorporation of systematic processes of biographical interviewing and analysis into a more developed model of biographical counselling practice is explored with reference to some theoretical and practice issues. It is written from the perspective of a non-academic "practice partner" in the EU funded Leonardo da Vinci "INVITE" programme.

### **1. Introduction**

The collection of "biographical" or "life history" information by workers in the rehabilitation field, as in other areas of health, welfare and employment services' practice, is long established. Indeed it will be found in to be more-or-less universally present, to greater and lesser degrees of elaboration, in both bureaucratic procedures and professional methodologies.

However, typical approaches to eliciting, recording and using such information in these contexts are subject to a sustained critique developed out of sociological interest in individuals' experiencing, understanding and "construction" of their lives in social interaction. This suggests that a person's "history" will often be distorted by the selection of information to which particular significance is attached by the history taker: this according to pre-existing "diagnostic" categories or bureaucratic frames of reference that are

brought to the encounter. In its extreme forms only questioning designed to identify such information might be pursued. Even where there is obeisance to a more “holistic” approach much information gathered might be rendered as no more than contextual, “human interest” colouring to what is deemed to be of *real* significance for the interviewer.

It is argued that the biographical information therefore comes to be appropriated by the history-taker for their particular professional or bureaucratic purposes of categorisation or classification. A deterministic interpretation of the person’s life course is likely to be more or less explicitly applied, and the status of the subject as a past and future „author” of their biography in interaction with their social world is diminished or denied (Kyllönin 2004).

This kind of critique can be over-played in relation to the actual practice of many workers in the occupational guidance and rehabilitation fields – who are by no means necessarily ignorant of it and the challenges it presents to them. Nevertheless it has continuing critical potency and poses interesting questions and opportunities to practitioners and to the agencies that employ them.

What the EU Leonardo da Vinci „INVITE” project has explored, in contrast, is the application of techniques of gathering and using biographical material that:

- acknowledge the status of the narrator as the owner and author of their own „story”;
- thereby redress some of the power imbalance inherent in her/his relationship with the rehabilitation „experts” s/he encounters;
- affirm and support her/his potential to be an active agent in the „re-authoring” of their biography in the context of their rehabilitation into work;
- and help to reveal potentialities and developmental opportunities that life circumstances have hitherto foreclosed or circumscribed.

(see, variously, the INVITE Curriculum Modules@[www.biographicalcounselling.com](http://www.biographicalcounselling.com))

## 2. Biography and Counselling Practice

The significance of personal-historical information is not a new idea in general *counselling* theory and practice. Indeed it is central to many methods and approaches: as, for example, in the emphasis on early childhood experience and its impact on subsequent functioning to be found in many psychodynamic variants. However, it is precisely the approaches to biography/history to be

found in much accepted practice of this kind that have been subject to the critique outlined above.

What is particularly proposed in the alternative is the introduction into counselling practice of „the biographical interview” and its subsequent analysis as a discrete element in a counselling process. In the approach proposed by Schütze and colleagues (initially as a qualitative sociological research tool developed out of the pioneering work of Anselm Strauss) as described in the various INVITE papers this can require a distinctive interviewing technique and particular analytical skills. Its purpose is to ground the counselling process explicitly and firmly in the narrator’s understanding of her/his own reality (their *truth*) and affirm their status as author/actor in its on-going construction.

It is not suggested that this „biographical interview” in itself constitutes „counselling”. There is always the possibility that allowing an individual to „tell their own story” under certain conditions well known generally to counselling practice – unconditional positive regard and respect, empathic listening and „congruence”, and confidentiality – might itself produce therapeutic benefit: catharsis in talking about past trauma, for example (Rosenthal 1998). It has indeed been famously claimed in the general counselling field that such „core conditions” can deliver therapeutic „personality” change on their own, without need of any other input or theorised intervention (Rogers 1957). There is, conversely, the possibility that encouraging someone to talk frankly about their lives under such conditions can sometimes re-awaken past severe traumas, or bring back painfully to mind memories of distressing events and circumstances, but without catharsis or resolution occurring (Kaźmierska 2004). There is an obvious danger then that in simply eliciting a detailed biography we might leave people worse than we find them.

More neutrally, telling their story may in itself have little or no impact on the narrator. For many people going through rehabilitative processes such an interview could be but one of many situations (albeit in some ways a distinctive one) in which they are asked to give an „official” account of themselves: part of the „routine” of being processed. Neutrality of response may of course move towards negativity if the painstaking narration of a „life” ultimately appears to have delivered no particular benefit to its narrator.

The biographical interview therefore cannot be safely or sensibly offered as a stand-alone intervention in someone’s rehabilitation. Unlike application of the technique as a research tool, where the interviewer has no duty to the narrator beyond adherence to certain limited research ethics, the rehabilitation „counsellor” will owe some continuing duty of care to the subject, and the rehabilitation agency will also have an institutional obligation to make purposeful use of such material to help achieve rehabilitation goals.

The interview must therefore be contained within some broader counselling process that:

- 1) ascribes a particular value to the subject's own understanding of their life course as they describe and account for it;
- 2) can make purposeful use of the information gathered in collaboration/alliance with the subject;
- 3) offers continuing support and assistance as biographical material is worked and re-worked by its author to deepen understanding and suggest or reveal potentialities;
- 4) embraces strategies (and access to resources) enabling and supporting change and development to promote and achieve rehabilitation goals.

This need to place the biographical interview within a more developed model raises some interesting theoretical, practice and pragmatic/situational issues.

### **3 „Counselling” in Rehabilitation Practice**

It was clear in the work of the INVITE project that the term „counselling” was used and understood in diverse ways within different national contexts and between different professional, and organisational contexts. It seemed more productive to participants to acknowledge these differences without unduly struggling over some definitional precision. Nevertheless some exploration of the idea of „counselling” as a practice may be helpful.

„Counselling” is a *portmanteau* term that is used to describe an array of different methodologies applied in a wide range of contexts by a disparate range of practitioners. It is variously theorised with reference to an assortment of explanations of the human condition. The „biographical interview” must therefore find its place in an already crowded marketplace of ideas and practices about helping people through talk. In one sense this suggests little problem in bringing another offering to market, but it would be wrong to assume that „the biographical interview” can simply be slotted into other existing approaches. Some of these will be based on theorising and a practice incompatible with a biographical approach. And, the transmuting of a sociological research method into a psychologised therapeutic practice has itself been identified as a dubious proposition from within sociology's own ranks (see e.g. Andrie 2001).

Let us look simplistically at the biographical interview in relation to the three main „schools” of counselling theory and practice as typically identified in

the literature: Behavioural, Psychodynamic, and Humanistic/Person Centred. What we find is that the technique does not seem to fit happily with the first, is seen by some to be particularly compatible with the second, and is in many ways congruent with, although in some ways at variance with, the third.

The poor fit with Behavioural approaches is simply explained by the fact that their focus is on behavioural outputs and their setting and maintaining conditions, and how these can best be changed. „History” is relevant only in relation to those. To give an example from an occupational rehabilitation context:

*John is a nurse who is no longer able to function in his job because of what has been described as an „irrational fear of sharps”. He has been on long-term sick leave and will soon exhaust his entitlement to sick pay and have to resign his post. He is desperate to keep his job and continue his vocation. He is referred for counselling to a behavioural counsellor in the hospital’s Occupational Health Unit. A Cognitive Behavioural approach is taken. The history of the disabling fear is established. Its genesis is found to lie in his witnessing a traumatic incident with a patient involving use of sharps by a colleague. Since then he has engaged in „catastrophising”, thinking that he might make the same mistake with similar drastic consequences. His confidence in his competence is destroyed, and in his fear of the potential catastrophe he is paralysed with anxiety when faced with any clinical procedure involving sharp instruments. The counselling proceeds using a CBT approach addressing his „faulty cognitions”. He is enabled to change these. He has a short refresher course on clinical practice. He returns to a full-time nursing post and successfully resumes his career.*

The practitioner using CBT (or other behavioural approaches) in their counselling practice, as in this example, would find the elaborated biographical interview quite irrelevant to their process.

In relation to psychodynamic approaches an affinity between the understandings obtained from biographical analysis as developed by Schütze and others and psychodynamic insights into human behaviour and experience appears to be almost implicit. The ideas of „deep structure”, repressed experience, etc. seem to resonate very closely with key psychodynamic concepts, and it has been suggested that the approach will raise the sensibility of rehabilitation professionals about psychodynamic processes operating in the biographies of their clients [see e.g. Betts et al, Biographical Counselling: An Introduction, INVITE Curriculum Papers@ [www.biographicalcounselling.com](http://www.biographicalcounselling.com)].

Turning to Humanistic/Person Centred counselling approaches, there is an interesting congruence between many of the ideas about the theory and practice of biographical interviewing and person-centred counselling. This is perhaps not surprising given the influence of phenomenologically based understandings of

human experience on both Anselm Strauss, Carl Rogers, the founding father of „humanistic psychology”, and their various followers. Thus the individual subject/client in their uniqueness is the necessary focus in both practices. This individual is the acknowledged expert on their lives as lived and has a capacity to change/re-author their life going forward. What has informed the experience of the individual can be unmasked and this will reveal potentialities for change. This can be achieved by listening carefully and respectfully to what they have to say about themselves and their perceptions of their „history” and experience, without „directing” the narrative or suggesting „answers”. The subject/client remains in control of what they may choose to take, and make, from the encounter. Such congruence suggests that a „person-centred” counsellor might have little difficulty incorporating the biographical interview into their practice.

There are however differences to be acknowledged at the theoretical and practice level. For example, in both methodologies the client/subject is identified as the „expert” on their own lives. In biographical interviewing however this „expertise” lies in the accounting of it: it is the interviewer who is necessarily the expert in its analysis and interpretation using specialised techniques of analysis. A principle of person-centred counselling however is that the counsellor does not bring to counselling any „superior” knowledge or understanding that is not accessible to the client/subject themself.

Rogers indeed developed his „person-centred” approach specifically in reaction to his perception of the „mystifications” of other approaches that put the „therapist” in a position of (purported) superior knowledge and understanding – hence power – in relation to the client. A „Rogerian” might therefore apply the critique outlined above back to proponents of biographical analysis, i.e. if they rely on a complex, scientised interpretative framework to gain a special understanding of the biography – one that its author does not share – they then fall foul of their own strictures. Indeed this „inequality” in the researcher-narrator relationship has been identified as an ethical issue in biographical research practice (Każmierska 2004).

Something of this potential tension was illustrated at one of the “INVITE” seminars. A delegate reported that, following a biographical interview undertaken within a therapeutic programme a mother had withdrawn her family from it. There was concern that the interview might in some way have led to this, but it was not known whether this was so. Academic delegates, expert in biographical analysis, suggested immediately that the interview transcript should be analysed to see if this suggested an answer. Delegates with a person-centred counselling background on the other hand countered that somebody should ask the mother herself what the answer was. (It transpired that this was not possible because of protocols established within the therapeutic programme itself.)

However, that said, it would be naïve to think that a person-centred counsellor does not also analyse and hypothesise on the basis of what they have heard. Indeed that is part of their standard methodology in assisting the client to come to their new understanding of their situation.

Perhaps an even more fundamental difference at a conceptual level is that a purist in the person-centred tradition is sharply focused on the „here and now” of both the client’s experiencing and capacity for change through „self-actualisation”. The past is simply a „given” away from which the client is enabled to spring by self-determined strategies of action – whether in relation to the internal world of their psychological processes or to their relationship and interaction with their external world. In biographical analysis on the other hand the biographical history, as recounted, is a rich seam of material to be mined for understandings of both the self-willed actions of its narrator *and* the objective contexts and constraints in which these have taken place: hence how an identity and life have become „constructed”, and with clues as to possible „reconstructions”. The detailed re-visiting of the life story is therefore central and crucial.

Finally, at a practice level, we could contrast the biographical interviewer, who seeks to be as „non-interventionist” as possible so as not to contaminate/disrupt the narrative, with the person – centred counsellor, who might be quite interventive as a matter of process („active listening”), while seeking to remain „non-directive” as a matter of purpose and intent.

In reality perhaps too much need not be made of such differences. While „purist” applications of particular methods might be found in counselling practice in rehabilitation contexts it is just as likely that „eclectic” or „integrative” approaches will be adopted, with practitioners drawing on a range of different techniques and interventions to suit particular presented needs and circumstances. This is important for two reasons in terms of adoption or incorporation of a biographical approach: firstly, the presence of a predisposition to be flexible and innovative; secondly, the presence of transferable skills already acquired in other practice.

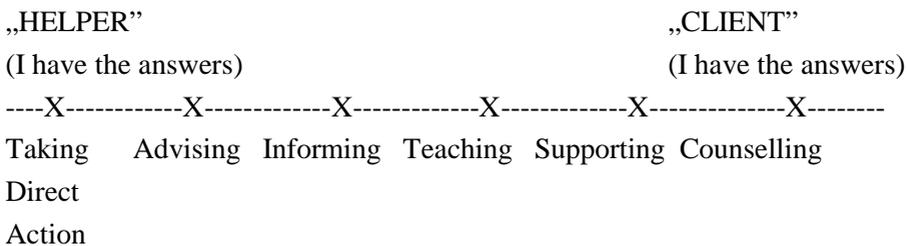
For example, someone used to working in a broadly person-centred mode (this would probably be the position of most practitioners in counselling roles in rehabilitation in the UK at present) might quite „comfortably” offer the option of a biographical interview, with an explanation of what the analysis is designed to help reveal, and on the basis that the „findings” will be used simply as „hypotheses” for further mutual exploration. The subject does not become expert in biographical analysis, but does participate in the process on an informed basis. This would be the equivalent of inviting a counselling client to complete a psychological profiling inventory: not because this will reveal their „true” personality but rather that it might suggest some areas for further exploration.

Perhaps ultimately, what might actually mark out the practitioner now versed in a biographical approach that goes beyond the „humanism” of the „person-centred” would be a heightened appreciation of the limitations of any over-psychologised stress on the individual’s capacity to „self-actualise”, i.e. to be or become what they want/need to be or to become in order to fulfil their psychological potential. An emphasis on what biography can reveal will act as a constant safeguard against losing sight of the inequalities of opportunity structures and cultural capital which, for so many people, constrain the narratives they can construct, and the lives that they can lead. As has been said in the UK context of implementing policies of social inclusion in relation to work opportunities: „If we want to support „careers for all” we cannot afford to base our work on psychological naïvety” (Watts 1998).

#### 4. Counsellors in Rehabilitation Practice

An acceptance of the possibility of such eclectic or integrative approaches is important because the term „counsellor” is itself one of loose application in rehabilitation practice. It might be used to describe at least four categories of worker in rehabilitation practice in different kinds of settings across Europe; 1) professionals qualified in Counselling as a discrete professional practice; 2) other professionally qualified staff who have „counselling” as part of their rôle/job description, such as Social Workers or Occupational Therapists; 3) others who have had some training in „counselling skills” to enhance what may be primarily bureaucratic rôles of job placement; 4) others still, in rôles where the word „counselling” is used in its other sense as a synonym for advice-giving.

All these categories of personnel are there to help in the rehabilitative endeavour and their various rôles might be specifically positioned somewhere on a „helping continuum” as depicted here:



Sometimes job rôles may span more than one of these positions. A Social Worker, for example, might be required to take some direct action to stabilise

a client's situation – to address an immediate crisis, say – but then move into the supporting and counselling modes in their continuing work with them.

The full-blown biographical interview might conceivably be used by workers in any of these „helping” positions. But perhaps it would be a technique more appropriately reserved to the positions towards the right, where the active engagement of the subject in finding solutions to their rehabilitative needs is assumed to a greater extent. It is those positions, of course, where personnel with some grounding in counselling skills and experience compatible with a biographical approach will more likely be employed.

So far, of course, this discussion has proceeded on an assumption that there is a single „counsellor” who relates to the biographical subject. In many rehabilitation settings however there may well be multi-disciplinary teams of workers involved in a number of complementary interventions. A possibility in some settings therefore might be that the biographical interview and its analysis could become a discrete specialism: with its outcomes then passed to others to use in their counselling work with the subject. Situational variables like these will be important in decisions about how and when the biographical interview might best be utilised.

## **5. Situational/Practical Constraints**

A potential constraint on the use of the biographical interview in counselling/rehabilitation practice is its resource intensiveness. In its pure form, as developed in research, an interview itself can take several hours. There is then the need for verbatim transcription before analysis, again time-consuming processes. Unlike the research context – where material might be safely shelved for long periods of time for later transcription – the practice situation will require that the material is turned round quite quickly so that it can helpfully fed into ongoing counselling, and thereby the general rehabilitative programme. There will also need to be suitably trained personnel available to conduct interviews and undertake analysis.

All this comes at a financial/resource cost, and the capacity to resource this will vary greatly between different settings both within and between different national rehabilitation systems. It is easier to envisage the approach being viable in the context of, say, the two year, residentially based programmes in highly staffed specialist centres in Germany than in the high-volume, high caseload, community based employment service offices in Austria.

There is potential being explored within the INVITE programme to adapt the approach for use in the more pressurised and less well resourced settings, but it remains likely that in many situations it would have to be rationed or „targeted” in some way. This in turn will require establishment of some criteria to identify the cases in which it might most usefully be applied. This would necessarily raise the question of efficacy.

## **6. Effectiveness: does it work?**

In the work of the INVITE programme the question „does it (the proposed biographical approach) work?” has been asked repeatedly in different contexts. This is an obvious concern for practitioners in the rehabilitation field and their agencies. Increasingly there is a keen interest in measuring outputs and outcomes in all areas of rehabilitation activity and generally in „human services”. Thus professionals of all kinds are increasingly called to account to justify their practice in terms of whether it delivers what it purports to do. And, at the organisational level, output measures linked to specific performance indicators have become a touchstone for policy makers and resource allocators.

Interventions based on belief in particular practices or a particular „value position” – however well supported by practice wisdom and the anecdotal – can and do struggle for legitimacy in this environment. In relation to the treatment of depression in the UK for example only Cognitive Behavioural approaches amongst the various talking therapies now enjoy the official *imprimature* of the National Health Service – through its National Institute for Clinical Excellence – as „effective”. This judgement is offered as „evidence-based” following structured clinical trials – evidence found lacking in relation to alternative approaches.

As suggested earlier though, the proposed use of this biographical approach in rehabilitation is quite different from the application of a counselling method as a „clinical” response to a specific diagnosed illness or disorder. Indeed at a theoretical and ideological level it is intended quite explicitly to stand in contra-distinction to medicalised and other positivistic methods of intervention. It is offered as an alternative way of better understanding individuals and their rehabilitative needs and potentials, and will often be positioned within wider processes of rehabilitative effort such as functional remediation, social skills development, technical training, and so on. In this broader context, then, the more appropriate questions are perhaps „can it help?”, „does it contribute?”. Whilst more systematic and structured investigation/evaluation of its potential

contribution is needed, the „field-testing” that has taken place in different European countries as part of the “INVITE” programme suggests that it can.

Interestingly, it has even been suggested by one commentator in the UK occupational guidance field that biographical or „narrative” approaches should be actively adopted as an antidote, or form of professional resistance, to the tyranny of targets and output measures: a humanistic liberation for the counsellor as much as the subject perhaps! (Reid 2005).

## 7. Conclusion

The author of this paper came to the INVITE project representing a counselling agency specialising in short-term interventions and operating in the commercial sector. This, plus previous professional and managerial experience within UK state welfare agencies, perhaps predisposed to a degree of scepticism about the practical application of full-blown biographical interviewing in counselling practice: this despite feelings of affinity towards its intellectual, interactionist roots. It was therefore particularly interesting to see the ways in which colleagues in Finland and in Poland, for example, have adapted and incorporated it into their direct work with clients. There is clearly encouraging scope for the further exploration of how it can enhance the rehabilitative effort in settings conducive to its systematic use.

It also became clear as the project progressed that a further value to be derived from the work of the INVITE project lies in its potential to contribute to professional education and socialisation, as initially demonstrated in the work of Schütze and his colleagues in Germany and now taken up in other project partner nations. This lies not simply in instruction in the particular techniques of biographical analysis, but in the revelation of the rich understandings of people’s trajectories in and through life that it brings: and that provides an empirically based affirmation of the importance of focusing on the individual client – in all their biographical uniqueness – in all rehabilitation and other „helping” interventions. Such „client/patient-centredness” is much proclaimed in the health and welfare field but can all too often be lost in the routines of practice and under organisational pressures. Exposure to the disciplines of biographical analysis can only help heighten professional awareness of how crucial it is to sustain that focus.

Finally, as this paper only briefly discusses, there is an interesting philosophical affinity between humanistic psychology and its counselling application and the underlying tenets of biographical interviewing and analysis

as proposed via the INVITE project. As a matter of passing biographical interest, we may just note that Anselm Strauss and Carl Rogers were academic colleagues at the University of Chicago in the 1950s and were clearly influenced by the same intellectual traditions. Perhaps just as the skilled interviewer/analyst can apparently „hear” the underlying patterns within a biography as it is recounted so too might the skilled listener in the person-centred counselling tradition claim a particular sensitivity to what lies behind the client’s story as it is unfolded. There is surely some interesting possibility here for some comparative work – perhaps on a pan-European basis?

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## **Social Work Case Analysis of Biographical Processes**

### **SHORT DESCRIPTION**

This module deals with the analysis of biographies and narratives. It also presents ways in which biographies and narratives are used in social work, and gives an example of a case analysis.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To learn something about how to analyse biographies and narratives.
2. To recognise ways of using a biographical approach in one's own work.

### **1. Introduction**

Collecting and analysing personal and collective stories in a systematic way has a long tradition in the social sciences. Biographical research is a "...field which seeks to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future" (Roberts 2002: 1). A distinction is usually made between, on the one hand, analysis of (biographical) "extended accounts of lives that develop over the course of entire interviews" and, on the other hand, analysis of "brief, topically specific narratives organized around characters, setting, and plot" (Riessman 2001: 82). An autobiographical interview focuses explicitly on the life history of a person while a narrative interview can focus on other things, too (Riemann 2003).

In the social sciences narratives have generally been studied in two ways: (1) from a methodological perspective, i.e. stories are seen as one of several sources from which to gain knowledge about social reality, and (2) from an ontological perspective, i.e. the social reality itself is seen to have a narrative form. In the latter case social and personal identities are seen to be constructed as stories. (Johansson 2005: 18). In later years the story-telling aspect has gained in importance and it is common to talk more about life stories than about life histories. Researchers are interested not only in **what** is said but also in **how** it is said. How events are related in a story indicates how individuals give meaning to their lives. (Johansson 2005: 220; Riemann 2003). The talk about „realism” versus „constructionism” or „narrativism” is a key debate in much biographical research (Roberts 2002: 7). Öberg has introduced a third concept, i.e. „retrospective reflection”, which places itself **between** the realistic and the constructive position. This perspective sees “life-stories as windows, though not completely transparent, to history, culture and mind of the informants interviewed”. This perspective takes into account the fact that “individuals constantly reinterpret their life history according to their situation in old age and to their story’s plot” (Öberg 1999: 110; see Johansson 2005: 223–224). In this module narratives are seen as interesting both as to content and to form. By narrative we here mean a story about life (biography) or part of life.

## 2. Analysing Biographies and Narratives for Social Work

When studying biographical processes in the work with clients, social work can gain from looking at how biographies and narratives have been used in research and what has been learned in this process.

Riemann (2003) mentions some important aspects, when doing autobiographical narrative interviews:

1. It is necessary that there is a relationship of sufficient trust between interviewer and interviewee.
2. The generating question has to be formulated in such a way that it can elicit an extempore narrative of the interviewee’s involvement in events and experiences that were relevant for the person instead of eliciting plain accounts or explanations as to why he/she acted in a certain way.
3. The interviewee should be allowed to tell his/her story without being interrupted, except for when the interviewer gets lost and does not know what the narrator is talking about.

4. After the coda (closing remark) of the main narrative there is a phase of questions and answers: the interviewer asks a few narrative questions in order to let the interviewee tell as much as he/she can about the main theme(s). When there is no more narrating, the interviewer can ask questions about certain facts or about the reasons for certain events or acts; these can be retrospective evaluations and reviews, reflections on what one would do differently today, what the events reveal about one's self, etc.

In social work it is often necessary to ask about things that the client has not mentioned in the main narration. After having asked the interviewee to tell more about themes that came up in the main narration (internal narrative questions) it is possible to ask the client to tell more about themes that have not yet been mentioned (external questions) (Rosenthal 2003: 918–919).

While telling his/her life story a person structures the story in a way that he/she finds meaningful. The memory process is supported and fragments are chained together to a whole picture. Narrating gives the best picture of what happened and of the experience. The story gets more detailed during the narration and the narrator starts to interact more with his/her memories, contemporary partners and with him/herself than with the listener. A biographical interview allows for themes to come up which the interviewer may not think to ask about. (Rosenthal 2003). Disadvantages in social work can be that a biographical interview is work and time consuming and analysis is difficult if it is not possible to tape and transcribe the interview.

## 2.1. Generating Questions

In analysing biographical narratives it is important to look at what kind of questions, so-called „generating questions“, are used to generate them. The generating question influences the story and should therefore be part of the analysis. Professionals, e.g. social workers, usually have a different purpose with their interviews than researchers do, but the former can learn from the latter when it comes to formulating questions that encourage people to talk about their lives.

It is often necessary to start out with some small talk and be observant of how the interviewee responds. The interviewee, of course, needs to feel that the interview has some meaning and wants to know why it is being done. When doing a research interview in a medical setting, Riemann proposes starting with something like: “I am not really interested in medical histories but in life histories’ or „in order to understand this part of your life...”. The interviewer should be vague enough in order not to restrict the interviewee's storytelling but specific enough, so that the interviewee knows what is expected of him/her.

Riemann proposes that the interviewer pulls the interviewee into narrating by narrating something first, e.g. introducing himself/herself with a story. The generating question can then be just: „Tell me your story!” followed by „Start with your first memories!” (Riemann 2004).

Other generating questions used in research are e.g.: „Every person has a life story. Try to tell me about your life in about 20 minutes. Start wherever you want.” Or „If you were to write a book about your life story, what would the different chapters be about?” (Holstein-Gubrium 1995: 40–41; see Johansson 2005: 248). Sometimes it is more relevant to start out with a more specific question, like „What does your work mean to you?” (Chase 1995; see Johansson 2005: 248). Curran & Chamberlayne (2002: 2) used an open question in which the interviewee was asked to speak freely about his/her own situation.

In social work, too, it is common to use open questions that are not easily answered by a “Yes” or a “No”. However, social workers may not usually ask questions that generate a whole biography. Often narrative questions (e.g. “Tell me more about...”) are needed to help the interviewee tell his/her story.

## EXERCISE 1

What questions do **you** use in your work to generate clients’ stories?

## 2.2. Analysis

Narratives can be read, interpreted and analysed in different ways depending on what questions are put to the material. One way to analyse autobiographical narrative interviews is described by Schütze in the module by Sundman, Björkenheim. Some general aspects of analysis will be briefly described in this chapter.

The model of Lieblich et al (1998: 12–14; see Johansson 2005: 288–290) identifies two main and independent dimensions in analysis of narratives: 1) holism versus category and 2) content versus form. The model is presented in figure 1.

| Content               | Form               |          |
|-----------------------|--------------------|----------|
| Holistic – Content    | Holistic – Form    | Holism   |
| Categorical – Content | Categorical – Form | Category |

**Figure 1.** Model for the Classification and Organization of Types of Narrative Analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber (1998: 13) modified by Johansson 2005: 288).

The holistic–content manner of dealing with narratives uses the complete life story of an individual and focuses on the content presented. The analysis can also focus on certain parts of the life story, usually the opening or closing parts, but the parts are always related to the entire life story. This kind of reading is common in clinical case studies and in anthropology. (Johansson 2005: 289).

The holistic–form type of analysis involves looking at the structure of complete life stories. Is the story a comedy or a tragedy? Does the story contain a climax or turning point, which explains the development? How does the story begin and end? How is the story organised: chronologically or thematically? This type of analysis has become more common in social sciences during the last years. (Johansson 2005: 289).

A categorical–content approach is what is usually meant by „content analysis“. It means that categories of the studied topic are defined and the narrative is extracted, classified and gathered into categories. Quantitative treatment of the narrative is quite common. This approach to look for certain themes or content patterns in a narrative has been common in sociology. (Johansson 2005: 289).

Finally, the categorical–form mode of analysis is about stylistic or linguistic questions of defined units of the narrative. A categorical–form analysis might focus on the kind of metaphors the narrator is using or on the use of passive or active form. This type of analysis is common in sociolinguistics. (Johansson 2005: 289).

Besides content and expression/structure Johansson (2005: 290) adds a third dimension to the model, i.e. the interpersonal relation perspective, which contains both an identity and a relational function.

Depending on which dimension the researcher focuses on, content, expression/structure or interpersonal relation, different questions are put to the data. A content analysis answers questions like: What happens in the story? Who are the characters? What are the relationships between them? Which is the dominant story line? What are the story time and story space? In what setting do the events occur? Which are the explicit and implicit themes? What is the point of the story? Which cultural, political, scientific and religious discourses are articulated in the story? (Johansson 2005: 286).

An analysis of expression and structure answers questions like: In what order are the events told? How is the story organised, chronologically or thematically? What is the duration and frequency with which events are told? What distance, perspective and voice is used in the presentation? In what tempo or rhythm are the episodes told? What words are used? What grammatical form is used, passive or active? What rhetorical figures are used, e.g. metaphors? What type of plot is there? Is it a comedy or a tragedy? (Johansson 2005: 286).

The analysis of the interpersonal relations answers questions like: Who is talking to whom, when and where, what is the purpose of the conversations? What kind of relationship is there between the interviewee and the interviewer? What are the differences in social position: gender, class, sexual orientation, age, “race”/ethnicity, knowledge, experience? What is the interplay during the interview? Verbal and non-verbal expression? What conversation styles/communicative strategies are used? Who dominates in the interview? How? When? In what respect? Are there critical points in the interplay, misunderstandings, conflicts? What identities are created in the story-telling? (Johansson 2005: 286–287).

In her outline of a line-by-line narrative analysis Fraser (2004: 186–196) distinguishes seven phases: (1) hearing the stories and experiencing the interviewee’s and the interviewer’s emotions, (2) transcribing the material, (3) interpreting individual transcripts, (4) scanning across different domains of experience, (5) linking „the personal with the political”, (6) looking for commonalities and differences among participants, and (7) writing academic narratives about personal stories. This outline can be looked at from a social work perspective.

In social work it is not always possible to record, listen to and transcribe narrative interviews like researchers do, although for example videotaping of interviews could be used more in the work with clients and in supervision. Instead, social workers usually have to listen very carefully to the client’s story during the interview and make notes. While listening the social worker needs to distance herself/himself enough from the storytelling to be able to reflect on it while at the same time listening. Fraser points out that emotions of both interviewee and interviewer should be registered, body language observed, agreements and disagreements noted, because they can give insights about how the conversation unfolds. This includes paying attention to the interaction between social worker and client and to the context where the interview takes place. Observing how the interview and the narratives start, unfold and end may be important in understanding what the client wants to say. It may be helpful to go through the interview thoroughly afterwards, to complete notes, and to think over the interview as a whole. (Fraser 2004).

According to Fraser (2004) the main challenges of interpreting individual interviews is trying to separate long chunks of talk into specific stories or segments of narratives. This may be difficult because one story often ends seamlessly into another. The interviewee may also jump from one subject to another and tell stories that are not separate and complete. Because the interviews are seldom recorded and transcribed it may be easier to try to recall the sets of ideas expressed and the scene(s) in which some sort of plot unfolds.

The interview may be analysed from intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural and structural aspects. Intrapersonal aspects often appear through the client's self-talk, i.e. when the interviewee says "And I said to myself..." Interpersonal aspects appear when the interviewee reports what he/she said and what somebody else said. Cultural aspects again often refer to larger groups of people or to social conventions. Structural aspects often appear when talking about social phenomena, and about class, gender, ethnicity, etc. Linking „the personal with the political" involves looking at how dominant discourses and social conventions constitute an interpretative framework for understanding the stories. Looking for commonalities and differences among participants is particularly important when the social worker wants to advocate for certain groups of clients. By classifying and typologising clients' stories, similarities and differences become more visible. Written analyses of the stories of clients form new stories, and we need to be careful to check that these analyses correspond to the stories told whether they are written as scientific articles, for agency files or as social reports. In seeing that narrative analysis offers a way to understand the role personal stories play in the making of the socio-political world social workers can use this knowledge to reinforce or context dominant social practices (See Fraser 2004).

### **3. The Use of Biographies and Narratives in Social Work**

Narrative approaches in social work have been classified as belonging to the „third wave" of social work theory characterised by solution-building and potential rather than by pathology. In this classification the „first wave" is described as a pathology-based medical model building on the ideas of Freud and his successors, and the „second wave" as characterised by problem-solving. (Milner & O'Byrne 2002: 84). Maybe as a kind of protest against the medical model and pathology-problem-oriented work, social workers have often been actively looking away from dealing too much with clients' past life. Another reason for the unwillingness to dwell on clients' past may be that many social workers feel they do not have the competence to deal with very traumatic experiences in clients' past, if such come up. Many social workers have felt that their competence is more solution-oriented, i.e. oriented towards working with the present and the future. This may have lead to neglecting clients' life histories and life stories. Despite this doubt of many social workers biographical narratives seem to be fairly commonly used in social work. With the concepts of „narrative" and „biographical" many social workers feel they have now got an acceptable term for what they have been doing all along. As mentioned earlier in

this module, a narrative is not always the story of a life. It can also be a story about something else, for instance about what happened when the person did not have money to buy medication. The work of social workers very much includes listening to clients' different, biographical as well as other, narrations.

Narratives are used in social work mainly in two ways: First, clients' biographical narratives can be used as a method to collect information necessary for getting a better understanding of the clients and their social reality. Secondly, biographical narratives can be used as tools in themselves to help clients to change, e.g. in building up their identity, in making new interpretations of their life, in creating a new life story, and in empowering themselves (Nousiainen 2005). This work of change that a person does is sometimes called "biographical work", which is defined by Chamberlayne (2004: 32) as the "process of developing more self-understanding as a basis for more reflexive and purposeful strategies".

Even when a narrative method is used by a social worker just for collecting data, for the client the mere telling of his/her life probably has some interventive effect, too, positive (therapeutic) or negative (disruptive). Rosenthal (2003: 915) finds it impossible to avoid interventions even in open research interviews. What then about narrative interviews in social work, where the interviewee supposedly from the very start has certain expectations of professional intervention?

In social work biographies are usually produced orally but written biographies are also used. Some clients may not be able to narrate long stories without engaging in a dialogue with the listener/social worker. Sometimes pictures and other objects may be used to facilitate a biographical interview. In the following we will look at some of the ways in which narratives, narrated biographies and a biographical approach are used in social work.

### **3.1. Narrative Therapy**

One of the best-known ways of using biographies and narratives as tools for change is probably the narrative therapy developed by White & Epston (1990). This is a type of psychotherapy in which the goal is to influence clients' ways of narrating about themselves and their life. If the client is caught in a destructive narrative, the goal is to release him/her from it and create another, more positive narrative. An essential tool is to externalize the problem, so that this can be controlled and worked on through language. Features of this narrative theory are probably used in social work, although maybe not always in a systematic way.

### **3.2. A Narrative Approach in Social Work Assessment**

Social work usually starts with an assessment as the basis for an intervention plan. If the assessment is seen as an intervention in itself, the choice of approach is not insignificant. Milner & O'Byrne (2002) present different possible approaches in doing assessments, one of which is the narrative one. Narratives are used not only to look at a client's past but they also provide good opportunities to look at the future. Stories can be told, but they can also be retold as alternative stories. The intention in narrative approaches is to address power issues by deconstructing dominant cultural stories which may be marginalising and oppressive. The intention is that service users themselves make meaning of their lives rather than are entered into stories by others. In a narrative assessment the social worker and the client together reflect on how the client came to be drawn into a „robblem-saturated story". This is done in a way that separates the problem from the person (externalising conversation). The problem is given a name of its own and the discussion is dealing with the person's relationship with the problem. The language, the choice of questions, is important. (Milner & O'Byrne 2002: 153–154).

### **3.3. Narratives in Rehabilitation**

An introduction to the narrative approach in rehabilitation was given in the module by Björkenheim, Karvinen-Niinikoski. Narratives may have several different roles in rehabilitation. Rehabilitees listen to, live and imagine narratives in order to build a new picture of the past, the present and the future. The narrative a rehabilitee tells the rehabilitation worker is an important tool for mutual understanding. At work places and other organisations collective stories can either further or prevent the goals of rehabilitation. Finally, stories are also present in rehabilitation institutions and among different professions in building up sometimes competing, model stories for the justification, the realization and the goals of the rehabilitation. (Valkonen 2004: 175).

A social worker working from a narrative perspective encourages clients to look at their life as if it were a story that can be looked at from different perspectives and the interpretation of which can be changed. A life change causes a break in the life story. Rehabilitation then means consolidating a life story structuring life. This may happen either by the life change being integrated into the previous life story, or by creating a completely new story that makes possible a new interpretation of life. The rehabilitation should support building a story in which the rehabilitee can have a positive idea of himself/herself and his/her life. Model stories of rehabilitation may be a resource to rehabilitees, but

they can also restrict and prevent rehabilitees from carrying out necessary changes in their life. Model stories in rehabilitation may restrict professionals, too, so that they have preconceived views of what is the “right” type of rehabilitation. (Valkonen 2004: 176–184). Even if a narrative approach can often be useful, Valkonen (2004) warns against expecting too much from it, e.g. quick and easy solutions to complex questions. There are no short cuts to effective rehabilitation. The important thing is that the story is created in a dialogue between the rehabilitee and the rehabilitation worker about what has happened, what is the present situation and where to go in the future. (Valkonen 2004: 188–189). Often it is a question of attitude and general approach, where the rehabilitation worker is sensitive to and open for biographical reflections.

### **3.4. Biographies in Child Protection**

Biographical tools may be used in child protective work to help children tell their life stories and find alternative stories for their future. The biographical skills of personnel working in child welfare institutions were enhanced in a project where the personnel were taught artistic ways to express their own life stories. The idea behind the project was that if a child stays out of touch with his/her own experiences and feelings, the risk for exclusion grows. Adults can help children see their experiences, if they themselves are prepared to meet their own history on an emotional level. The information a life story can give has most value to the narrator him/herself. A child may live in a situation where the story adults tell is very different from his/her own experiences. Developing the child’s skills to express his/herself and tell his/her life story to others can be vital in managing life. (Bardy & Känkänen 2005).

In adoption counselling a biographical approach is often used, when assessing the fitness of persons who want to adopt a child. A couple may be asked to tell about their childhood, their life as a couple, etc. Their capacity to reflect on their own life, considered important when adopting a child, gets assessed, too, in the counselling process. (Eriksson 2006).

### **3.5. Narratives in the Care of Alcohol and Drug Abusers**

In the care of alcohol and drug abusers narratives are used when discussing the history of the abuse and the role of drugs in a client’s life. (See Mikko’s case in this module).

### **3.6. Biographies in Working With the Chronically Ill and the Handicapped**

Falling ill with a chronic disease and/or getting a handicap may mean big changes in daily life. However, the changes are not always stable conditions to which one adapts once and for all. The illness often has a course, which may include a risk for increasing functional difficulties. The dynamic and changing aspects of a chronic disease become more visible if they are studied from a long-range life-span perspective. (Jeppson Grassman 2001).

### **3.7. Biographies in Working with the Bereaved**

Walter (1996) has introduced a model of grief using biography, which may be useful to social workers working with bereaved persons. He challenges the model of seeing grief mainly as a working through of emotion, where the eventual goal is to move on and live without the deceased. Instead he points to the fact that survivors usually want to talk about the deceased with others who knew him/her, and that this is done with the purpose of constructing a story that places the dead person within the lives of the survivors and integrates the memory of the dead person into their lives. In Walter's model talk, in particular meaning conversations with other persons who knew the dead, is seen as more important than feeling. Counselling with professionals is important particularly in cases where the bereaved has no one to share his/her memories with.

### **3.8. Biographies in Working with the Elderly**

Molander (1999) found that old people facing death can be helped by having someone listening to their life stories and reinforcing the positive aspects of the stories. Studies on reminiscence work in groups of elderly persons showed that the reminiscence work served more as a tool to confirm the value and meaning of the elder persons' life than as a means to regulate their mood (Saarenheimo 1997).

### **3.9. Narrative Peer Support**

Narratives have long been commonly used in peer groups, both in self-help groups and in groups led by professionals. Sharing stories with persons with the same type of handicap, disease, and life situation can help people to see new

perspectives and to find alternative narratives as well as to receive and give support. (Valkonen 2004: 185). Social workers often conduct peer groups especially in medical settings and in rehabilitation.

## **EXERCISE 2**

In what ways have you yourself possibly been using biographies and/or a biographical approach in your work? In what other ways can you envisage using the approach in your own work?

### **3.10. Documentation**

A difficult question for social workers is often how to document biographical interviews. The views on documentation in social work have changed over the years. Historically there are two main streams: the legal-administrative tradition and the psychosocial case-work tradition. The former emphasizes documentation as a means of controlling that interventions are legal and correct. In the psychosocial case-work tradition, process recording of client interviews has long been seen as essential for supervisory and pedagogical purposes. However, in the 1970s this type of documenting was criticised. It was not seen as encouraging an analytical view on the work, and there was a call for more structured documenting in line with seeing social work intervention as mainly a problemsolving process. This also had to do with the requirements of accountability. Newer models for process recording aim at including more reflection. The impact of clients' rights, computer technique and confidentiality on documentation has also been discussed. When developing documentation practices we first have to define the purpose and then consider what kind of documentation best serves this purpose. But the considerations are also influenced by general views on social work. In developing documentation of today we need to think about how the discussions on e.g. reflective professionalism, self-evaluation, evaluation research, and legal and other rights of the clients, affect documentation. (Karvinen-Niinikoski, Tapola 2002; Tapola 2003). This discussion also pertains to documenting life stories and the biographical information clients give us.

In a constructivist perspective language plays an important role in defining and constructing persons (White & Epston 1990; see Milner & O'Byrne 2002: 183), and so what is written down in a person's case file is far from insignificant.

Milner & O'Byrne (2002), who to a high degree rely on White's and Epston's narrative theory, suggest that after an initial assessment the client be

given written narrative feedback. The feedback can be written as a letter, which comments on the interviewee's stories. Letters, however, are usually not suitable for agency records. Milner & O'Byrne propose a format of recording that can be used both as feedback to clients and for agency records. It has the titles "Problem", "Unique outcomes", "Thoughts on solutions", "Homework" and "Afterthoughts". The notes are written in a language understandable to the client using his/her own words and metaphors. In the last section the social worker writes down ideas that may be helpful in the following session. (Milner & O'Byrne 2002: 162–165).

Experiences of co-authoring narratives, i.e. collaborative representation, for medical records have been described by Mann (2001). She started out by asking clients, if there was anything in particular they wanted her to record on their behalf. Later she invited them to join her in forming the words and telling the story. She would sit next to the person and ask them where they wanted to begin or what they would like the medical team to know so that the team could be more helpful. In doing so Mann noticed that new conversations developed. The significance of co-authoring for the clients was shown by the fact that some of them wanted to sign the record at the end. The question of confidentiality, of course, is the same here as in other types of recording. In Mann's mind collaborative reporting is a practice of respect. (Mann 2001).

### **EXERCISE 3**

Reflect on documenting your own work considering the views presented above. For instance, would you be able to give written feedback to your client or use collaborative representation in your work?

#### **3.11. Ethical Considerations**

Nousiainen (2005) points out that biographies should not be used without reason. Social workers need to consider what a biography may or may not add to the work and before conducting a biographical interview ask themselves: How is it produced? How will it be analysed? For what purpose will the story be used? What kind of knowledge can be gained from the biography? And, of course, a biography should be produced only with the consent of the client. (Nousiainen 2005).

Social workers may feel they do not have the competence to deal with difficult events in the client's past and are therefore hesitant to do biographical counselling. In social work there are, however, other ways of dealing with

clients' biographies than psychotherapy per se. Clients should be told in advance what kind of help they may or may not expect to receive from the social worker.

Social work clients should be allowed to participate as much as possible in all interpretation and analysis of their life stories; the value of biographies lies in the meaning they have for the persons themselves. Milner & O'Byrne (2002: 155) mention Payne's (2000) notion that externalisation adds to an ethical way of working, since it makes the process transparent as the service user can hear what the social worker is saying.

The more professionals know about a client's life the greater the demand for confidentiality. This pertains especially to documentation, which gives the social worker great power to define the client. Who actually owns the story of the client is a question, which could well be more often discussed with the client.

Kyllönen (2004) discusses how social workers' biographical constructions of their clients may affect the social welfare interventions. She points to the power of social workers in a workfare policy framework to produce "normal" biographies rejecting alternative biographical destinies. Welfare programmes and professional practices in this case serve as strategies of normalisation. (Kyllönen 2004: 247–248). The social workers in Kyllönen's study obviously had not conducted systematic extensive biographical interviews with their clients. However, the question remains as to what extent the general policy and regulations of a social welfare office allows for supporting biographies that differ from the "normal" ones.

Milner & O'Byrne (2002) seem to think that the narrative approach can be used with clients with any kind of problem as well as with clients with for instance, limited intellectual capacity or a major mental illness. As a possible disadvantage they mention the fact that a narrative assessment can be more intrusive than a more structured approach, because it takes longer to conduct. Also using clients' own language may collude with male metaphors of control. (Milner & O'Byrne 2002: 166–168).

#### **EXERCISE 4**

What ethical dilemmas can you find in your own work using biographies and a biographical approach?

## 4. Social Work Case Analysis: the Case of Mikko

A social work student (Levälahti 2005) conducted a study for her Master's thesis, in which she interviewed eleven former alcoholics about their recovery process. Her generating question for the interviews was: "Could you, please, tell me about your life? You can start anywhere you want." The analysis of the interviews focused on the role the social network played in the recovery process. A categorical-content approach was chosen (see the model for the classification of types of narrative analysis developed by Lieblich et al 1998; figure 1 in this module). In the life stories three phases were distinguished: the addiction, the turning point and the recovery process. The social networks of the interviewees were categorised as being informal, formal or due to cohesion, and the support they received as emotional, instrumental, informational, or existential. The support could be either positive or negative. In addition to these interviews, the social work student later conducted a focus group interview with social workers discussing the use of biographies.

In this chapter the student presents and discusses an interview with a former alcoholic (Mikko) as an example of individual biographical work in a recovery process. She also presents a part of the focus group interview which dealt with Mikko's case. The case provided material for a discussion about how biographies can be used as a tool in social work. In writing about the interviewees' experiences and the focus group discussion the student is creating her own narrative.

### 4.1. Biographical Work in Mikko's Change Process

Mikko had been an alcohol addict for almost 40 years, and his problem had been quite severe for about 10–20 years. The problem got worse and became more visible in the course of time. Most of the time of addiction Mikko lived with his family and they experienced difficulties caused by his drinking. Mikko experienced negative impact from his informal network, as lack of relations. When Mikko's wife suddenly died, he had to take care of their youngest child. That meant a kind of support for Mikko, even if the task was not easy to handle:

*"The youngest child was then 14 years and I felt like a tower block of responsibility and problems fell upon me ... If the youngest child had not stayed at home, I had probably let everything go, not bothered about anything..." (M/389).*

Granfield's & Cloud's (201: 1554–1566) study indicates that responsibility towards others can be a resource in the recovery process. In a while Mikko

found a new partner and they moved in together. Mikko's drinking continued and his family had him choose between them or the spirits. Mikko chose to continue drinking. However, Mikko's informal network provided instrumental and informational support by taking him to the hospital and making appointments with a psychologist. They also informed him about a Minnesota-treatment.

During his addiction Mikko seemed to do little biographical work. Life events that shaped his life happened, but he did not reflect upon them. One of the first times biographical work appeared in Mikko's story was when he attended an Alcoholic Anonymous meeting. There he listened to the stories of others and also reflected upon his own life, even if the context felt somewhat strange to him. In AA he experienced acceptance, even though he knew that he had spoiled a lot of things in his life because of the drinking. No one condemned him for being an alcoholic and accepting treatment became an emotional support.

*"... it felt good, already then I liked to be there, no one condemned me for being an alcoholic, I thought that no one would have denied me to go to Alko<sup>1</sup> afterwards..." (M/404).*

Mikko also had contacts with the health care system during addiction. According to Mikko professionals were unwilling to talk about the addiction. Either they did not have enough knowledge or understanding about alcohol matters or they did not allow him to express his worries about his drinking, which meant negative impact on him. One professional however, encouraged his plans for the future, and professionals could provide instrumental support through care and medication. For Mikko it was, however, a problem that he got too much habit-forming medication.

The turning point came when Mikko tried to commit suicide, but failed. Mikko's grownup child brought him to the hospital and the turning point arose when his family came to see him in the hospital. He realised that the family was more important than the drinking.

Mikko's turning point was strongly connected to his informal network. The formal network took care of Mikko in the hospital and provided him with instrumental and informational support, but he did not mention them in the interview as being part of his turning point. After trying to commit suicide, Mikko lay unconscious in the hospital. When he woke up he noticed that he was surrounded by his family, and he realized that he had to quit drinking, if he wanted to hold on to his family.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Alko is a trading chain, specializing in alcohol beverages, owned by the Finnish State, and administered and supervised by the Ministry for Social Affairs and Health.

*"... I woke up and all I could see was the whole family there and, when I woke up before that, then I dropped off again, then I thought that I failed with this too, but then when I woke up the second time and saw the family, then actually I had thoughts about doing something about my drinking..." (M/403).*

For Mikko this meant a lot of emotional support, which was crucial for his recovery from addiction. Afterwards Mikko was able to reflect on the turning point and his time of drinking.

*"... I never thought about what I did to my children and my partner, what problems I could have caused them, I did not think about that at all, I only thought about myself..." (M/402).*

Although Mikko realized that he had to do something about his drinking he was not, at first, ready to seek institutional treatment. Luckily for Mikko his family had arranged treatment for him in a Minnesota programme, and they more or less forced him to go there, which meant both emotional and instrumental support.

During the turning point Mikko seemed to do more conscious biographical work. He reflected upon the price he had paid for drinking. He had once deliberately chosen spirits prior to his family. In a biographical perspective one can assume that this had happened indirectly several times while he was living with his family. Drinking had often gone prior to other areas of responsibility.

The month in the Minnesota treatment was intense. Mikko realized that the other patients were ordinary people like him, and they became part of Mikko's recovery. Mikko described the change process as follows:

*"I thought that I cannot stop drinking, and I do not even want to quit, but it was strange, when you listened, you were not allowed to do anything there ... everything circled around thinking about yourself ... and when you had nothing else to do, were in therapy from morning until evening, and discussed and listened to others discussions, and little by little, it became understandable, for me too..." (M/409–410).*

Mikko's change process included therapy, own reflections and listening to and discussing with others. All factors in the process contributed to the biographical work Mikko was doing during the treatment. During treatment patients were not allowed to do any unnecessary work, which meant that there was a lot of time and space to reflect on the lived life and on future possibilities.

In treatment Mikko also had to face what he had done to his partner and children. He was confronted with the family and their experiences of his drinking.

*"... I thought that my children could not say anything about me, but, they told me all I had done to them, and I am glad that they did, because, everything*

*was true, it was not something they lied about, but I had not thought of it that way” (M/411).*

To learn about his family’s experiences during his years as an addict gave Mikko a broader perspective on life, and also made it possible for the family members to start all over again. Although this was a tough experience, sorting things out provided good emotional support.

According to Mikko, his family confirmed the biographical work he was doing during the treatment, now they treat him with more respect and more confidence. The family accepts his new identity as a former addict, and also confirms his new way of telling his life story, as a story where he has succeeded in overcoming addiction. During the treatment both Mikko and his family got informational support from the treatment setting. There alcoholism was regarded as a disease, and this helped them to explain the past and create a new story.

Back in everyday life Mikko was at first uncertain of how his old friends would react. He still avoids his drinking friends, but does tell other people his life story if asked. Mikko has started to attend AA meetings and thereby he has got something to do and also new friends, i.e. both instrumental and emotional support. He also feels good when he sees that he can help others, by telling them his own story.

An important part of Mikko’s change process including the biographical work was a social network due to cohesion. Once a week, during the first year after treatment, Mikko and his partner met with others who had undergone the same treatment.

*“... and it was good, I willingly went there, and it was, you looked forward to it, to meet all the friends... it was a good step, to cope with, to be able to succeed and be strong in these trains of thought, and so, you do not want, my sobriety has lasted for two years and I do not always think about spirits any more.. of course you take one day at a time, but I do not have that craving...” (M/414–415).*

Vilma Hänninen’s (Hänninen & Koski-Jännes 2002: 19–23) concept of “the inner narrative”, which means the subjective experience and interpretation of life, includes three levels. The “original” narrative works as a matter of routine, while the “reflective” narrative is needed when the original narrative does not work. The third kind of narrative is “metareflective”, which means working with the inner narrative as if it was apart from reality. All kinds of inner narratives are influenced by the surrounding cultural narrative, and have an impact on the behaviour of the individual. It seems that a change process from alcohol addiction to sobriety includes more or less “reflective” and “meta-reflective” inner narratives. If the individual does not reflect on his or her own biographical

experience or inner narrative, and the “original” inner narrative dominates, change will probably not occur.

In Mikko’s life experience the consequences of his drinking accumulated until finally, at the turning point, he was prepared to begin to do some biographical work. However, it is important to notice that, without the support of his social network Mikko’s biographical work may have remained undone. Life experiences, social networks, inner processes and also existential questions cooperate in a complex way in the change process from alcohol addiction to sobriety.

#### **4.2. Social Workers’ Views on the use of Biographies**

In a focus group interview in August 2005, three social workers who met alcohol addicts in their daily work were questioned about life stories as a perspective in social work. Two of the professionals worked in social services, while the third one worked in an open care setting for addicts. All social workers had mostly adult clients. One of the topics discussed in the focus group was: Life stories in social work and the case of Mikko.

The social workers pointed out that each one of them worked on the basis of their main tasks. Depending on their main task, and the client’s need, they start to explore the actual case. The social workers do not encourage their clients to tell about their whole life but do want to get an overall picture of the client’s situation.

***Social worker #2#:** “Of course you have to map out the situation, how it is, and you ask a lot of questions and get a, at least I like to have some background information ... to know something about the client, although it is only about getting financial support ... but people are different, some tell you their story, also new clients, they tell you everything”.*

During his talk one social worker notices that despite the fact that he has not thought biographically, the clients’ life history became present in investigating different kinds of accommodations in the clients’ life.

***Social worker #1#:** “I have not gone so far (to the childhood / JL) ... when I worked with homeless people I was most interested in their accommodation history, where they have lived, types of accommodations they have experienced, and by that there came some history, or I tried to form an opinion about in which kind of accommodation they would manage to stay, and to take care of themselves, not too big challenges ... by that they told about where they geographically had lived and when and where they worked and so on...”.*

The third social worker, who worked in open care with addicts, was more aware of her bringing life stories into her daily work. In meeting with new clients she had a period, four or five sessions, when she explored the situation. During this period the social worker made an alcohol case history.

**Social worker #3#:** *“Our starting point is the addiction problem and we make this alcohol anamnesis, back in time and in relation to that ... we go through this, how the problem started and developed during the years ... and in this the individual’s life story will be present ... and if the person continues in therapy, we will go back to and build on the story, it is an important instrument in my daily work”.*

The social workers do think that biographical work is an important part of a changing process, but all clients do not want to change or do not think that they need a life change. They just want financial help or immediate help with their current problem. One social worker expressed that biographical work often is not done at all, if there is not an ongoing change process. In a rehabilitation situation the most important task is to be able to activate the client and the central precondition for this is to get the client to do biographical work. The past also determines which future possibilities the client has, and an understanding of the client’s life may help the social worker to give more adequate advice.

One social worker also thought that there are at least two groups of addictive clients. Some young addicts may not have a sober life story at all, because they started their addictive life style so young. In that case the social worker finds it hard to work biographically. The addicts are rootless and there have been few or no resources in the past. The life story perspective is easier to accomplish with addicts who have lived a sober life before they started their addict life style. In these cases the social worker finds it easier to go back and point out resources in re-creating a sober life style. Although the point of view is understandable, it might be questioned, whether biographical work might be even more needed and fruitful with clients who have no sober life story. To create a life story with rootless clients may help them to get a base on which to build their future. Although most of their life consists of addiction, having come to a care setting indicates that they do want some kind of change. Finding one’s own biography may also include going back to previous generations, identity work, future dreams and expectations of life.

In the discussion the social workers pointed out that change is a process that takes time and has to be allowed to do so. Since social workers’ instrumental support can be an important means of supporting a client, they should be allowed to concentrate on the change process.

During the focus group interview the social workers were asked to comment on Mikko’s case. They found it hard, because the description of the case was

brief. The social workers were familiar with the kind of life story that Mikko told, and commented that stories seldom have the happy end that Mikko's story had.

One worker said that it is hard to do anything about a client's drinking before the client is ready to change. The consequences of the addiction have to be visible to the client, and the client has to experience no more positive effects of drinking. The client's personal motivation was seen as decisive; if the client had no motivation for change, no kind of support was of any use.

The case also resulted in a discussion about Alcoholics Anonymous and the need for different kinds of treatment settings. Clients have different needs and use for different treatments. What works for one may not work for another. One social worker also pointed out that the same client might need different kinds of support and that professional and mutual support can be supplementary. Mutual support groups can also offer friendship and alternatives to drinking.

One social worker commented that although there are common patterns for most addicts, there is always also a personal touch to the problem that comes from the life story. The starting point has to be the client's situation, and that is one factor that increases her interest in her daily work.

*Social worker #3#:* "but I think that there are those small stairs ... the background, all that happened influences the process ... behind the process there is a course of events that leads to a lasting change".

In the focus group interview with the social workers one interesting observation was that although they all saw life biography and life history as an important part of the change process, there were few comments on the life events and their impact on the process in Mikko's life. Social workers seem to concentrate their work on their main practical tasks, and if biographies happen to be part of that work, social workers welcome the biographical approach, but they do not seem to work deliberately with "biographical glasses" on.

## 5. Conclusions

In this module we have tried to show that biographies, narratives, and a biographical approach can be useful and appropriate tools in social work. However, they should be used with discretion and awareness of their limitations.

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## **The Case of Matti – the Significance of Work as Experienced by a Rehabilitee during His Vocational Rehabilitation Process**

### **SHORT DESCRIPTION**

The text is the description of the case of a 50 year old Finnish carpenter who as a result of an illness lost the ability to continue the profession of a vocation teacher. The authoress analyses the experience of limited employment possibility in various phases of the biographic process and reflects on the importance of work and social network in the client's life.

### **1. Matti's Story**

Matti is a 50 year-old carpenter who careerwise had advanced to become a teacher in woodwork and the supervisor of the school's woodwork class. He had been doing this for nearly 20 years and enjoyed it. Matti went to primary school and then chose carpentry in vocational school, as he was clever with his hands. After having done his national military service he was employed in a carpenter's shop and in customer service at a timber yard. The work was pleasant, but when he saw a temporary post as a woodwork instructor advertised in the paper, he applied for the job and was chosen. He considered himself to be suitable to work with children and thought he could make use of his vocational training in this task. So after 10 years in carpentry Matti went into teaching. After some years his position became permanent. Besides helping the teacher, he particularly supervised the safety of the pupils working the machines and the different solvents used in class. He also ordered supplies, maintained the machines and helped the pupils in different stages of their work in collaboration with their teacher. Later on he worked as a teacher, although he had no formal

teaching qualifications. At the time employers had difficulties finding versatile people, and, furthermore, Matti got along well with the children and youngsters and was a popular colleague amongst the teachers. His own children had started their studies and were on their way to becoming independent. Matti's relationship with his wife, who also went to work, was good. Life went smoothly and financially he could take care of his family and fulfill his wishes.

Suddenly one day at work Matti was taken away to have acute blood vessel surgery in the brain, where several weak spots were repaired at once. When he returned to work after two months of sick leave and the summer holidays, he noticed that he could no longer cope with his work: his sense of smell was gone. Earlier he had noticed that his taste was gone. Furthermore, his ears began to ring. In class, the sense of smell was essential because of the glues and thinners and the risk of fire. The headmaster stated that Matti could not continue his work and directed him to occupational health care, where he was declared incapable of doing his work. Simultaneously assessments were made at several units of specialized health care after Matti had been in contact with the hospital where surgery was performed. These units also stated that Matti was no longer capable of doing his work.

Occupational health care directed him to his own employer's unit for work transfers. There they aspired to arrange a job trial within their own organization and at the same time possibilities were sought to find Matti a permanent work place within the employer's other branches. Several trial positions were suggested and Matti tried a couple of them, only to quit after a few days referring to his experience that all the noise, the nailing, the sound from the tools and driving the tractors was more than he could manage and was severely damaging to his hearing. He declared that he did not want to become deaf.

Matti applied for sickness allowance from Kela (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland), which was granted for the same period that his salary was paid. He could not apply for a pension, because there were still two unused months of sickness allowance. When Matti had been on sick leave for two years, he applied for a pension, but the application was rejected. There are several pending complaints concerning both the rejection of the sickness allowance and the pension. The pension institution told him to register as an unemployed jobseeker, which was not possible because he already had a job.

The unit for work transfers started to look for a job for Matti and also encouraged him to be active himself. Matti stayed at home, waiting to be contacted, convinced that no suitable new job was to be found anyway. Among the positions he was offered there was work as a caretaker at a home for the elderly, requiring many different tasks, the work as a carpenter in a museum and gardening work. Since none of these worked out, the idea of a job trial was

suggested and he was offered rehabilitation allowance for half a year by the pension institution in collaboration with the unit for work replacements and occupational health care. The situation was assessed monthly and the decision was made for a month at a time. Matti has had severe problems with his subsistence due to the fact that at times there has been no income at all and even now (at the time of the interview) the half year of rehabilitation allowance is coming towards its end and there is no agreement on an extension. Matti has not been placed in a job of work.

Matti has remarried. One month after Matti's surgery his wife became seriously ill, was hospitalized and placed in rehabilitation for a long time. After almost a year's sick leave she returned to work, part-time. From his first marriage Matti has a grown-up son who still needs his father's financial support. From the current marriage there are two young adults who still live at home, and, in addition, the girlfriend of the boy has permanently moved in with the family. The daughter interrupted her studies, when her father got ill, and she went on sick leave. The vocational school the son was attending did not accept him as a student for the following year because of too much absence during the school year. The family lives in a big rented apartment. The children sleep into the afternoon and during the nights they watch videos and the music blares loudly. Earlier on, Matti's children had inherited quite a large sum of money from a relative. Matti resorted to borrowing money from his children. The income of his wife was halved due to her transfer to part time work. Matti is talkative and easily establishes contact. He describes his situation openly and in a multifaceted way. He is afraid that in the future things might not work out well. He is willing to work but states that he does not want to lose his hearing.

## **2. The Research Task**

The central aim of this study is to determine how a person with reduced employment capacity experiences the different stages of the rehabilitation process, and what significance his job and his social network have to him. The analysis concentrates particularly on the significance of work.

The use of the biographical method is derived from the Leonardo Project. The narrative, story-like approach makes the narrator's biographical story visible and hence makes it possible to better understand the individual and his/her actions. Written autobiographies or biographical interviews are a means of collecting information for research topics (Eskola & Suoranta 1998: 20–22). Qualitative approaches are especially suitable when investigating meanings given by the informants or when the informant might perceive the whole picture

differently from the researcher (Kilpeläinen 2000: 22). Roos (1988: 140) defines the biographical interview as a personal life story, experienced, lived and interpreted by the individual and then narrated to another person. Interviews can take the form of structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and intensive interviews. In my interview, I asked my interviewee to speak especially about his work and his experience of vocational rehabilitation, and the interview was mainly intensive with freely progressing discussion.

### **3. Carrying out the Interview**

I am very familiar with the field of vocational rehabilitation, as I have 25 years of experience working as a social worker with neurological patients, whose main reasons for seeking counseling are related to rehabilitation matters. The interview situation is a dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee, in which both parties represent their own context (Sintonen 1999: 85). The appearing of the narrator's own meanings, expressed in his/her story, might be hindered by the questions of the interviewer (Kokkonen 2003: 44). In my work as a social worker my client contacts have resembled mostly semi-structured interviews, where the client opens the discussion with the topic he/she prefers. However, the restricted amount of time available at the counseling sessions sets its own constraints on the dialogue. I now strived to give Matti the chance to tell his story freely without being interrupted. Only at the end of the interview had I planned on specifying some things, such as work history and family matters.

Two years earlier Matti had been referred to me by a neurologist to sort out his situation as his pension application had been rejected and complaints had been made with the help of a lawyer. That is when I first told him about the Leonardo Project and asked him about his possible interest in being part of the study as soon as I got my official research permit. When I got the permit, I phoned Matti to tell him more about the purpose of the study and expressed my wish that he would participate in it. Matti consented to tell me about his experiences and we set a date for the interview right away. The interview was done in Matti's home on his request. I thought that in this way we would avoid a hospital-like, official situation and also diminish the social worker position. I also thought the home setting would make the interview more natural and less of a stressful situation than at the office of an expert of the official service system. At the beginning of the interview I told him that taking part in the study was voluntary and that he could still refuse. I also told him that the data would be generalized to protect his privacy. I once again repeated that I was interested in his experience of the vocational rehabilitation process. Furthermore, I gave

him the opportunity to ask some specific questions before starting the interview. At first the recorder made Matti a bit nervous, but after some initial stiffness it did not bother him anymore. The recorded interview lasted 65 minutes and when I transcribed the interview there were 17 pages of text.

As mentioned before, I wanted to give Matti the space to tell his story without interruptions (“just tell me your story”). I had also prepared a loose semi-structured interview framework to be used if needed. My intention was to specify issues in certain life areas towards the end of the interview if they had not come up in the narrative. These themes were related to work, to the actions of occupational health care, of the management and of other health care professionals, to family, housing, subsistence, and to decisions related to the insurance system. Hence, my interview consisted of two parts, one where the interviewee spoke freely and without interruption and, if needed, a second part consisting of a semi-structured interview. The introduction to the interview, telling about the study, was the preparation part in which I led Matti to an understanding of the aim of the interview (see Roos 1988: 144). If the opening question is well formulated, it generates a narrative, which is not to be interrupted by supplementary value-bound and leading questions (Saastamoinen 1999: 178). I also used case record data that I had documented during our earlier meeting as well as my notes from the interview appointment. These included comments on atmosphere, smoothness in narrating, longer pauses, signs of anxiety, annoyance and laughter, all this to help better understand the whole situation. I also documented the immediate questions that came to my mind.

## **4. Analysis of the Data**

### **4.1. Narratives as a Research Subject**

When analyzing the interview material I have used narrative analysis. According to narrative analysis, the human being uses narratives to help structure life and construct meaning and order out of different life situations. People construct their knowledge and identity through narratives, which then, for their part, are reconstructed and changed over time (Heikkinen 2001: 119). Narrative analysis enables investigation of identity, life course and different transitions. Nevertheless, narratives are influenced by the cultural and social world of the narrator, the narration situation, or the mood of the narrator (e.g. Polkinghorne 1995: 16; Denzin 1997: 248). With reference to the aforementioned, the data can be analyzed concerning, for example, contents,

structure, attitudes, motives and beliefs or style of speaking (Lieblich et al 1998, 5–9; see also Johansson 2005: 284–285).

The data of biographical interviews may be approached in four different ways: through holistic-content, categorical-content, holistic-form or categorical-form analysis (see figure 1 in the module by Björkenheim, Levälähti, Karvinen-Niinikoski). The holistic approach studies the whole; the research often then concentrates on a certain person and his/her situation. In categorizing the subject of the research is a certain problem which is taken out of the whole entity. Certain events, themes or words are picked out of the narration. Content analysis examines the content of the material (what has happened or why), whereas form analysis helps investigate the storyline, metaphors and words (Lieblich et al 1998; see Johansson 2005: 288).

It is possible to combine different analysis approaches, and in this study I have used the holistic-form analysis and the categorical-content analysis, since the aim of the study was to examine narratives about the whole vocational rehabilitation process of persons with reduced employment capacity, the importance given to work, and the significance of social support and rehabilitation. There are no detailed rules as to how one should carry out the analysis process in content analysis. Each researcher develops his/her own system of categories to best serve the analysis of their specific material. The aim of the analysis is to achieve a systematic, extensive and condensed description of the examined phenomenon. The outcome of the analysis consists of categories, concepts, concept systems or models, all descriptive of the examined phenomenon (Kyngäs & Vanhanen 1999). According to Eskola and Suoranta (1988), content analysis is appropriate when you want to use different ways of classifying, categorizing and describing the examined phenomenon in a creative way.

The analysis of my interviews springs from the material. I read through the transcribed text as a whole. As I read I broke it down and documented statements made in the text. As a mind map for myself I made sketches of the life situation, which I then specified as the process went on and made into “narration maps” to facilitate the analysis. I made them into a core story in which I present Matti (see section 1), furthermore, I tried to situate him into a model story (see Hänninen 1999).

#### **4.2. The Construction of Core Narratives, and the Model Story**

The core narrative is the framework of the life story within the material, simplified and cut down by the researcher (Bell 1988: 102). Simplifying means dropping descriptions and bypaths, thus leaving gaps in the story (Bell 1988: 109). The core narratives unfold what is significant and real to the narrator

himself/herself (May 2001: 40). According to May (2001), a life story has to be treated as a unit of its own, and analysis should occur on the basis of the meanings the individual gives to the life he/she narrates.

In this study I present Matti, who has told me his story, and the storyline of his life, which I, as a researcher, have created by simplifying his life story, using the core narrative (see Matti's story, section 1). I use the concept of narration maps to enhance my understanding as I search the narrative for plots to be placed in different life areas. Through the use of narration maps I understood that Matti's life consisted of many different circumstances and elements, and that they affected the course of his life in a rather individual way.

The cultural, thus societal, model story is based on the characteristic virtues and vices of each community. The model story consists of episodes made into an entire storyline, which includes a moral dimension that maintains the values and traditions of the community (see e.g. Bruner 1990, Polkinghorne 1988). Vilma Hänninen (1999) examines the cultural story reservoir, that is, the body of available stories, which gives the members of the community a collective framework through which they can understand different experiences and life events. Well-established stories not only guide persons undergoing life changes to structure their situation, they also direct other people's attitudes towards them. Persons who are undergoing change must get other people's understanding and social affirmation to their story (Hänninen & Valkonen 1998: 16). Matti's life was settled, he had an agreeable, esteemed job and he was able to take care of the needs of his family. In his story, he thus seemed to be ascending the storyline pattern of a middle-class established father and teacher. However, Matti's life situation changed when he fell ill, something that affected especially his work situation and his readiness to try other work tasks, but that also had a ripple effect on the family situation. Matti now leads a life of routines without being able to reflect on his experiences. He does not see the new reality that has emerged around him. Receiving any kind of help is difficult at the moment. According to Jokinen (2000: 132–133), clients of professional helping work may get stuck in stories that are destructive and incapacitating. Their perspective on the future disappears and it seems hopeless. Matti's story is now best described as a tragedy (see Hänninen 1999). Falling ill and losing his job endangered the continuance and significance of his life story. To Matti the situation meant a biographical break (Bury 1982), which leads to a void in the story (Hänninen & Valkonen 1998). This can nevertheless give birth to a new narrative challenge, reinterpreting the story that previously has directed his life.

## **5. The Significance of the Rehabilitation Process and of Work**

Work has always been a vital part of the Finnish life cycle and is expressed through achievement, self-employment and coping with work (Kortteinen 1992: 48). How one experiences one's own work history is significant. As I see it, a person's experiences in working life also determine the success of vocational rehabilitation. According to Julkunen et al (2004), work, being a manifest of middle-class life, is considered indispensable for a person and for his/her social position, whereas falling out of working life or being unemployed is defined as a personal disgrace. According to Kortteinen (1992: 47–48), men characteristically relate their life story as one big project in which work is essential.

The analysis of the data yielded several themes that were coloured by the insecurity brought on by the illness. The themes partly intertwined but the significance of work came through as central. The five themes that describe the rehabilitation process are: falling ill/being ill and bringing it up in conversation, the life situation (work, family, subsistence, housing, free time), job trials and looking for work, social support, and the actions of the service system.

I will now deal with the significance Matti's (lost) work has had for him and I will leave out other themes, particularly social support and the role of the system, even though a different approach by, for example, the occupational health care could have affected Matti's situation. The significance of work is here analyzed from the perspectives of content (curriculum, work community, and autonomy) and of instrumental value (securing a settled everyday life, and professional status).

### **5.1. Contentual Significances of Work**

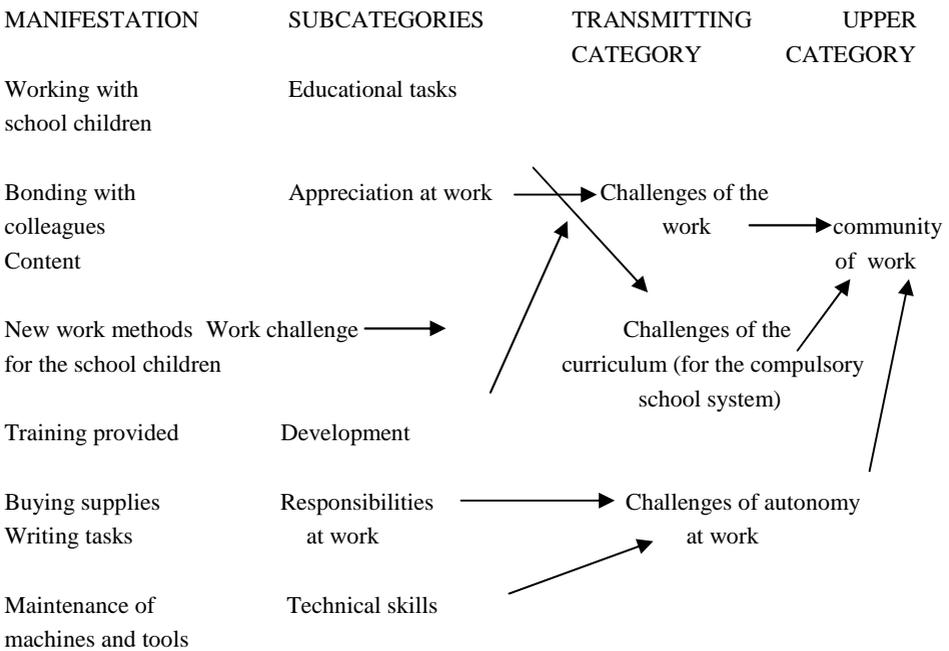
Work content has a great significance to a large part of the Finnish population even if people's values have been reconstructed; 84% find work content important (Pohjola 1996: 112). Individuals most commonly comment on how challenging, interesting, diverse or satisfying their work is. According to Rissa (1996: 115), people's well-being at work is made up of work content, skills, working conditions and leadership. The content of work, for one, consists of the basic skills, readiness, and competence that the employee has acquired. In addition, orientation, instruction, training and other development is needed at the work place. Workmanship includes the know-how of the work task itself, developing and enriching work, the possibilities to influence one's own work and the means of altering it.

### 5.1.1. Challenges of the Curriculum

Matti found the educational tasks important. He worked as a woodwork teacher for young people. There were about 15 students in the class. Matti was in charge of teaching manual skills; the children used tools such as machines, knives, saws and hammers. Matti made sure there were no accidents and the children learnt how to use the tools. In Matti’s opinion, teaching manual skills, and having the competence to guide the children in acquiring these skills, was the most important challenge of his work. At the same time he taught the children to work in a group and to take collective responsibility. Matti found that his job involved great responsibility. He also felt that it was rewarding and that he was successful at it.

*”You should see how happily they use these tools and how proud they are of what they achieve...”*

*I say, one has to pay attention, with so many at the same time in the class... Work tasks in pairs need to be even more closely watched, of course you need to intervene a little bit, so no damage is done...”*



**Figure 1.** The content of Matti’s work.

Matti sometimes found it a bit hard to carry out the curriculum, but he saw the link that it made to the rest of the teaching staff. Everybody looked at their work from the point of view of the curriculum. This was, in his experience, the official, even bureaucratic side to his work.

*"It's as if we pull together as a team... So the children won't think that we work in different ways..."*

Between the teachers the central parts of the curriculum were pondered together throughout the year, and good as well as tricky cases were discussed.

### **5.1.2. Challenges of the Work Community**

Matti felt that his work was creative and that it required looking after his own know-how, development and coping. It was important to keep up-to-date in order to be able to pass on adequate know-how to the children.

*"Time changes and so do the children. What was appropriate yesterday is old-fashioned today... You have to get out, listen and watch... what people are doing elsewhere. Or how they do it... and what's in fashion, what children are interested in"*

In Matti's opinion, his employer provided the necessary training and was interested in how the employees wanted to develop their skills. Sometimes, however, Matti felt quite alone as the sole representative of his field; he was able to discuss occupational matters only when people of his field met for get-togethers or for training. Matti's colleagues were important to him and he felt appreciated by them. They supported and encouraged him particularly when he fell ill. That is why it felt odd when suddenly all this ended as it became clear that Matti could not continue teaching anymore. The headmaster had good management skills and he was fair to everyone, but he was not willing to discuss the problems of Matti's continuation at work. It was specifically the notice-board style in which this was brought up that hurt Matti's sense of justice. A sense of fair leadership comes when one's case is given a fair hearing and there is positive interaction. How decisions are communicated affects people's feelings and reactions (Kivimäki et al 2002: 44).

*"Of course I understood that I couldn't continue, but since you couldn't discuss it... Nobody asked how I was ... when I was in hospital several people visited"*

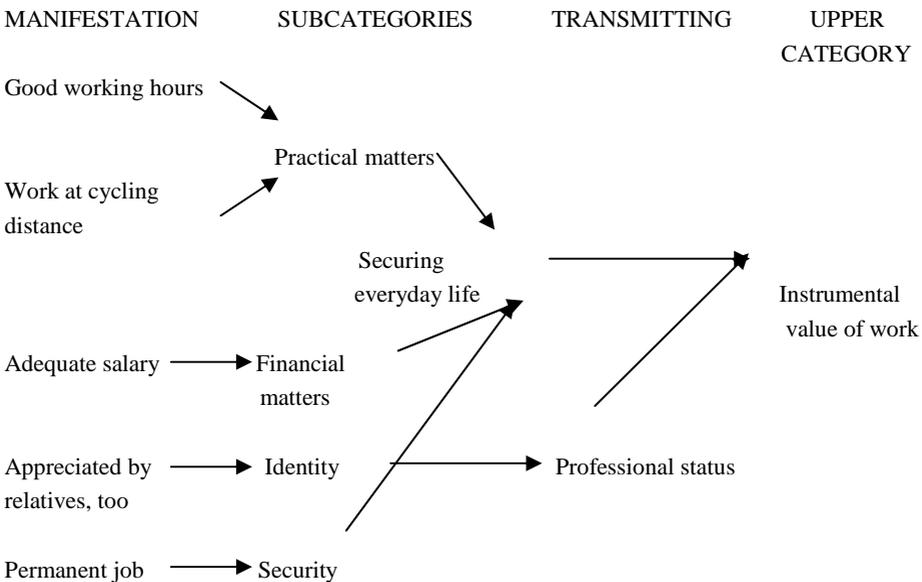
As his life was shaken he started worrying about financial matters and finding a new job. In this situation he had hoped for the support of his colleagues who he had been working with for 20 years.

### 5.1.3. Challenges of Autonomy at wWrk

Matti’s best area of technical know-how was working with the machines. Likewise, his responsibilities for ordering and purchasing supplies resembled his prior customer service tasks in a timber firm, a job that he had liked. These things were, in his experience, closely related to his vocational identity as a carpenter, whereas the challenges of being a teacher came from the work community and the children.

### 5.2. The Instrumental Value of Work

Work also has an instrumental value. The salary supports the worker and his/her family. He/she is also a consumer and thus has an influence on the household’s resources. The location of the work place and the time it takes to get there are also relevant, as is the status the job gives you.



**Figure 2.** The instrumental value of Matti’s work

### 5.2.1. Securing a Settled Everyday Life

As a practicality, Matti relates that it was nice to have a day job with somewhat varying working hours, this way there was time left to run his errands. He also appreciated being able to cycle to work, although as such it did not affect his view of his workplace. He emphasizes the security given by a permanent job. He says that it enabled long-term planning of life, and a regular salary to the bank account set the mind at rest. Matti did not regard necessary periodic planning of work tasks as a problem either, work and free time were nicely interlocked. Now, falling ill presents a problem: he has a job but no tasks. Salary payment has ceased and the financial insecurity is reflected in his activities.

*“I have to ask my children [for money]... I won’t go to the social services, I guess I wouldn’t get [anything] because of my wife’s income and since the children live at home... Our expenses would only be partial expenses of all costs”.*

Matti says that he does not dare to interfere with his children’s actions because of his financial dependence on them.

*“I mean they don’t take any responsibility, but I can’t do anything... Even his girlfriend just moved in – it wasn’t even discussed with us... They should at least go to work... Me and my wife we can’t cope...”.*

### 5.2.2. Professional Status

Matti has experienced being professionally appreciated and earlier he had described his life as typical middle-class. His present position is that of a school assistant, but he has been working as a teacher for years receiving corresponding salary, neither of which he would like to give up.

*“Just imagine, I am offered positions as a hearse driver and a supermarket trolley driver. That’s not my professional work, and the pay is at rock-bottom, the lowest caste – I couldn’t live on that! And then my hearing, ‘cause... I can’t stand the rattling of the wheels of the metal trolleys, it won’t work...”.*

## 6. Challenges for Rehabilitation Work

McIntyre (1987) emphasizes the use of narratives as a professional tool. It has been used in rehabilitation (Hänninen & Valkonen 1998) and in social work

(Jokinen 2000: 132–133). A central dimension of professional helping work is bringing forth a process of change. Meeting a client means assessing his/her life situation, charting the needs or problems, and at the same time looking for solutions and resources. If discussions can add hope for the future to the client's story, the past can be seen as a source of strength.

At several critical points of the system, Matti was treated in terms of the medical model. He was given the doctor's statements he asked for from the viewpoint of an expressed need. The task of occupational health care was to attend to vocational rehabilitation matters. The specialized health care wrote the required doctor's statements, while the rehabilitation measures were taken by occupational health care. However, Matti was not sent to vocational assessment and his own wishes were not discussed. Rather, efforts were made to replace him through his employer's unit for work transfers as if he were a client of the employment office instead of a person with reduced work capacity. Matti has been the victim of actions meant for his own good, but as Matti has not yet dealt with the future story of his life, he probably does not possess a readiness for the suggested solutions.

The teams in rehabilitation institutions usually include social workers. However, this is not the case in occupational health care, where questions of facilitating the tasks of persons with reduced work capacity and of transferring them to a more suitable job are usually dealt with in collaboration with the management of the company. Clients might not even be aware of being the object of rehabilitative measures. The problems of specialized health care are the restricted amount of time on hand and the short treatment periods. The clients return to occupational health care, which should help them to find possibilities of continuing their life story.

## **7. What if...**

When difficult events occur in life, one has to look at one's life from other angles. This emphasizes the significance of a narrative approach. Illness or losing one's job can cause a biographical break as one's life course takes a direction that was not intended (Hänninen 1999: 143). Jokinen (2000: 133) brings forth the regressive narrative, because it can give a client of professional helping work the chance of experiencing sympathy and understanding. Even working on your despair and dead ends might be made possible.

In the future Matti's story may continue in one of the following ways:

1) Matti is heard and undergoes a rehabilitation assessment through which new employment opportunities are opened for him.

2) Matti is heard by the occupational health care system, the possibility of a long-term change process opens up and even the ringing in his ears eases.

3) Matti is heard by the pension system and he can retire (honourably).

4) Matti's pension complaints are rejected, his own employer can't find him any suitable work, he is let go and becomes an unemployed jobseeker.

5) Matti is able to find himself employment, his self-respect increases as the salary starts coming in again, and he can stop borrowing money from his children and thus regain the role of father.

Matti's situation has been taken care of for some years by many different actors within the health care system, without anybody coordinating his situation. Work has been looked for in a way that resembles the procedures of the employment office, namely through looking into reassignments within his employer's work field, but such work has not been accepted by Matti for various reasons. The office-holders and the social security system have taken measures based upon their own points of view, whereas Matti's life situation has never been negotiated or discussed in true dialogue with Matti himself. As time has gone by, Matti has seemed to be adjusting to retirement, which is demonstrated by his complaints against the turning down of his pension claims. On the other hand Matti is offended by the fact that the funding decisions for vocational rehabilitation are made on a monthly basis, which in his experience means being pressured and supervised.

Matti wants to work but he does not feel suitable for, or capable of, the tasks that he has been offered. Furthermore, he feels that he has lost his identity as a worker as it is not possible to return to his former profession. Matti is also very offended by the lack of support from his colleagues, and especially the headmaster, when it became clear that he could not continue working. He finds his tinnitus to be extremely disabling and he feels that any situation which causes noise could result in him losing his hearing.

Matti's part in making decisions in family matters (as both husband and head of the family) has suffered due to lack of money. He is dependent upon his children and does not dare to discuss the rules of the home with them as he thinks they will stop lending him money. Matti should be able to discuss the children's future with them, for example by encouraging them to apply for jobs or young people's workshops. In addition, their rhythm (staying up in the night and sleeping in the day) is very tiring and strenuous for Matti and his wife. On the other hand, Matti puts up with the loud music that his children play at home in spite of his tinnitus.

To improve Matti's life situation, restore his self-respect and autonomy, make him trust his own resources and take hold of his own affairs, the goals for the social worker should be the following: a long-term dialogue in which Matti is listened to, processing of the alternatives concerning rehabilitation, action to try out the alternatives and coordination of the cooperation between everyone involved. In addition, discussing the situation at home should not be overlooked as society has many means of supporting the family in their efforts to solve the situation. In this manner it would be possible to achieve the positive alternatives 1, 2 and 5 in the list above.

In Matti's case the connection to working life has remained but he cannot return to his previous job or to similar work. Nowadays, the most commonly used services in these kinds of situations are rehabilitation examination or evaluation of rehabilitation need, looking for and organizing job trials and possibly vocational retraining. In Matti's case job trials were looked for with the intention of reassigning him to another post in his former employer's service. However, there was no talk of rehabilitation assessment in Matti's case. In a newer approach charting the situation by interviewing the client could start the rehabilitation process. The situation could be processed through the organizing of a job trial, support, and possibly a coach. Moreover, tutelage discussions during the process promote the care of the matter in a positive direction (see Kivekäs et al 2006: 2011–2014).

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## **Working With a Client in Vocational Rehabilitation. A Look at Professional Work and Biographical Processes**

### **SHORT DESCRIPTION**

This module deals with the different perspectives and experiences of those who seek institutional and professional assistance and those who provide such assistance.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To sensitise readers to the different perspectives and experiences of those who seek institutional and professional assistance and those who cope with the problems and questions which clients pose.
2. To develop a realization that professional work routines can sometimes create unnecessary trouble for both clients and professionals
3. To encourage the use of narrative analyses in professional practice in the field of vocational rehabilitation.

### **1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Life histories of persons who have run into different kinds of difficulties deriving from their (loss of) work, their material situation, their failing bodies

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<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Mrs. Brühl, a social worker and the protagonist of the following case study, for providing me with some helpful background information on institutional arrangements of vocational rehabilitation when a few questions arose during the textual analysis. This information, which I did not receive from her personally but via Peter Straus, the coordinator of the Leonardo project INVITE, will be included in footnotes 7, 18 and 26. The names of Mrs. Brühl and her client, Mr. Scholz, are not their real names. They have been chosen for reasons of confidentiality.

and their relationships with others can be shaped by powerful institutions of people processing and the work of professionals. If adult members of German society experience a failure of their bodies, have grave accidents or develop chronic illnesses which make it difficult for them to continue their work it sometimes happens that they apply for and enter a process of vocational rehabilitation. Many persons get into the picture, among them doctors, counsellors, teachers, social workers, psychologists, fellow participants of a program, and colleagues and superiors of the re-trainee. All of them have their story to tell about what is going on during this process.

The idea of this module is to sensitise readers to the different perspectives and experiences of those who seek institutional and professional assistance on the one hand and those professionals on the other hand who have to cope with the problems and questions which clients present to them as part of their professional work. Once in a while such problems can be rather complicated to deal with. Everett Hughes (1984: 316) once remarked that “one man’s routine of work is made up of the emergencies of other people”. But professional work does not just consist of routines and sticking to routines sometimes creates unnecessary trouble for clients and professionals alike.

One can learn about the specificities, requirements, practice wisdom, down-to-earth case analyses, problems and possible “blind spots” of social work in the field of vocational rehabilitation by listening to stories which social workers tell about the history which they share with clients. Such off-the-cuff-narratives are valuable data for getting familiar with the realities of social work as experienced by the workers themselves – quite different from programmatic statements (“our approach”) or official, polished websites, annual reports and other presentations of what “we” have to offer to “our” clients, patients, customers and what makes “us” special, etc. Even experienced professionals can profit from carefully looking at transcriptions of spontaneous narratives on practice experiences that seem quite familiar to them, especially if they participate in a discourse which is about “making their own or their colleagues’ practice strange” (Riemann 2005)<sup>2</sup>. One can also learn about a client’s biography, her or his work experience and experience of vocational rehabilitation by listening to her or his story. That’s what professionals do or should do and that’s what social scientists sometimes do (cf. in the module by Sundman, Björkenheim). One can learn a lot about what’s going on by putting all of this together. Social scientists talk about

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<sup>2</sup> The development workshop which is presented in module 0 can be described as a setting in which participants are encouraged and encourage each other “to make their own practice strange”. An important device in this regard is the joint analysis of autobiographical narrative interviews with clients who are in programs of vocational rehabilitation.

“triangulating” (Flick 2003) the perspectives of different people involved in such events.

One of the professionals who are in the picture is Mrs. Brühl, a social worker in a vocational retraining centre<sup>3</sup> in a city in East Germany. This institution provides assistance for adults who undergo a process of vocational rehabilitation after having qualified for such a procedure; i.e., they have successfully applied for this measure at the respective agency of statutory pension insurance: A decision is reached that it is not possible for them to work anymore in their present occupations because of specific health problems and they are entitled to retraining in another occupation.

Mrs. Brühl, the protagonist of the following events, told about the history which she shared with a client in a narrative interview which a member of our project, Fritz Schütze, conducted with her in the beginning of 2005. He asked her to narrate how the relationship between her and this client developed and to focus on the case work which she had done. Mrs. Brühl knew that the interviewer was interested in a certain client, Mr. Scholz, who had been interviewed by another member of the project, Peter Straus, somewhat over a year before the interview with her (in the middle of December of 2003). The focus of Peter Straus’s narrative interview with Mr. Scholz (who was in his early thirties at the time of the interview) was the history of the interviewee’s work experience<sup>4</sup> and especially his experiences during vocational rehabilitation. Mrs. Brühl, a member of Peter Straus’s “development workshop” with professionals in vocational rehabilitation, was familiar with this interview since this material had been discussed with the members of the workshop<sup>5</sup>.

In working with this data I used the procedures of a narrative analysis which has been developed by Fritz Schütze (1983: 1987) and applied in a number of research projects in the last decades – projects in the fields of biographical research (e.g., Riemann 1987, Nittel 1992, Schütze 1995, Treichel 2004) and the analysis of professional work (e.g., Reim 1995, Riemann 2000). The experiences of the social worker as revealed in her interview will be at the centre of the following reconstruction, but once in a while I will introduce what I have learned from the client’s narrative (without aiming for a presentation “without

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<sup>3</sup> In German: “Berufsförderungswerk” (Bfw)

<sup>4</sup> I.e., he is not asked to tell his whole life which would elicit more background information on his biography, but the interviewer’s query for his vocational history is probably more in line with the kind of questions which professionals usually ask in the context of vocational rehabilitation.

<sup>5</sup> There are a few references to this interview with Mr. Scholz in the last part of her interview. She does not refer to it in her introductory narrative, but during the subsequent phase of answers and questions based on the introductory narrative.

a gap”<sup>6</sup>). I will try to present my reconstruction in a way that at least partially reveals the way in which I attempt to make sense of the data. By making my own work of wondering aloud and “stumbling over” particulars of the spoken language visible I invite readers to join me in the attempt to understand the narrative(s). And I hope to encourage readers who are professional practitioners in the field of vocational rehabilitation to do such narrative analyses themselves.

## 2. Meeting the Client

The story begins when Mrs. Brühl was contacted by a rehabilitation counsellor of the regional pension fund for workers, LVA (“Landesversicherungsanstalt”), who told her that she would send a new participant of the program of vocational rehabilitation to her. She already informed her that he would like to become a car salesman. As the narrator explains, sometimes people who have qualified for the program have not decided yet in which direction to go, sometimes they have. In looking back Mrs. Brühl remembers that “*it was already clear in his case*”. This quote leaves open what the work of the rehabilitation counsellor at the pension fund consisted of, how she felt about the client’s decision and whether or not Mrs. Brühl would sometimes take the license to try to divert a new participant from her or his chosen path and to move her or him into another direction. This issue will remain important in the unfolding of the story<sup>7</sup>.

At this point we do not learn about the pattern of institutional procedures which people like the new participant experience (e.g., undergoing certain tests, etc.), but at least we can start asking questions about it. The narrator does not give background information about the processes which led to the declaration

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<sup>6</sup> These excursions into the client’s biography will be clearly marked, so it will be easy for readers to distinguish between the professional’s and her client’s perspectives. Quotes from the interviews will be italicised. The term “narrator” refers to Mrs. Brühl at the time of the interview. Thereby it becomes easier to distinguish between the perspectives of the same person at different times and when taking on different roles: the role of the narrator and the role of the actor in the events which are depicted in the narrative. I also use the present tense in dealing with the interview and the past tense in referring to the events and the experiences of the actors in the unfolding story.

<sup>7</sup> That’s what I learned from Mrs. Brühl at this point: If a decision with regard to the specific direction of a vocational reorientation has been made before the respective client is sent to the vocational rehabilitation centre for starting her or his retraining it is of great weight that it can be assumed that such a decision has been reached in an orderly procedure (in consideration of medical opinion, etc.). Therefore such a decision has a strong binding force. Revoking it before the start of the retraining is only possible on the basis of “hard facts” (e.g., no place for retraining is available, the grades are not sufficient for a re-qualification, etc.).

that “*it was already clear in his case*” and about the division of labour between the pension fund and the vocational retraining centre. Who was involved in confirming this choice besides the new participant himself? The quote “*it was already clear in his case*” conveys that the social worker regarded this as given fact: something which had been arranged before she entered the stage. – Peter Straus told me that complaints about such “givens” were an important topic among the counsellors in vocational rehabilitation who took part in his development workshop: They felt that the quality of their own work of counselling suffered because quite often they were just informed by the pension fund about a new participant’s vocational choice without being able to engage in an inquiry (together with the client) if this decision was a wise choice and was sufficiently grounded in her or his biography.

Mrs. Brühl invited Mr. Scholz, the new participant, for a first “*information talk*”: This term shows that there is a language for routine activities and a regular sequence of steps in working with clients. “*Information talk*” probably refers to the fact that she informed the client about the program, but also received information from him about himself. As she remembers, “*And of course I also asked him how it came about that he had chosen this occupation of a car salesman. After he had told me his story/life course, what he had done before. Before that I believe he had been a machine and plant mechanic (“Maschinen- und Anlagenmonteur”). Yeah and he wanted to become a car salesman because he is busy with cars in his private sphere, because he enjoys cars, likes to buy cars, is interested in them. And because he had the opinion that he could earn quite good money when selling cars*”.

As this quote reveals the social worker asked the participant to freely narrate his story – at least as far as his work experience is concerned (“*what he had done before*”). Other parts of her narrative show that she is well acquainted with the development of his medical problems. This must have already been a topic in their first meeting, too, since the history of his work experience is partly a trajectory of suffering (Schütze 1995) which had finally led to the decision to actively cope with it via rehabilitative measures. It would be interesting to know more about her specific questions: When the professional took the freedom to ask the client for “*his story*”, was this strictly a story about his work experience and his way into rehabilitation? How much can be asked for in such a situation without appearing intrusive and indiscreet?<sup>8</sup> This problem is highly relevant for working with a client

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<sup>8</sup> This issue was probably important in the development workshop of Peter Straus which he conducted with social workers, psychologists, teachers and trainers in vocational rehabilitation. Learning about the insights which can be generated via the analysis of autobiographical narrative interviews leads to the question of how to incorporate such an analytical mentality and sensible

since the quality of the process of counselling depends on a sound empirical basis, in this case a narrative basis in which a client reveals a lot about himself in his own words. How much does one need to know? How much is plausible for the interaction partners without violating unwritten rules pertaining to the protection of the private sphere? And what about the time pressure of the work and shared standards of efficiency? There is probably a shared understanding among colleagues of how much time to invest in such an encounter, so that other parts of a social worker's daily business don't get neglected. Otherwise the worker could lose her reputation as an efficient practitioner<sup>9</sup>.

It is interesting that the social worker learned enough from the client's initial presentation of self to become a little sceptical as becomes obvious in a commentary at this point in her interview: *"Well, that's always something"<sup>10</sup>. Lot of people have this idea. Many of them always look for something which they think will make them rich afterwards*". That means that during her work with clients she has developed the notion that there is some kind of self-deception involved when new participants emphasise the motive of *"earning quite good money"*. At the same time she did not pursue this line of questioning and arguing during her first encounter with the client: *"Well, it really seemed very, very consolidated at first glance. He also explained this to me in a quite plausible way"*. It seems that she put her own doubts to rest – for a while. *"At first glance"* and *"it really seemed"* already allude to a downhill course while *"very, very consolidated"* sounds positive, like a "strong foundation" (unlike "stubborn")<sup>11</sup>.

### **Changing perspectives: The client's work experience before vocational rehabilitation**

At this point it makes sense to present a summary of what I have learned from the narrative interview with the client as far as the history of his work experience prior to entering vocational rehabilitation is concerned:

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practice of narrative inquiry without confusing the worlds of professional work and social research.

<sup>9</sup> After reading a first version of my case study Peter Straus informed me "that generally speaking such an inquiry stays focused at aspects which appear immediately relevant at this point in time (vocational biography, course of illness). At this point practitioners attempt to get specific (factual) information instead of trying to learn how the new participants have experienced certain processes. And they proceed within a rather strict scheme of questions and answers instead of making open narrative requests. Of course there is also a potential for biographical and process oriented inquiries within the overall proceedings (that's what I tried to make accessible in the work of the development workshop)". This comment is informed by his general knowledge which he acquired in his work with professionals in vocational rehabilitation.

<sup>10</sup> „Na gut, das ist immer so ne Sache". The German sentence reveals a doubt which I find difficult to adequately express in English.

<sup>11</sup> In German: "Und es schien ähm auf den ersten Blick also wirklich sehr sehr gefestigt".

The starting point of his narrative is the time when he was first exposed to industrial labour during a practice placement during his eighth or ninth grade in school in the GDR. It was not possible for him to get his “*dream job*” as a “*fitter for controlling facilities*” since these positions were extremely rare, so he finally decided to go on an apprenticeship as a machine and plant mechanic in the firm which he had already got to know during his practice placement. (As he recounts, finding a place to work was not difficult at all in the GDR). He already had some problems with his back at that time which were taken into regard (“*I wasn’t allowed to work in the pipes and stuff where I couldn’t move and so on*”). In retrospect one can say that this is (in terms of the long-term unfolding of a trajectory of suffering) an important part of his trajectory potential (Schütze 1995).

During the time of his apprenticeship unforeseen collective events had a decisive impact on his biography: the GDR dissolved and its industry collapsed. He was still able to finish his apprenticeship, but was then put on short-time work in his firm right away. At that time he was eighteen years old and did not find his situation too hard to bear because he still got a large part of his former wage, but his parents put pressure on him to work (“*go to work, go to work*”). This led to his leaving for a big city in West Germany all by himself where he worked as a mechanic for just six months. He felt very lonely (“*because I was too young and my family and friends weren’t there*”) and returned home to Magdeburg where he was unemployed again. He took a class in further education for a quarter of a year to become a welder. At this time he also got to know his girl-friend (with whom he is still living together at the time of the interview, they have two children).

For about two and a half years he worked as a driver for pharmacies until he got dismissed; the firm had run out of commissions. He found another manual job in a firm outside of Magdeburg and worked there for four or five years. Due to difficulties in the tape recording it is not totally clear what his work consisted of – in any case he had not been trained in this specific occupation – , but in retrospect he evaluates this period quite positively referring to the fact that he became a foreman after some years: “*well, things having to do with handcraft that’s something for me*”: a proud biographical commentary on what he believes he is good at and which skills he can acquire easily.

He left this job and returned to Magdeburg because his girl friend who worked in Magdeburg gave birth to their first child. At that time he was ill for half a year because of inguinal hernia and medical complications following an operation. These experiences are already a part of a trajectory of suffering from chronic pain and a failing body. As mentioned above, the conditions of the later onset of his trajectory of suffering had already been partially created at the beginning of his apprenticeship when he began training in an occupation which required hard manual work – despite the fact that he had already developed problems with his back; but the structural conditions of the collapse of the industrial infrastructure in East Germany which had a decisive impact on his work experience and life history have also to be taken into account. It is somewhat difficult to pin down (on the basis of this topically focussed and rather laconic narrative) when his trajectory –

a trajectory of chronic or recurring pain – began. This is usually easier on the basis of an unfocussed autobiographical narrative which contains more detailed sequences.

In order “to earn a lot of money” he began to work in the field of connecting iron railings on building sites. He did this as a foreman for about three years (partly in Bavaria). One important goal of his was to save enough money so he could have a basis for starting retraining at the age of thirty (while also supporting his family at the same time). He was acutely aware of the medical problems which were associated with his hard manual labour and knew that he could not continue with this kind of work in the long run: “*I always had slight problems with my back, with my disk, you know, because connecting iron railings was a really hard job, but I always went back to work, let’s put it this way*”. The project of preparing for retraining at the age of 30 can be regarded as a long-term biographical action scheme of control: an attempt to get away from hard manual labour and to prevent a further deterioration of his body.

What is remarkable or even ironic about his action scheme of control is the fact that it meant getting into especially risky and hard work: He wanted to get away from a type of work which he found too strenuous for his body. But in order to start retraining in a field which was less strenuous for him he tried to earn as much money as possible in order to have material resources as a basis for retraining – and this meant an even intensified exploitation of his body. This action scheme had a ruinous character as far as the damage for his body was concerned. The topic of a possible retraining stayed more or less diffuse – except for the motives of (a) getting away from a kind of work which he could not endure in the long run and (b) earning a lot of money.

There are also hints in his interview which convey something like a strategic attitude with regard to the resources made available by the system of vocational rehabilitation. When asked by the interviewer about the origins of his plans of retraining he said, “*Yeah, it had always been my idea that I wanted to reorient myself when I was thirty. And that’s exactly what I did. I am thirty-one now and I did it that way. It’s something else how I arranged it, you know. I really have problems with my back / I did / that has been medically con(firmed) / (I) was put into a pipe and you can see it, but I can cope with it well by doing sports*”. (He elaborates a little more on how he has managed to keep his problems with his back under control). What I find interesting is his remark “*It’s something else how I arranged it, you know*” and the way he refers to the legitimacy of his medical problems as a ticket to vocational rehabilitation – medical problems which have been officially confirmed and legitimised, but are de-dramatized by him nevertheless. His remark “*It’s something else ...*” is a hint that he prefers to keep all this under some information control and that he senses that there might be a lack of legitimacy as far as his own presentation and usage of medical problems is concerned. This might also have consequences for his relationship with professionals in vocational rehabilitation. (But I am stepping too much ahead in my story, he had not mentioned vocational rehabilitation yet at this point in his introductory narrative, it is not totally clear when he had become aware of such an option and whether or not this was really a long-term orientation. He mentions that his girl-friend had also undergone a retraining and had become an occupational therapist, so it might be possible that he had already learned about such options some time ago. – The analysis of his narrative reveals in any case that Mr. Scholz had

developed a lot of serious health problems during his long experience of hard manual labour – regardless of the issue (*“how I arranged it”*) which I just mentioned).

When his firm went bankrupt he stayed at home for three months. It is somewhat unclear in the interview if he got dismissed before the bankruptcy of the since he already suffered from a slipped disk (*“he threw me out immediately”*) which could not be operated because the disk was damaged already. He suffered a lot of pain and was on very strong medication.

Later he worked in an assembly plant in West Germany together with a friend until the firm stopped paying the regular wage. He stopped going to work and *“is calling in sick”*. The narrative conveys that he thereby tried to secure at least his sickness benefit (which is paid by the statutory health insurance after six weeks in case of a “disability to work”) since he could not count on receiving his regular wage from his firm any more. This is a common strategy to secure one’s claims in case of an insolvency. But the narrator also emphasises that *“I really had problems with my back all the time, I suffered the whole time and stayed sick”*. The doctor sounded alarmed (*“we have to do something now”*). Mr. Scholz stayed at home for a long time (also securing money from his firm during insolvency proceedings).

On the basis of the narrative it does not become clear if he already had in mind at this point in time to strive for the status of “occupational disability” as the basis for being granted a retraining. It is quite possible that he could not clearly anticipate the procedures which finally led to his vocational rehabilitation. Reading the first lines of the following narrative sequence makes you wonder if he experienced some kind of automatism – unintended consequences of *“calling in sick”* for a protracted period of time (cf. *“the health insurance had already put pressure on me”* in the following sequence which conveys a sense of experiencing something which is beyond his control):

*“And then the health insurance had already put pressure on me what’s gonna happen with me. I said, “I can’t stay sick any more” They also didn’t pay any more and said, ‘We have to do something now’. That meant that I was supposed to go to a health resort. Then I went to the health resort. And the doctor had already told me in the beginning, “Well, you may only do light work from now on. And nothing of the kind which you are doing now” And then someone came from the LVA in ((big city)), because I was in the health resort in ((Bad...), someone came from ((big city)) and asked me and so on what I was planning and whether I’d like to do retraining and so on. And that there are certain opportunities – (from...) and the vocational rehabilitation centre, they have their big thing in ((A-town)). A big object. And they said that I should leave the health resort for two days and go there to do a kind of “search for a vocation”<sup>12</sup> and so on. But actually everything was clear to me what I wanted to do. That was already / because I had already (talked) to friends and so on, because they had already done that and (still) do that. I said right away, „I want to become a car salesman”. And that settled it. I did that for two days, then the time in the health resort was up.*

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<sup>12</sup> In German: „Berufsfindung“.

*And then I went to the LVA here in Magdeburg right away and said, "I would like to do retraining". I was really taking care of that, let's put it that way, for at the health resort there were people who waited for their retraining for three years. And it went rather quick in my case. Ähm and I was supposed to start in June, I had come (home) from the health resort in April. Then I told them, „No, that doesn't work. I'd like to on a vacation for four weeks before (it starts).” And then I was told I could start in December”.*

The narrator does not go into any details. He also stresses the unproblematic character of the whole proceedings in other parts of the interview: He stresses that he was so sure of his choice to become a car salesman and that this contributed to the speeding up of the whole process. At the same time he was not in a hurry to start the retraining at the earliest possible time (as the above quote reveals). This delay is at least interesting since it raises the question of the biographical foundation – or the possible lack of a biographical foundation – of his vocational choice.

Going into vocational rehabilitation can be regarded as a biographical action scheme of control which entails entering a program of people processing.

### 3. The Beginning of the Retraining

The first step in the program of retraining consists of an eight week “vocation specific preparation” which takes place at the vocational retraining centre. Since the whole process of retraining only lasts for two years whereas regular apprenticeships last for three years, there is the need for an intensive training in the beginning in order to support the participants in the program to catch up with other apprentices.

During this seminar Mr. Scholz and three other re-trainees who wanted to become car salesmen were taught by a coach<sup>13</sup> who was employed by the centre on an honorary basis. Apparently Mrs. Brühl was informed by him that her client did not quite fulfil his expectations: *“It turned out that he was the absolute loner somehow. He did not ask questions, did not actively present himself as the coach (...) had expected. And during breaks he was always by himself. But it did not seem to be the case that he had problems with the occupation, but that was what he was like. Well. And the preparation as such went okay”.*

At the end of such an eight week phase the social worker has a “*final talk*” with the individual participants in order to prepare them for the next step: their entry into a firm. (These “*final talks*” belong to a regular pattern). She also had such a conversation with Mr. Scholz.

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<sup>13</sup> In German: „Verkaufstrainer“ („sales coach“).

Before describing the substance of her conversation with him (as she remembers it in her interview) I would like to turn to a formal feature of Mrs. Brühl's narrative for a moment since the way in which she introduces this conversation sheds light on something which she apparently had experienced as troubling during this eight week seminar. When she mentions the fact that the "final talk" serves as a preparation for the next phase – the entry into a firm – she remembers that first of all a local car dealer had to be found during this eight week time span, i.e., she interrupts her main story line and introduces something which had happened before the "final talk". This phenomenon is referred to as a background construction in the type of narrative analysis which I use (Schütze 1987: 207–235). The comparative analysis of spontaneous narratives about personal experiences leads to the insight that such background constructions (self-corrective devices which are often introduced by utterances like "Oh, I forgot something" or "I have to add" (see below) and which are always closed in an orderly way before the narrator returns to her or his main story line) reveal something about the troubling character of former experiences, but also about the fact that the narrator has still some difficulties in coming to terms with these experiences in the present. Otherwise she or he would not have left them out in the main narrative in the first place. Of course it is important to avoid quick assumptions about the nature of such trouble when stumbling over these formal features of story telling. It is enough to get sensitised and to start looking for the heart of the matter.

The background construction deals with the difficult search for a firm: *"Yeah, I have to add: During these eight weeks it was necessary to make a contract for retraining, yeah a training contract. And we had approached several car dealers where he had applied, too. I always think it's great when people make suggestions themselves: Where could I apply? Where would I like to apply? What kind of notions do I have about the car dealer? Which brand am I especially interested in? That's also important in the process. But he did not do anything. He went like, „Oh, Mrs. Brühl, just go ahead. Yeah. I have never really applied for something, see, and I have trust in you. You must certainly have your contacts". Okay. And then finally it happened that he had applied at a Skoda dealer in (local city) which had left quite a good impression on me at first glance. /I also visit the firms./ And he got invited to an interview. And he returned and said, „Yeah, I could imagine quite well to work in this Skoda firm". And people there would (take) him for these two years. And the whole thing was sound".*

What Mrs. Brühl found difficult to cope with seems to be her client's lack of initiative and the problematic division of work which developed between her and him: Because of the client's passivity the social worker apparently slipped into the role of having to organise things for him. On the one hand she sensed that

she should not give in, especially since she has a clear notion (cf. her commentary: *“I always think it’s great ...”*) that a re-trainee’s taking initiative and developing identifications is a necessary part of his successful vocational socialisation; if he does not do this kind of work it is doubtful whether or not he is sufficiently committed to the vocation which he has chosen. And beyond that he could learn the problematic lesson that he can always lean on his social worker, i.e., she would foster the development of dependency. On the other hand there are temporal constraints within this program: A firm has to be found within this period of eight weeks in order to avoid chaos and difficult negotiations with the pension fund. In discussing paradoxes of professional work Fritz Schütze (1992) refers to a “pedagogical basic dilemma” which consists of the need to demonstrate to a client in an exemplary way how certain activities should be carried out while running the risk that such exemplary demonstrations could foster dependencies. Mrs. Brühl apparently senses that the way she coped with this dilemma is not satisfactory according to her own standards. The formal features of her narrative rendering at this point which I referred to as a “background construction” can be used to get sensitised to (a) the difficulties which she experienced and still experiences in this particular case and (b) a type of professional paradox in general.

I will now return to the *“final talk”* as the narrator remembers it in the interview: During this conversation the social worker gave feedback to her client<sup>14</sup> and raised some doubts: She told him that she had noticed that he had been *“a very, very quiet participant”*. If he wanted to become a car salesman *“he would have to be quite the opposite”*. She asked him *“if he could still imagine”* to work as a car salesman to which he responded that this would not be problematic. *“He would look at people from above. That’s exactly what he told me. And he/he chooses the persons with whom he talks. And the instructors of our house and also his three comrades-in-arms in his group, let’s put it this way, they were absolutely not on his level. He has totally different standards and I could be lucky that he talks to me (...). In that situation I could only think, “Oh God, this is going so disastrously wrong”<sup>15</sup>. He is supposed to sell cars, he is supposed to approach people, is supposed to convince them. Well, let’s wait and see”*.

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<sup>14</sup> At a later point in the interview she goes into more details with regard to the organisation of this “final talk” which appears to have a regular pattern: She mentions that she has developed a list of questions which she uses in this situation – questions on vocational issues in a more narrow sense (how well they feel prepared, etc.), but also questions referring to self-perceptions (personal strengths, weaknesses, notions on the employer’s expectations, etc.). Afterwards she gives feedbacks on how she experienced the participant during the eight weeks.

<sup>15</sup> In German she uses a colourful metaphorical expression: „Oh God, this is hopelessly going against the tree“.

Of course we do not have exact knowledge of the details of this conversation (cf. the Treiche's module for the analysis of a conversation between a professional and a client), we have to rely on what the social worker remembers. Her detailed memory of this scene shows that it has left a lasting impression. She was shocked by his answer which she regarded as a revelation of his essential arrogance without feeling insulted herself (as she remarks in the second part of the interview when the interviewer asks her about this). When things went wrong later on, she remembered her client's remarks as a key to understanding what was wrong with him in the first place. During the "*final talk*" she apparently tried to convince Mr. Scholz that he had to overcome his tendency to keep his distance from other people if he wanted to be successful in his apprenticeship as a salesman, but she felt that her criticism and exhortations didn't have any impact on him. He seemed to be immune to her attempts at coaching him. In a later part of the interview she mentions that she went so far as to give him strong advice at the end of their conversation: "*that it would become very difficult for him to work in this field which he had chosen if he didn't change his attitude. Because the whole opposite will be expected from him: He has to sell a car to a customer, too, whom he does not like. That's the way it is. I asked him if he had gotten familiar with the image of this occupation, with the things which he will encounter. And he always said, „Yes, yes”, that he had done so. And that he will see what's coming up. And it's important for him to earn a lot of money (in this field)*".

An interesting question which cannot be resolved on the basis of this data has to do with how open and straightforward she was in her criticism in this situation: A reader gets the impression that she sent a strong warning and appealed to her client to change his general outlook, she also showed her doubts ("*I asked him if...*"). But maybe she was also careful in not fully explicating her negative prognosis ("*I could only think*") because this could have made it more difficult to establish a trust relationship, it might have also destabilised the client. Professionals have to cope with the problem that sometimes they have much more knowledge about the most likely (downhill) development of a "case" than the client or patient her- or himself. Establishing an "open awareness context" (Glaser and Strauss 1965) could entail the risk of demoralising the client, keeping it closed could further endanger the reciprocity of the relationship and could introduce a spurious, inauthentic quality into the communication (Schütze 1992).

It is also important to ask how difficult it would be to stop the "machinery" at this point after the social worker had been informed by the pension fund about the participant's decision and had arranged for his participation in an eight week

preparatory course<sup>16</sup>. A lot of time and money has already been invested in this process of retraining.

#### 4. Two Crises

Six weeks after Mr. Scholz had started working Mrs. Brühl got a phone call from the Skoda firm. As she remembers she was told: *“It is impossible for us to cooperate with Mr. Scholz any longer, that’s impossible. Scholz is not willing at all to establish contact with the employees of our firm, to return to the role of an apprentice, to approach customers in an appropriate way, to adjust his appearance to what is expected in this trade. We would like to have a talk in order to discuss these things”*. Shortly after this talk she got a call again and received the information that Mr. Scholz would be dismissed without notice within his probation time. Even though she explicitly asked them to provide her with reasons for his dismissal (so that she could write a justification for the pension fund), they declined to do so: *“No, we don’t want to have anything to do with Mr. Scholz anymore. There have been enormous problems with the gentleman and we would like to get some distance from the whole business. And you have to accept this”*. As can be seen the social worker had been called in to act as a “fire brigade” or a coach, someone who could be expected to talk turkey to the client. It is not clear though what she did and experienced during the crisis meeting at the firm. Afterwards she had to engage in some kind of legitimization work when she had to develop an account for the pension fund as to why things had gone wrong.

When Mrs. Brühl talked to the client about this disaster he presented a totally different version of events which she apparently did not give much credit to: *“Of course Mr. Scholz told a quite different story. The others were to blame, they did not accept him as he was. Then he told me in retrospect that the Skoda brand / it was also not possible for him to sell Skoda cars, since this is totally below his level. And then I said, „Why didn’t you tell me before? Didn’t I give you the chance, “Look for something for yourself, something which fits your ideas”. Yeah, there was no response from his side. Okay, “well”, I say, “I have to provide a justification for the pension fund. I would like to give you a second chance, but there has to be a reason and we have to find it out.’ „No, it’s not my fault at all”*.

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. footnote 7.

This sequence of the interview conveys that the social worker tried to get the client to review together with her what had gone wrong, but found this frustrating because of his downright refusal to consider that he had somehow contributed to the mess. She felt that he was self-righteous and that his theory of why he had suffered defeat was far too simple and even self-deceptive. This joint review also had the function for Mrs. Brühl to get a more comprehensive view of the events in order to have a basis for a convincing account which she could present to the pension fund (so that the financing of the measure could be continued), but she was unable to win her client over in this regard.

During her conversation with Mr. Scholz she initiated the scheme of argumentation and used the strategy of revealing a discrepancy in her client's account: Why had he not revealed his distaste for Skoda automobiles right from the beginning if this seemed so important for him? The way in which the narrator is quoted with his statement that this brand was "*below his level*" creates a link with his earlier statement (as quoted by the narrator) that his fellow classmates and his instructor "*were absolutely not on his level*", i.e., she confirms the theme of his self-deceptive arrogance. It is interesting that the client's statement about himself became consequential for the unfolding of the story (as will be seen in the following) and was used by the professional for what turned out to be an interesting field experiment.

Mrs. Brühl was informed by the pension fund that the participant "*should have a second chance*". She was asked to look for another car dealer together with her client which she found a little difficult in this situation: "*That's basically all right. But it's just difficult if a firm dismisses (a person) at a moment's notice, it's not possible for me to get hold of another training firm right away*". Such a search would get even more difficult if one knows about the problematic character of an applicant. The narrator reveals something of (a) the time pressure under which she is working, (b) the networking quality of her work, i.e. the need to reach out and get cooperation partners, and (c) her difficulties in trying to represent and "sell" someone who is hard to "sell". It also becomes obvious during the interview that in the process of contacting firms and negotiating with them she has learned a lot about work milieus, conventions and expectations in different occupations<sup>17</sup>. This experiential knowledge serves as a resource for her counselling and coaching of clients.

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<sup>17</sup> The work of counsellors and social workers in vocational rehabilitation could probably further profit from a familiarity with ethnographic studies on different work milieus. Cf. Terkel (1975) as a rich (journalistic) collection of personal accounts on the experience of working in a wide array of jobs and occupations. He also presents the personal story of a car salesman (pp. 303–309).

What seems interesting, too, is the general directive from the pension fund to look for another car dealer together with her client. The social worker does not mention in her narrative if she had the freedom to argue with the representative of the pension fund about the wisdom of this directive or if she thought about trying to get her client to consider other vocational options. For an outsider who is not familiar with the regular institutional procedures it is somewhat surprising that there did not seem to be some reflective pause for discussing the general question if selling cars is really the right thing to do for Mr. Scholz<sup>18</sup>. This question seems quite appropriate since the social worker had already entertained serious doubts about the success of his retraining for quite some while (cf. her earlier evaluation of their “*final talk*” at the end of the preparatory seminar: “*In that situation I could only think, „Oh God, this is going so disastrously wrong. He is supposed to sell cars, he is supposed to approach people, is supposed to convince them. Well, let’s wait and see”*). But the client was not willing to raise any general doubts himself about whether or not he was on the right track as far as his vocational choice was concerned.

When Mr. Scholz went on sick-call she asked him, “*Okay, then you are sick now, but you can pick up a phone nevertheless. Just choose some firm. If Skoda doesn’t suit you – VW, Audi, whatever’ – but there was no response whatsoever*”. I.e., the social worker tried in vain to “activate” her client by showing him that she took him seriously, also as an opponent in the scheme of argumentation: If he is so particular about cars, it should be his turn to look for a car dealer of his own choice. She apparently failed to draw him into an argumentation which would have some morally binding force, i.e. the mutual willingness to respect argumentative constraints and to act accordingly. The social worker felt (and still feels) that Mr. Scholz could be expected to respond in this situation, “*but there was no response whatsoever*”<sup>19</sup>. Maybe there was a response (similar to the accounts he provided for his initial reluctance to look for a car dealer during the preparatory seminar: “*I have never really applied for*

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<sup>18</sup> According to Mrs. Brühl every re-trainee gets a second chance for retraining in the same vocation if a first attempt did not work out. This is even the case if there are doubts if training in this particular vocation really makes sense for the re-trainee, since a negative evaluation by the firm might still be ascribed to relationship problems for which the participant cannot be held accountable. – According to Mrs. Brühl Mr. Scholz was dismissed in his probation time without the firm giving any reasons for this step. Therefore there was no base whatsoever to revise the decision for retraining in this field. There was considerable time pressure to look for a new place for retraining, since the chamber insists on a speedy training without interruptions because of the shortened (two year) period reserved for re-trainees.

<sup>19</sup> In terms of the communicative scheme of argumentation the client does not seem to respect and to commit himself to the argumentative constraint of drawing conclusions (Schütze 1978).

*something, see*”), but at least no response which she regarded as appropriate and legitimate.

As soon as it was clear that the client did not comply with her request, Mrs. Brühl took her “*chance*” (the fact that she uses this term conveys something of a strategy): “*All right, then I had contacted a BMW dealer (...)*”<sup>20</sup>. *I went there and said, „That’s the situation. The participant has started already”. I explained everything to them and they said, „Okay, we would take a look at him. But we also have certain criteria which the person has to fulfil let alone that he has to show up in a suit. Yeah, we do pay attention to someone’s outer appearance. And BMW has its own way of doing things, you know”.*

The narrator does not explicate her reasons for having contacted the BMW dealer, but her move also seems to have had a playful component: She certainly had not accepted his excuse that the Skoda brand was “*below his level*” as an explanation for the negative turn of events, she had sensed the self-deceptive quality of his account. If she now took him at his word that a brand has to fit with his own special (elitist) taste it reminds the listener and reader of a move in a (serious) game: Stop fooling yourself. If you will now have the chance to work at a place which is “*on your level*” – let’s see what you will do now. You cannot be so evasive anymore if you get into trouble again.

It had already become obvious before that an important and time-consuming part of social work in vocational rehabilitation consists of having to win the cooperation of firms which are willing to take re-trainees. When the narrator says, “*I went there and said, That’s the situation. The participant has started already*”, it becomes obvious that such canvassing work can be rather complicated, especially if there is something about an applicant which appears unattractive or dubious in this context. The way in which the narrator quotes herself shows that there was something which she felt she had to confess: “*The narrator has started already*”. She does not go into interactional details, but it must have been difficult to successfully present the candidate as someone who deserved a second chance, especially since she knew so little about the first (failed) attempt of retraining which could have served to save his face. It appears quite remarkable that the firm went along and that she was told: “*Okay, we would take a look at him*”. I assume that part of her success in this situation had to do with presenting herself as a reliable liaison worker in case there were some trouble in the future and things had to be straightened out.

As the narrator remembers, “*of course he (Mr. Scholz) was totally enthusiastic when he heard the word „BMW”. Then I told him about the conditions, he accepted them right away. That means, he went out to buy a suit*

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<sup>20</sup> Interviewer and interviewee join in laughter at this point of the narrative.

*right away and he also worked hard in preparing himself for the interview. Then he went there. Then the manager criticised some things. He had rather long hair and he had it pretty much styled with gel. And that was something which she did'nt like at all. – He couldn't understand this at all. According to the motto, „They have to take me as the person who I am”. I tell him, „Oh boy, Mr. Scholz. That's your chance. If you don't use this chance, this will be the end of it. Then I can't help you any more”.*

One does not learn from the interview how often she saw her client in this phase, but there seems to have been a number of reviewing and coaching encounters: conversations in which she tried to sensitise him to the need to take over the perspective of others, especially others who are in a stronger position than him. When the client told Mrs. Brühl about the manager's criticism of his appearance he apparently felt offended by what he perceived as intrusive: The manager, a woman, took the license to disapprove of the way he styled his body and presented himself as a man; and it was a meeting of strangers, too. The manager's criticism reveals something of the relevance of style in the world of selling classy cars to affluent customers. The client did not seem to realise this general point and had difficulties in taking the perspective of the other while the social worker felt frustrated by his protest and implored him not to waste his last chance. When reading this sequence one could ask whether or not the client as well as other participants in the program had been prepared for the possibility of such criticism in the preparatory seminar. It is certainly a type of criticism which is hard to swallow for many people who had not been working in the world of selling (fancy) goods to (well-to-do) customers before: a criticism which could be felt as too personal and degrading. It must certainly have been a new situation for Mr. Scholz with his long history of manual work. – A part of Mrs. Brühl's work in this phase also consisted in persuading the chamber of commerce (under a lot of time pressure) to grant the training license to this car dealer, i.e., there is a rather large arena in which she has to operate.

Two or three weeks after Mr. Scholz started to work for the BMW dealer, Mrs. Brühl got in contact with the firm again. (She does not remember if she was called or called there herself). As she mentions, the manager told her,

*„You know what, Mrs. Brühl, the first thing Mr. Scholz asked was when he was eligible for a vacation”. I said, „Well, all right, he has two children though. It must certainly be important somehow”. She said, ‘But we want to retrain him. We have given him his second chance. He should go on a vacation with his children, but we found it somewhat inappropriate that this was the first thing he cared about. Second, he does not make any contact with his colleagues. And the worst thing is: He is sitting at his table’ which he had in his office in the end „and when customers enter he doesn't even look up. That means he doesn't say*

*hello to the customers and he doesn't even look at them. He doesn't show any reaction.' I thought, 'Oh God, I don't believe it'.*

As this very detailed sequence shows, the social worker was again confronted with multiple complaints about her client which focused on his supposed lack of civility and breaches of etiquette in this work milieu. At first she tried to introduce some exonerating background information (referring to his family obligations) in order to alleviate a specific faux pas which she was told about, but apparently she was overwhelmed by the overall negative information. This episode must have seemed to her like a replay of the first disaster. – Then she called her client in for a kind of crisis intervention, another attempt to talk turkey with him which she experienced as rather frustrating again:

*“Then I invited Mr. Scholz again. I say, „Oh boy, Mr. Scholz, it doesn't work that way. Don't you notice? What do you think about the whole thing?” Then he went again like, „But the others are to blame. They cannot accept me like I am. And it's such a formal work climate there”. I say, ‘But this is something which we knew from the beginning, didn't we. But this is actually a brand which somehow fits with your notions. „Yes, that's true, but the woman is totally critical of me. And, well, people / the customers, they are so formal, too.’ And the manager said that he eats and drinks in front of the customers – at his work place. And then he enters the firm and doesn't even say hello to his colleagues and so on. All these kinds of problems. Yeah and I mentioned this and said, ‘Mr. Scholz, this is your chance. Don't waste it’”.*

The social worker obviously had the experience to be biting on granite even when the client conceded that he could identify with this kind of car. The social worker had expected to get into a better position in arguing with her client when choosing such a car dealer, but she now had to learn that the difficulties which he had run into again did not make him any more receptive for her criticism. Her imploring attempts to persuade him to take the perspectives of others apparently did not “reach” him.

After two or three weeks Mr. Scholz was fired without notice in his probation time. At this point the social worker “*couldn't do and didn't want to do anything for him anymore*”. She justified this in the following way: “*Because there had to be some validity in the statements of the training firm somehow. It does not make sense to always blame the others. That had been my observation when he was with us. He always regarded himself as a victim, the others were to blame. And I always remembered the conversation when he told me, „The others are not on my level”.* And I could be lucky that he talked to me. And somehow this had gone on along these lines. And then I said, „No way. He has simply to learn that others have expectations of him, too. He cannot just demand things”.

This quote reveals her great disappointment at this stage. Her statement sounds like a final verdict in which an early (shocking) encounter with the client and the pattern of blaming others (in her conversations with him) served as corroborating evidence for his basic problems in taking over the perspectives of others. At this point she did not feel any further obligation to work with him, she felt that he had to learn the lesson himself.

### **Changing perspectives: The client's experiences during this time**

Mr. Scholz talks about his experiences with the two car dealers in a quite laconic way. He just mentions the eight week-preparatory class at the vocational rehabilitation centre, but does not mention how he experienced it and how Mrs. Brühl shared her own (critical) impressions with him.

*“Then I started in December. Car salesmanship (...). Then they got me a car dealer. (I had an) interview. Then I started. But it only went okay for one and a half months in this firm because I said, „No way. want to become a car salesman. I only have a period of two years. And I cannot wash cars every day”. That’s it. And I said, „No”. And then I had some private, private problems, too, because a lot of people knew him<sup>21</sup> and I also knew him well. Yeah, they (...) threw me out.*

*Then me and Mrs. Brühl worked pretty hard to get hold of a new car dealer since usually the apprenticeship would have been finished. Then we found one but that wasn’t anything good either. They couldn’t stand me right from the first day / they let me run the gauntlet. They told me (at the) interview, „(You got to wear a) suit every day”. That was a BMW dealer. I bought three suits just for this (purpose). I arrive there on my first day wearing a suit. They ask me first of all, „Why do you wear a suit here? Please change your clothes”. And stuff like that, let me put it that way. It didn’t work out for too long. Ehm, overnight too be/ because you were in a time of probation. And I was sacked immediately, let me put it that way. After that the car salesmanship was finished, because I didn’t have a training shop anymore. And let me put it that way and then I had to overnight the LVA told me „good bye”. That was the end of it. Mrs. Brühl told me I wouldn’t get a retraining anymore. And then I said, ‘I don’t believe it’”.*

It is noticeable that the client’s narrative reconstruction of his apprenticeship with the two car dealers does not contain any self-criticism and any reference to Mrs. Brühl’s criticism of his conduct and attitude during this time: his unwillingness to get attuned to the specific work milieu and to take over the perspective of others. Apparently he does not allow for the possibility of having contributed to the mess himself but emphasises the exploitative, arbitrary and degrading treatment which he suffered. In referring to his time with the first car dealer he also stresses his own willingness to stand up for his rights (as expressed in the quote which he attributes to himself). He also mentions the sensitive issue of being criticised because of his appearance: an example of what he experienced as having “to run the gauntlet”.

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<sup>21</sup> The narrator probably refers to the manager.

In comparing the two interviews one could make the mistake to privilege the viewpoints of one narrator (and not the other), especially the presentation of the professional – a tendency for which Howard Becker (1967) coined the critical concept of a “hierarchy of credibility”. There is no point in just marking what is supposedly missing in Mr. Scholz’s narrative. But the comparison apparently reveals that the social worker’s criticism did not have a lasting impact on the client’s theoretically coming to terms with his two defeats: Her voice does not seem to be a voice in his own conversation with himself in this context.

But maybe this is too easy, maybe the conversations with the social worker were somehow consequential for him in this regard even though he does not explicate it. Other parts of the interview reveal at least that he has arrived at the conclusion that he is really not suited for the work of selling cars and that the decision to become a car salesman was really not sufficiently grounded in his own biography. In retrospect he regards this choice as a mistake: *“It is not possible for me to talk other people into buying something – or how should I put it? to get them round or to mother them – or how do you call it? that they buy a car from me. That’s nothing for me. I rather prefer to be straightforward and say, „You either take it or not”. That’s actually something which you shouldn’t do as a car salesman. I already had problems with this during my retraining”*. But even if he admits that car salesmanship is not for him, there is no trace of self-criticism: When he talks about what selling cars is all about, his remarks sound derogatory. As he sees it, the manipulative character of this activity stands in a clear contrast with his own trait of being *“straightforward”*. At no point in his interview does he allude to any difficulties with taking the role of others and to the possibility that he somehow contributed to misunderstandings and a breakdown of relationships.

One topic is quite prominent in his narrative which is not mentioned by the social worker: Mr. Scholz’s specific vulnerability as an older apprentice who is treated like all the others who are much younger: *“And then the fact that the car dealer firms didn’t function well, you just got exploited as an apprentice. And I have to say that’s especially hard on someone who is thirty-one”*. His feeling of not being treated as an adult certainly contributed to the destructive dynamics of alienation and misunderstanding in the communication at his work places. There are several commentaries in the interview with him in which he emphasises that it has been difficult for him to relate to much younger people at work and in vocational school because their lives and interests seemed to be so different from his own concerns and obligations as an older person, a father of two children, etc.. It is difficult to determine, but I don’t want to rule out the possibility that the social worker was not sufficiently sensitised to this biographical vulnerability of her client. When she remembers the complaints of the firms (*“Scholz is not willing at all (...) to return to the role of an apprentice ...”*) there are not hints that she regarded them critically, they apparently fitted her own impressions of his basic difficulties to take the perspectives of other people, of his self-righteousness and his self-deceptive arrogance.

One final observation: Both narrators share the evaluation that Mr. Scholz's idea to become a car salesman was ill-founded<sup>22</sup>. The sequential analysis of the interview with him also leads to the insight that he has had difficulties in doing biographical work (cf. in the module by Sundman, Björkenheim) and in developing vocational plans which are based on biographical meaning resources. But while the social worker stresses the one-dimensional and superficial character of his vocational decisions (the prominence of the topic of *"earning good money"* and his reliance on the example of *"buddies"* who had chosen the same occupation) one can discover that his considerations were really somewhat more complex. During the phase in which he still worked hard on construction sites he had the idea for some time to retrain as an occupational therapist. As he says, *"In between I wanted to become an occupational therapist / that was a really strong wish / because that was a little bit like (work on) construction sites. But it was / but it didn't work out because the first health reform started, all those things closed down"*<sup>23</sup>. Then I said, *"That doesn't have to be that I learn this now", right, because / that was working with my hands and so on. I really could imagine to do that. (But I gave it up). I really looked after this for two years, but then it wasn't there any more"*<sup>24</sup>. Then (the idea) of becoming a car salesman came up". I think two points are important: (a) his idea to do something which is founded in his biography and creates a link to something which he is good at (*"a little bit like (work on) construction sites"* means "using my own hands"), remember his proud biographical commentary: *"well, things having to do with handcraft that's something for me"*; and (b) his prognosis about the viability of a vocation. He had witnessed the breakdown of the industrial infrastructure of the GDR and had experienced himself that important vocational skills could suddenly be regarded as superfluous.

## 5. Down and Out

After Mr. Scholz was dismissed by the second car dealer he did not receive any support from the pension fund any more. He contacted Mrs. Brühl in this time because he entered a protest against the discontinuation of the measure. *"Because he did not think he was to blame. Yeah, and he went on to demand a new entry from the pension fund. He gave the reason that it had turned out that being a car salesman was not the vocation which he was really interested in. He had had quite different notions. And he had also found out that you cannot make as much money in this branch as he had imagined in the first place. There was an interruption of one year in which the labour office and the pension fund let him stew in his own juice so to speak"*.

<sup>22</sup> Mr. Scholz uses the term „Schnellschuss“ (a „quick shot“ or „shot in the dark“).

<sup>23</sup> He apparently refers to clinics of medical rehabilitation.

<sup>24</sup> In German: „Aber das war dann doch nicht mehr so.“ This probably means: I lost interest in pursuing this goal.

After receiving unemployment benefit for the first time, he got unemployment relief afterwards, i.e., his social and material situation became more and more critical.

## 6. Starting Anew

Mr. Scholz contacted the social worker again and told her about a new plan: he would like to get a qualification to work in tax consulting<sup>25</sup>. When she asked him how he had come up with this idea he told her that he would have preferred to enter a retraining program in this field with a private educational agency (emphasising “*theory*”, a few practice placements). But since this didn’t work out he had to return to vocational retraining in firms. But he would like to look for a firm himself, he said he had “*quite a few connections*”. When Mrs. Brühl asked him about the reasons for this vocational choice he said that “*one could earn really good money*” as he had learned from a “*buddy*” who worked in this field. The social worker was critical of the prominence of this theme: “*That had been his idea already when he wanted to become a car salesman. And I saw that is absolutely in the centre for him: to earn money. He had never come up with an individual idea. I never heard, „I am convinced” or „I have chosen this because”, but he always just referred to an acquaintance who had done this: because he knew someone and he earns quite good money*”.

This quote conveys the social worker’s disappointment about the fact that the client did not formulate any idea which would reveal more of a personal attachment to a vocation and his own biographical meaning resources. Maybe she tried to probe him in this regard, especially since the retraining in selling cars had ended in such a disaster, but she gave this up after some time<sup>26</sup>.

The next step consisted of administering certain tests to find out if he was intellectually suited for this occupation. After these tests led to satisfactory results, she told him, “*Okay, then go and look for a tax consulting firm, all right? Because I don’t want to push anything on you, I don’t want to say you must go there now*”. And of course nothing happened. We had agreed on a certain period, I told him, “*I will give you two months*”. But he didn’t do

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<sup>25</sup> In German: „Steuerfachangestellter“.

<sup>26</sup> According to Mrs. Brühl she did not have the chance to probe deeper whether or not Mr. Scholz’s vocational reorientation was sufficiently grounded in his biography, since he had turned to the pension fund himself and had been successful in getting the fund to finance the retraining in his chosen field. Obviously he had given reasons for his prior failings which had sounded plausible. This created a lot of time pressure for her again.

*anything in these two months. All the contacts which he had didn't (turn out to be solid)".* I.e., the social worker tried to use the same strategy as she had done before but to no avail.

Mrs. Brühl decided to look for a training firm herself and finally found one in which Mr. Scholz had been working already for one and a half years at the time of the interview. In retrospect the narrator evaluates this time very positively: *"I was extremely lucky that this firm absolutely fitted his ideas. (...) All the employees were older than him. He felt very comfortable there"*. According to her this has to do with the fact that the employees understand his social situation and take into account that he had been sick and has to catch up with a lot which other apprentices already know. It seems to be important that older colleagues take care of him and appreciate him even though he is still *"very, very quiet"*. The narrator uses the image of a quasi-adoption: she thinks that the men in the firm *"take on a father's role for him (...) People there don't want to push anything on him, but... they have accepted him the way he is. And he must have accepted them the way they are. Because otherwise there would have been a showdown again"*. She also mentions that he has had almost no health problems during his present re-training – in contrast to the time when had worked at the car dealers' places and had been on sick leave again and again (*"I have problems with my back"*). She says that this could have been so because of different reasons: *"It can be an escape. It can also be a psychological burden that something had really burdened him which he couldn't cope with. But there haven't been almost any problems with his health during his present training"*.

During this phase he also has to attend classes in the vocational school<sup>27</sup>. The narrator says that he has been *"absolutely overstrained"* in vocational school and has had a lot of problems in classes in which he has to take exams. In order to avoid falling back behind his classmates he made use of the (individualised) educational support offered by her vocational retraining centre. *"Because he is aware of the fact that if he doesn't make it this time, then the LVA will put an end to this. They have already told him: If the measure is broken off again because of the same reasons as the first time, then his rehabilitation file (will be closed) as they call it"*. In order to stay attuned to his needs and problems the social worker stays in close contact with him and the firm (by phone calls and visits). This is the basis for organising some educational support at the centre which is sensitive to his particular situation. She says that it was important for her to learn that he should be given additional exercises for his homework in order to mark his own responsibility. (Other participants at the development

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<sup>27</sup> The German system of dual education consists of an apprenticeship section (which involves training in a company for several days a week) and a vocational school section (involving regular lessons at a state run vocational school).

workshop had come up with this idea when discussing the autobiographical interview with Mr. Scholz and learning about his dispositions. As she mentions, this change in practice had been a direct consequence of the work of the development workshop).

Coaching the client includes asking very detailed descriptive questions in order to find out about his learning strategies and the conditions of his everyday life: *“How do you learn? When do you learn?”*. She made suggestions about how to integrate learning and taking time for his family. And she also made flexible arrangements with his firm in order to support his learning process: *“Could we just have him for a whole day to do some intensive training?”*.

Mrs. Brühl is still critical of what she perceives as her client’s tendency to put the blame on others, but she also evaluates the development of their relationship on the one hand and his identity on the other hand positively: *“Of course he has found reasons again and again to justify his bad results in vocational school. Of course somehow the vocational school was to blame. Yeah, and we have tried to support him but . yeah I think he will always come up with reasons to claim, „The vocational rehabilitation centre hasn’t organised this in the right way”. What ever. But at least I could now cooperate with him very very well, there was a quite different relationship than the first time. We treat each other very honestly. He took the initiative himself to contact me when he had problems”*.

Even though she states that he still tends to put the blame on others – including her centre – if things become difficult, her overall evaluation sounds quite different from earlier references to their relationship which stressed the experience of futility: her inability to reach her client and to have any impact on (what she regarded as) his self-righteous and self-deceptive way of theorising about his problems at work and in relationships at his workplace.

In explaining this change in her client she is very modest: She does not attribute it to her own work of counselling and coaching him in the first place even though it must have played an important role in that Mr. Scholz has experienced her as someone whom he could rely on. (In a later part of the interview she also alludes to a deepening of their relationship due to the pressure which the pension fund had put on him. She thinks that he clearly understands that finishing this program is his last chance). Primarily she develops a kind of theory of pauperization which reminds me of biographical theories which are shared by many professionals working with drug addicts and which are also widespread among self help groups like Alcoholics Anonymous. By offering this theory she concludes her narrative: *“And I believe that the first experience which he had was very important for his development: The experience to really fall very deep. Because he had fallen down to receiving unemployment*

*benefit/unemployment relief during this year of interruption. And I think he needed this to think about it. Yeah that's the story".*

She offers an additional explanatory theory in a later part of the interview when she creates a link between his present very supportive work milieu and the development of his identity: *"They also give him the option to pass an additional examination because they believe in him. They have a clear understanding of his deficits and they try to really support him. And I think that they have found the right way. And he wants to work in this field if he passes his exam. And his personality has certainly changed during these years – for the better".*

One final comment: It is important to take into account that Mrs. Brühl is familiar with the narrative interview which had been conducted with her client. She mentions somewhat later in the interview that she had reacted quite emotionally when reading Mr. Scholz's narrative, because (according to her) *"this was really him: always putting the blame on others (...). There was an indirect accusation of the vocational retraining centre (in the interview) that it hadn't done anything for him".* She sounds bitter when she continues: *"He is also quite clever in his way. He really tells people exactly what they want to hear. That's what he tells people at the pension fund, what he tells the employment office, what he tells me, what he told Mr. Straus. Quite calculating".* While reading the interview partially confirmed her negative attitude towards her client (as essentially opportunistic), it also led to new insights in the context of the development workshop: Colleagues of hers came up with suggestions which were consequential for the practical work with the client. – But Mrs. Brühl's disappointment in (what she perceives as) the strategic behaviour of her client is only one side of her evaluation of him. She also thinks that he has become a different and more open person and that their relationship is built on trust.

### **Changing perspectives: The client's evaluation of his present situation**

When Mr. Scholz is interviewed he has just been working in the tax consulting firm for four months – quite some time before the interview with Mrs. Brühl took place. He apparently feels accepted by his older colleagues and appreciates that they take his biography and everyday circumstances into consideration. (This differs from his irritating work experience when he was with the two car dealers). He worries though that he lacks some important qualifications and that there might be not enough time to catch up, i.e., he feels an intense time pressure because of the two year time span which is reserved for his apprenticeship. Mr. Scholz thinks that at least three years should be reserved for retraining in vocations which are more demanding, vocations like the one which he is receiving training in right now. But he is optimistic and also develops plans for further qualifications in this field after having passed his examination.

One can also learn that this vocational choice was somewhat more complex than depicted in the interview with the social worker: He thought that this vocation might be suited for him because he always liked mathematics at school and that it would have a safe future (simply because taxes would always be collected).

In referring to Mrs. Brühl he never sounds critical, but there is a generalised critical tone when talking about proceedings of the pension fund and of the vocational rehabilitation centre: quite a few complaints about, e.g., a lack of interest in really finding out (via tests and interviews) about what an applicant might be good at and which vocational choice makes sense in terms of her or his life history and a lack of personal support during the phase of retraining. Maybe one could speak of a generalised claim attitude which has probably originated in a time when the socialist state had taken care of his life in a comprehensive manner.

As mentioned already, Mrs. Brühl's reaction to this interview is rather critical, because she is angered by (what she perceived as) his tendency to put the blame on others – including the centre at which she is working. The client's narrative does not appear to convey much self-criticism (even though he is critical of his idea to become a car salesman in retrospect), in any case he does not seem to be aware of how he contributed to his own defeat when he was an apprentice in the automobile firms. The social worker probably has the impression that she is also included in the client's general category of professionals and officials who fail to meet his expectations, even though he never singles her out for his criticism. A careful reading of his interview leads to the insight that he is well aware of the work she has done with him, even though he does not explicitly appreciate it which must be disappointing for the social worker after having invested so much time and energy. One also has to take into account that the interview with the client took place long before the interview with the social worker. As she mentions, their working relationship had become closer in the last time when she and the centre helped him to prepare for his exams and to improve his learning strategies.

## **7. Aspects of an Analytical Abstraction**

### **1. Why Triangulating Perspectives?**

In the beginning I mentioned the concept of a “triangulation of perspectives” in the social sciences (Flick 2003): the idea of grasping and relating the perspectives of different protagonists which appear in one's data in order to arrive at a deeper understanding and to build up a more differentiated picture of (a) the biographical and social processes in the lives of the protagonists and (b) the structural conditions and historical circumstances which have an impact on how they act and suffer. In the context of a further training curriculum it made sense to focus on the experiences and perspectives of both a professional and her client in order to get sensitised to the tasks of the work, its consequences and

possible blind spots. The idea has not been to thereby expose a professional or to debunk her ideas of what she has been doing, but to imagine that she is an interaction partner who could profit from learning how an outside researcher has looked at her work, has raised questions and has also taken into account the experiences and perspectives of her client. Beyond that I had in mind that other practitioners in the field of vocational rehabilitation might find it useful to read how such a researcher (who does not have their practice skills and does not share their experiential knowledge) takes the freedom to “stumble” over things which they take for granted, to ask naïve questions and to regard a client’s story as a valuable source of insights as well.

The sequential and triangulating analysis of the work processes of a professional *and* the processes in the vocational biography of her client has led me

- to appreciate the complexity of the work of the social worker who has been a sensible and reliable interaction partner of the client and has remained accessible for him in times of crises. The fact that he is still a participant in the program of vocational retraining and finally appears to be on safer ground has a lot to do with her continuous accessibility and her circumspect practice with her client and others in his work environment.

- to contextualise the process of vocational rehabilitation in the overall biography of the client<sup>28</sup>. Such a stance could also help professional practitioners to become more sensitised to the structural processes of the life course, the biographical meaning resources and vulnerabilities of clients and the consequences of their own work for their clients’ life histories and life circumstances.

- to raise some critical questions with regard to possible blind spots and the adequacy of some views and evaluations of the social worker; e.g., her emphasis on the superficiality of her client’s vocational projects – the dominance of the money motif – contrasts with his own ideas of retraining in fields which are somehow grounded in his biography (the link between his manual skills and the temporary idea to become an occupational therapist; his liking for mathematics as a source for his present vocational project etc).. This does not mean that her criticism of the lack of meaning resources of his idea to become a car salesman is not right on target, but his own deliberations are at least not as superficial as it appears in her narrative. – It is also noticeable that the social worker never mentions her client’s experience of feeling degraded in terms of age (= being treated like an adolescent apprentice by his superiors) and his feeling not at ease

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<sup>28</sup> The narrative interview with him would have contained more “biographical material” though, if the question had focused at his life history as such and not just his vocational biography.

with other apprentices who are so much younger. That does not mean that she is not aware of such problems, but it is at least reasonable to ask *if* she is sufficiently attuned to them or merely regards them as more or less irrelevant.

- to develop a critical assessment of the structural conditions of vocational rehabilitation which make it difficult for a social worker to work with a client in a way which is sensitive to her or his biography. Such an analysis of work and biographical processes might be used to shed light on bureaucratic procedures which are too rigid and which discourage and devalue the professionals' competencies in case analysis (cf. footnotes 7,18 and 26) and adequate interventions.

## 2. Elements of the Work of the Social Worker

A close look at the social worker's narrative leads to insights into the structural conditions and the "arc of work" in this field: the overall work which needs to get done sequentially and at the same time (Strauss et al. 1985: 30–39)<sup>29</sup>. A reader learns something about her work in this particular case but also about general features of professional work in vocational rehabilitation.

It has become obvious that the work of counsellors and social workers in vocational rehabilitation cannot be just reduced to counselling in a narrow sense but consists of different elements which become visible over a longer period of time. I assume that the category of "coaching" as it has been used by Anselm Strauss (1969: 109–118) in discussing "transformations of identity" could be helpful in thinking about such elements: "A coaching relationship exists if someone seeks to move someone else along a series of steps, when those steps are not entirely institutionalized and invariant, and when the learner is not entirely clear about their sequence (although the coach is)" (p. 110). I am not quite sure if the last remark in the bracket is really necessary since a coach can also lose control and lose sight of what is going on, but Strauss's discussion of such an evolving relationship between someone who is a learner and someone else who has accumulated a lot of experience in guiding other people through an important status passage contains many fruitful ideas nevertheless. As the

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<sup>29</sup> Strauss's concept of „arc of work“ was further refined in an unpublished manuscript by Fritz Schütze (1984). Schütze's refinement was used among others by Karin Bräu (2002) to study the group work of high school students and by Nick Thräne (2003) to analyse the work of driving instructors. Schütze distinguishes between four components of activity of an arc of work: (a) the component of "installing" (like the work of exploring and securing information, of planning and articulation); (b) the "social" component (interaction work, sentimental work and biographical work); (c) the component of "evaluating" (in between and in the end); and (d) the "substantive" component (which includes all activities which are necessary to cope with the specific substantive requirements of a certain arc of work).

example shows, it can sometimes be difficult to develop a coaching relationship in this context, especially if someone who is supposed to be a “learner” already knows what is good for him and is quite reluctant to let the other person be his “coach”.

Mrs. Brühl’s story demonstrates that social workers in the field of vocational rehabilitation participate in an organisational division of labour, have to develop a lot of ties to the community and important agencies and utilise their “local knowledge” in order to help a client to move on. Quite often they act as interpreters, mediators and fire fighters on behalf of their clients, but they have to be aware of the risk of an “overdose” of such activities if they do not want to lose their reputation with firms, pension funds, etc. They cannot “sell” clients very well if they do not have sufficient trust in them themselves or do not know enough about them.

One could get some insights into what is involved in finding out about a client’s history, resources and weak points, especially by encouraging him to narrate his experiences, e.g., during the initial “*information talk*”. Beyond that it was possible to learn how the social worker argued with her client over a long time span and tried to give him critical feedback when he got into trouble but failed to take into account how he contributed to the mess himself (even though she felt that her arguments and admonitions did not “reach” him and make him change his mind). This critical stance did not lead to a point where she gave up on him, even though her work experience must have felt like biting on granite in between. One especially interesting feature of her work is her engaging in a kind of field experiment (securing an apprenticeship with a BMW dealer) which can be regarded as an argumentative move in a (serious) game: The idea is to create conditions under which he can learn to be more honest with himself.

It becomes obvious that the social worker accompanied her client over a long period of time and could be reached by him, even in the time when he was not supported by the pension fund any more. He learned that he could trust her – despite or probably because of her reluctance to fawn on him. He knew that when she talked turkey to him, she was honest and serious. She did not have to agree with him.

I have also identified a few points in Mr. Scholz’s narrative which lead to critical questions as to the adequacy of some of Mrs. Brühl’s interpretations; e.g., his search for a vocation which fits him is somewhat more complex than depicted by the social worker. But it can also be seen that she had a difficult time in encouraging him to become more sensitive to the perspectives of others and to do biographical work.

### 3. Recurring Problems or Even Paradoxes of the Professional Work

There are recurring and obstinate problems in the work of professionals (doctors, lawyers, social workers, etc.) which are part and parcel of their practice: problems which often have a paradoxical quality and which cannot be abolished once and for all, even though practitioners often try to ignore their complexity or develop and legitimise pseudo-solutions which lead to turmoil in their work with clients. Such problems and paradoxes which are constitutive of professional work have been at the centre of interactionist studies published in the last one and a half decades (e.g., Schütze 1992, 1996; Riemann 2000). One example of professional paradoxes analysed by Schütze is the unavoidability of having to develop prognoses of case developments even if the empirical basis is narrow and shaky. It is helpful for professional practitioners to clearly focus on such problems and paradoxes and to discuss possible options to cope with them, because ignoring them or developing simplifying routines and rationalisations in dealing with them leads to mistakes and “cumulative mess” (Strauss et al. 1985: 160–181). Oftentimes they are not aware of their own contributions and entanglements but prefer to solely attribute a downhill course of events to the particularities of a client or patient which can be easily categorised and diagnosed as “whatever”.

A close look at the interview with Mrs. Brühl has revealed that there are also such obstinate and complex problems and tasks in her work (and in the work of other professionals in this field). I will just mention them at this point and will not go into details again<sup>30</sup>:

a) the need to apply general categories on the single case while taking care that such typifications are not forced on the case and turn into stigmatisations<sup>31</sup>;

b) the need to focus on one client while also taking into account the interests and perspectives of others who are part of his network (cf. his relationship with colleagues and superiors at the automobile firms and the issue of the “hierarchy of credibility” as it was called by Howard Becker (1967));

c) the need to demonstrate to a client how things get done vs. running the risk of creating dependencies;

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. Schütze (1997) with regard to (b) and Schütze (1992) with regard to (a), (c) and (d).

<sup>31</sup> Mrs. Brühl is very careful in this regard, but it is possible to ask critical questions nevertheless. During her professional work she has developed typifications which have proven useful in her work with clients, e.g., the typification of clients who can be characterised by the dominance of the motif of “earning quite good money”. It is possible that such a category turns out to be too crude and to distort “what’s the case”. I have pointed out that the history of Mr. Scholz’s own deliberations about meaningful directions of retraining are more complex and also oriented by the question what he is good at.

d) being sure about a likely down-hill course of a case development and the question whether or not and to what extent a client should be informed: the issue of “awareness contexts” (Glaser and Strauss 1965) in communicating with a client;

e) finding the right “dosage” in negotiating on behalf of a client and risking the loss of one’s reputation with powerful others (firms, the pension fund) whom one will need in the future;

f) the need to acquire a sound biographical knowledge base with regard to a client vs. the risk of asking too much and invading the other’s private sphere;

g) the need for biographical counselling under restrictive conditions and bureaucratic directives (especially if dubious vocational decisions are treated as “givens” and are difficult to correct).

## 8. Exercises

- Professionals working in vocational rehabilitation are encouraged to compare their own experiences of working with clients with the experiences which Mrs. Brühl reveals in her narrative. What sounds familiar? What sounds strange? Are there certain junctures at which they would have acted quite differently?

- If they participate in workshops of professionals in vocational rehabilitation they should start to tell stories about their work with clients to each other (and to ask questions based on such narratives) – similar to what happened in the interview with Mrs. Brühl.

- They are encouraged to do such interviews themselves and to engage in sequential analyses of such texts (together with colleagues). How do their own orientations towards their clients change in this process?

- Another approach to their work would be to closely observe situations of their work practice and to turn these observations into detailed fieldnotes which could be shared and discussed with other colleagues (Riemann 2005). This could become an important element in (a) fostering a self-reflective professional discourse and (b) representing one’s work to a wider audience. Such detailed fieldnotes could also deal with the issue how structural conditions and macro developments impinge on the work with clients.

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## **The Arc of Work of Counselling, Types of Action, Schemes of Counselling, Work Steps of Counselling**

### **SHORT DESCRIPTION**

This module presents the Anselm's Strauss concept of arc of work and consists the analytic description of the arc of counseling work conducted in the year 2005 with the Polish teenager who has decided to become a priest in The Catholic Church.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To Familiarise students with the concept of the arc of work.
2. To encourage analytic reflection on professional vocational activity.

### **1. Institutional and Interactional Dimensions of Counselling**

Counselling is a purposeful and organized activity conducted by specialized institutions. In Poland the most common institutionalized guidance is family, professional, medical and legal counselling.

Interest in the counsellor's interactive contact with people seeking advice originated in works by G. H. Mead and the symbolic interactionists. Counselling began to be looked at not only through the prism of the institution (organization) but – first and foremost – through the prism of social interaction. In such interaction, the counsellor and the client interact by communicating both verbally and non-verbally. Such an interaction does not always run according to strictly defined rules. The course and results of the counsellor's contact with the client, due to its non-definiteness and unrepeatability, may be difficult to

analyse. The description of the process of step-by-step assistance, aimed at seizing the situational context and relations between both sides involved in the interaction as well as the consequence of their behaviours, is very difficult. In research on counselling it is underlined that the counsellor as a professional undertaking the task of helping another person, usually takes into account all pros and cons in an individual, her surroundings and the counselling context, which can facilitate or inhibit the process of counselling and reaching the pre-set aim. The objective of interaction in counselling is not teaching the client the techniques of solving simple everyday tasks, as much as helping him/her to organize his/her attitude to important life problems in a better way. Counselling may refer to the identity of clients as well as to reflective construction of their biography.

- Counselling is therefore realized in an interactive arrangement, which facilitates the formation of new values and the occurrence of special social relations based on co-operation of participants.

- The object of an act of counselling is the problem of an individual, which leads to the disorder of the individual's attitude to himself/herself and/or to the social environment.

Therefore, the field of the counsellor's interest may embrace the family situation or the broader social context of the client.

- Most people's problems are complex tasks relating to adaptation or decision-making difficulties as well as to emotional states which an individual cannot deal with alone. In order to solve these problems, the counsellor – in contact with the client – touches on the client's particular personality traits, specific behaviours, motivations, emotions, information supplies, thinking stereotypes and identities. The proper and effective course of this contact requires cooperation and co-involvement of both sides.

- One should not forget that the counsellor himself/herself in the contact with the client must cope with his/her own emotions and stereotypes and have control over the course of interaction while setting hypotheses and projecting the course of the assistance process.

## **2. Specific Nature of Counselling Work**

In contemporary counselling work the key role of the client is recognized. This results from assumptions of the contemporary philosophy of help that is associated with the subjective treatment of the recipient. Subjective treatment is facilitated by establishing a contract with the client which can be summarized by

the formula of “open awareness context” (Glaser and Strauss 1964)<sup>1</sup>, where the client is very well informed about the role of the counsellor, planned procedures and planned duration of the contact. The situation of open awareness context gives the client possibilities of influencing the content of the contract, while the counsellor receives information about the client’s expectations and reacts to them.

In the situation of defining the contract, the opening of the awareness context is beneficial for both sides.

In the course of further work the counsellor who treats the client subjectively takes into account his/her unique features and problems, and consequently, his/her unrepeatable trajectory (despite basic common features of trajectory processes, each trajectory requires a different approach depending on its kind, phase, complexity of model, etc.). In his/her professional activity the counsellor must be aware of the fact that there are different options for solving the client’s problem. The very same problem may be solved in many different ways. During the process of helping there may appear additional problems and symptoms. Special attention should be paid to the danger of the appearance of a new trajectory as a result of an attempt to provide support. This trajectory may be of an intended and controlled character (e.g. causing “positive disintegration”) or be an effect of a mistake in the counsellor’s work – so called unintended trajectory.

### **3. Arc of Work**

The concept of “arc of work” comes from the work of Anslem Strauss and his research on the chronically ill within the structures of medical care (Strauss et al. 1985). The trajectory of illness is closely related in this concept with problems of work organization and the author considered it mainly in this context. The arc of work is understood by Anslem Strauss as: “the totality of work which has to be done in order to control the course of illness and to restore the health of the patient” (ibid: 30). Simultaneously – besides the description of the complexity of the medical work organization – Strauss also occupied himself

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<sup>1</sup> Strauss and others distinguished two types of awareness context in the situation of interaction – open and closed. E.g. in the doctors’ work, the opened context of awareness means that the patient is fully informed about the state of his/her health, while the closed context means that the patient is cut off from negative information by the doctor (Strauss, 1985: 139). Work on opening the awareness context should take into account the emotional state of the client and his readiness to accepting difficult situations.

with the personal experiences of all the people involved in the process of medical treatment. In the course of his research he developed an analytical description of the social and biographic process – a process which is very difficult to analyse because of a limited predictability of events and sometimes even total loss of control over events. The key concept of the trajectory of illness is, in Strauss' work, related to the notion of illness and is understood as **“not only the physiological unfolding of a patient's disease but the total organization of work done over that course of illness plus the impact on those involved with that work and its organization”** (ibid: 8). It should be added here that the patient, being the object of staff's impact, is also included in this work. He/she has his/her tasks in the total organization of work. Therefore, the notion of illness trajectory refers to the course of adaptation, mastering and controlling the process of illness, through different types of work and its proper distribution. It also refers to the consequences which these activities have for all the people involved in them (e.g. families and friends of the patient). Strauss' concept of the trajectory of work is very broad, it creates therefore the temptation (and possibilities) of transferring its analytical patterns to areas outside of medical care. These can be: social care, family guidance, as well as different forms of assistance dealing with transformations of clients' identities and biographic work. The analytical notions in Strauss' concept may be the basis for the description of the arc of work in reference to an unemployed person (out of work for both structural and health reasons), an immigrant, a former psychiatric patient or a member of a sect. This is legitimate from the methodological point of view, since the analyses of biography courses portraying the dynamics of formation and development of trajectory showed that these internal dynamics had a universal character and are the same in various kinds of trajectory processes (Schütze, Riemann 1992). The arc of work has a phase character and common basic proprieties.

#### **4. Arc of Work in Vocational Counselling**

The arc of work in professional counselling consists of the following elements:

1. Diagnostic work which may consist of the following:

- a) preliminary interview (establishing contract, setting goals and main tasks as well as basic work steps, which may be specified or altered in due course as a consequence of thorough analysis and contacts with the client;

b) investigation tools such as questionnaires, tests or specialist measuring devices;

c) narrative interview.

2. Work on the client's sense of safety and security e.g. adaptation of a building, lifts and different devices for the needs of handicapped people, protection of personal data, discretion, professional secrets.

3. Work on the client's sense of comfort (influence of housing conditions, respecting the client's intimacy, preparing him/her for possible discomfort, minimizing damages – choice of less evil, the meaning of perception of the social value of the client for work with him/her).

4. Psychological work (“sentimental work”), consisting of:

- a) work on the course of interaction and moral and ethical principles;
- b) trust building;
- c) work on controlling stress, disquiet, emotions;
- d) biographic work;
- e) work on identity;
- f) work relating to the awareness context – open or closed;
- g) rectification work.

5. Work planning and programming as well as the co-ordination of actions contained in the total arc of work.

6. Client's own work.

Below we present the analytic description of a counselling process, which took place in spring 2005 in a psychological consulting clinic in Poland. We begin this description by presenting the case of the client, then the reconstruction of the record of his contacts with the work counsellor follow; finally we describe elements of the arc of work which took place.

#### **4.1. Jasiak's Story**

The story of Jasiak was reconstructed on the basis of conversations with the client's parents as well as with Jasiak himself. Jasiak's accounts had the character of an open account, partly of narrative features. Jasiak – now a student in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of General Secondary School – was born in January 1988 in big Polish city. Both his parents have technical education his mother graduated from a technical chemistry school, and his father finished a constructing technical school. The mother's work/occupation involves frequent business trips, the father runs his own company. Jasiak's parents thus have clear-cut occupations

involving specific skills<sup>2</sup>. Jasiiek has a younger sister – at present a student in the junior high school. Jasiiek's family is Catholic, all members are believers and practitioners – every Sunday they attend holy mass and they also go to Częstochowa (religious centre of Poland)<sup>3</sup> to attend important religious celebrations. Jasiiek's faith is reflected in his appearance – otherwise dressing similarly to his peers, he wears a cross around his neck and a silver rosary ring on his finger. Jasiiek was brought up quite traditionally – there are definite norms and rules to which one should comply. His parents fulfil clear parental roles, despite being very busy, they are interested in their children and take real care of them. They take decisions regarding their children together and they are coherent and consistent in their demands. For Jasiiek, his grandmother is an important figure, a person who supports him in new and difficult situations.

We do not know very much about Jasiiek's earlier years. Certainly he was in the primary school and he was a healthy child. His parents describe him as a responsible person, very mature for his age and extremely determined to reach his goals. At the age of 11–12, Jasiiek became associated with the local radio broadcasting station – he came to the radio on his own answering an advert, he even persuaded the editor to let him conduct his own radio programme. Jasiiek enjoyed this very much and was proud of his own activeness and enterprise.

When Jasiiek was 14 he became an altar-boy, enjoying this occupation very much. It was a very important challenge for him when he was appointed to the job of lector – the person reading passages of the Holy Scriptures during mass. Although Jasiiek acquired some skills during his practice at the radio, the live contact with the participants of the mass turned out to be quite a difficult experience. The boy turned for help to his grandmother, who advised him to concentrate on the text and not on the behaviour of the congregation. The advice proved effective. Jasiiek tended to somewhat idealize the attitude of the congregation, according to him, they absorbed the preaching in silence and reverence. It seems that being the centre of attention is very important for Jasiiek. It was probably at this time that Jasiiek's interest in the profession of a priest appeared.

Jasiiek finished primary school and junior high school without any problems. He was however not admitted to the secondary school he selected (he did not score the sufficient number of points). Initially, he went to a different school, later on however, probably due to his parents' contacts, Jasiiek got to the chosen school. The boy was very depressed because of that failure, yet he did not mention this in the conversation with the counsellor who found out about that

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. Jasiiek's father has good manual skills – he does all the decoration work at home himself.

<sup>3</sup> Częstochowa is the best known place of the cult of St. Maria – Mother of God, The Queen of Poland in our country.

from Jasiiek's mother. Jasiiek went to science and linguistics classes. Such a profile of classes, which he attends to date, is not in accordance with his interests. Jasiiek's passion, under the influence of his favourite secondary-school teacher, became history.

In secondary school Jasiiek took part in holiday scout camp – he wanted to spend holidays with his peers. The camp tutors, observing his behaviour, gave him responsibility for one of the formal camp functions. Jasiiek was very proud of the fact that he was given such a responsible role on the basis of such a short contact.

Jasiiek practiced swimming, which is one of his favourite ways of spending free time.

In secondary school Jasiiek went out with Zosia for some time. However, when he began considering the possibility of becoming a priest, he informed Zosia about this and she understood his situation. Contacts with Zosia now have the character of friendship. This relationship is very valuable to Jasiiek. In conversation with the counsellor, he pointed out that he was pleased that he and Zosia remained friends although situations like the one that occurred between them often lead to stormy break-ups.

The year before the secondary school final exam, Jasiiek decided that on completion of school, he would continue his education in a higher minister seminar in his city. There are no entry examinations to the seminar, only notes in Polish and foreign language from the secondary school final examinations certificate and knowledge of religion are the admission criteria. The candidate also has to deliver a certificate of Baptism and Confirmation as well as references from the parish-priest and the religion teacher. Conversation with the candidate is carried out on the subject of his choice with the state minister and often this conversation decides about admission, not the school-final notes. The studies, lasting 6 years, have a stationary character<sup>4</sup> – the alumni live in the seminar, which they only leave during winter and summer breaks.

Jasiiek's father reacted fiercely to the information about his son's plans. The parents forbade Jasiiek to continue his altar-boy duties. This was very painful for Jasiiek and he even started to attend the Sunday mass at a different church, in order not to meet up with his colleague altar-boys. He missed the lector's role the most.

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<sup>4</sup> The 6 years program of studies in seminar consists mainly of classes on theology and philosophy. After the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the studies the alumni are consecrated as deacons, during the 6<sup>th</sup> year they are put in parishes into practice. Completing the master thesis is the condition for being consecrated as a priest.

## 4.2. Jasiiek's Contacts with the Career Counsellor

Jasiek's parents took the decision about consultations at a psychological-pedagogic youth consultation clinic and came to the first meeting together with their son. Jasiek was very reluctant, he came there under his parents' pressure. In the course of the first meeting, the preliminary conversation took place – the parents introduced the problem: the mother claimed that the purpose of their visit was for general advice on the matter of choice of an occupation. However, the father directly stated that his son had decided to go to the seminar and this decision worried him. The mother was calm and reserved, however the father's behaviour reflected strong emotions. Asked about the reasons for his anxiety, the father said that the decision may be premature and the son might not know any other educational possibilities. The father also expressed his regret that his son, after taking the decision about studying at the seminar, gave up private English lessons as well as the idea of passing the driving test, which, according to the father, limited Jasiek's chances of undertaking education at a different school as well as of coping in the job market. The counsellor defined her role, informing the family that she could not interfere in the client's choices, especially if they concerned a specific occupation involving a sense of mission, she could however, under Jasiek's agreement, work with him on defining his professional preferences as well as discuss various educational possibilities and related requirements. Jasiek agreed to this proposal. He was even willing to do a professional preference test on the same day. Based on this information a contract was established. The parents left, and Jasiek was left alone with the counsellor. Immediately after the parents' exit, Jasiek spontaneously began telling the history of his contacts with the Church, beginning with his undertaking of the role of an altar-boy. He felt that he had communicated his decision to his parents prematurely: *I told them too early that I wanted to be a priest and they started to panic. This was my mistake, I shouldn't have told them yet.* He said that his parents had forbidden him to fulfil the altar-boy's function. During that meeting Jasiek did the first part of Holland's test as well as summarizing the significant events from his biography.

Jasiek made an appointment for a second meeting on his own initiative. During that meeting Jasiek filled in the second part of Holland's test. A conversation about contacts with peers and with girls also took place. The counsellor found out that Jasiek had friends in the seminar, he knew the conditions of recruitment, education and housing perfectly. The conversation also concerned the risks connected with the choice of such a way of life – limitations and renouncements as well as the influence of a minister's career on

the whole course of life. It turned out that Jasiiek's awareness of all these limitations was very high.

The results of both parts of the test were discussed at the third meeting. The counsellor showed Jasiiek all the possible professional ways. The results of the test showed that the most appropriate occupations would be – an announcer – radio presenter, a minister of Roman Catholic faith and a lawyer. On the basis of the results of the test, the counsellor mentioned the possibility of studying mass communications at the Catholic university in Warsaw. Such studies would give possibilities of working at the Catholic radio broadcasting station. Jasiiek, however, did not find the proposal acceptable, because as a graduate of that university he would be a secular person and not clerical. Jasiiek also informed the counsellor that his mother had decided to lift the prohibition of fulfilling the altar-boy's role, but Jasiiek decided to wait for his father's decision on this matter arguing that since the decision was taken by both parents together, its cancellation also had to be a result of a common decision. The counsellor and the client decided together that the parents would also come to the next meeting.

On the fourth meeting Jasiiek appeared with his mother. The mother only knew that Jasiiek had visited the counsellor on his own, she did not know the content of these meetings. The counsellor, in Jasiiek's presence, informed his mother about the results of the test. The mother inquired twice if the minister's occupation was on the list of occupations integrated with the test of professional interests and preferences. Both the counsellor as well as Jasiiek – the latter not without some satisfaction – confirmed and presented the mother with the test form for her perusal. The mother wanted to find out if the test was a purely objective tool or whether the results could be influenced by the respondent's intentions. She was informed by the counsellor that using both parts of the test, comparison of the results and calculation of coefficients increased the credibility of conclusions. The mother also referred to her personal professional experiences and stated that she had little confidence in humanistic subjects – not specific enough in her opinion. She expressed an opinion that a graduate of a technical university with definite qualifications would cope better on the job market. The topic of resignation from learning English language, discussed during the first meeting, was again referred to. It turned out that Jasiiek did not in fact give up learning English, but he was not admitted to the English First Certificate examination, and due to this his learning was temporarily suspended – non-admitters were expected to find a place in other groups. Jasiiek's parents regretted this fact severely, especially his mother who believed in the necessity of continuous linguistic education. They also thought that Jasiiek, on the basis of his decision about going to the seminar, gave up other additional activities treating them as unnecessary. A conversation about the functioning of the job market in Poland, its changes and unpredictability started, among other things

the counsellor mentioned that several years ago there were engineers who had great difficulties in finding employment.

The further part of the conversation concerned the strategy of taking the school-leaving examination. Jasiiek decided to take up history, despite the fact that he was in mathematical classes. In the counsellor's opinion taking the examination in mathematics would broaden educational options, although these options would be discordant with the specific and detailed plans of Jasiiek. The mother, after familiarizing herself with the results of the test wanted to find out which university faculties would be accessible for Jasiiek if he passed his secondary school final exams in history (beside obligatory Polish and a foreign language). The counsellor summarized the possible pathways of educational careers as well as providing informative materials – leaflets, descriptions, etc. It turned out that Jasiiek was interested in some of the faculties which had not been discussed earlier and he asked if he could borrow some materials to take home. In looking through the materials his mother showed Jasiiek a lot of support. She asked if Jasiiek was afraid of a failure in applying to the state university. She told her son that there were many different ways of studying, including paid evening studies and private tertiary schools and his parents were ready to provide funding for studies of this type. His mother was particularly interested in international relations and political science because, in her opinion, the son was predisposed to such studies. The counsellor stated that she had also spoken with Jasiiek about the possibility of studying media and communication at a Catholic university in Warsaw but Jasiiek did not show interest in such an option. The mother did not pick up this suggestion either. A conversation between mother and son started on the subject of the ban to fulfilling the altar-boy duties and during it the mother realized that the ban had been very difficult for her son. Jasiiek admitted that he had sporadically evaded the ban serving at another church. The participants of the meeting came to the common conclusion that forbidden things were the most appealing. The counsellor fulfilled a mediatory role, her very presence allowed difficult and abrasive matters between the mother and the son to be discussed and explained.

The counsellor also suggested that Jasiiek read "The Magic Mountain" by T. Mann and lent him a copy of this book. The counsellor's motivation for this was twofold. First, she thought that it would be beneficial to meet at least one more time with the boy, and the pretext for this could be the returning of the book. Second, the book by T. Mann was chosen due to its plot – the theme of a dispute on freedom and piety between the characters of the book Septembrini and Naphta. Septembrini presents the attitude of rational humanism, whereas Naphta is a Jesuit – a person of reflective and spiritual nature. The counsellor was aware of the fact that reading this book may be too difficult because of Jasiiek's age and the lack of sufficient philosophical background, nevertheless she felt that reading

the book, which touched on existential choices similar to those faced by Jasiak, offered a valuable possibility for the client.

The last meeting ended with a conclusion that Jasiak, together with his parents, would acquaint themselves with the educational possibilities based on the offered materials. After a few days Jasiak appeared at the secretariat of the clinic and left the book for the counsellor together with a letter in which he thanked her for the contact and informed her that the book was altogether too difficult but that he might read it in the future. At this point contact ended.

Therefore, according to his parents' wishes, Jasiak acquainted himself with different educational options. At the same time it turned out that the minister's occupation chosen by him, was in accord with his personality and abilities. However, questions remain concerning the reality of the spiritual call. The client himself does not question it at the moment, however both parents (especially the father) as well as the counsellor have doubts and concerns relating to non-religious motivations of the client. All meetings lasted over two hours. Their end was marked by the closing hours of the counselling clinic – Jasiak showed interested in the contact and was eager to discuss issues.

### 4.3. Arc of Counselling Work with Jasiak

1. **Diagnostic work** – consists of tests, preliminary interview, conversation with the customer, observation of behaviour as well as biographic narrative statements of the client.

a) **preliminary interview** – took place during the first meeting of the counsellor with Jasiak and his parents. The aim of the visit at the consultation clinic was identified, the contract was established between Jasiak, his parents and the counsellor and the procedure of conduct was established.

b) **diagnosis based on tests** – Jasiak completed two parts of Holland's test<sup>5</sup>. The choice of the test was determined by the possibility of the client's independent test completion. When filling in the test the client has the feeling of autonomy and subjectivity in defining his/her preferences and in principle he/she establishes the list of suitable occupations on his/her own (based on the Holland theory). The results of the test in the case of Jasiak do not allow the exclusion of the minister's occupation. It certainly is the profession to which Jasiak was predisposed. Different occupations appeared as well, such as lector, psychiatrist, psychologist or lawyer (barrister). All these occupations involve contact with

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<sup>5</sup> Holland's test in English SDS – Self Directed Search – is the most commonly applied in the world method of professional interests assessment.

people and at the same time they contain an element of creativity. The test also confirmed Jasiek's self-definition as an enterprising person.

c) **diagnosis on the basis of conversations** with the client showed that Jasiek was very willing to contact the counsellor, he spoke a lot about himself, he even commented that his affability surprised him, he claimed that he had not been so open most of the time. For the counsellor these statements were an opportunity to reflect on relations within the family. She established that the client's openness towards the counsellor could be the result of communication barriers existing between the client and his parents, especially the father. Jasiek, going through the period of identity shaping, needed much attention from his close adults. The father's absence at the last meeting with the counsellor, during which the results of the counselling process were discussed, was very significant. The father's absence may imply difficulty in reconciliation with the son's choice. In the case of deep psychological work it would be important to analyse the causes of the father's behaviour.

d) the **diagnosis based on observation of behaviour** – Jasiek characterizes himself as an enterprising person. The counsellor's observation did not fully confirm that feature in Jasiek, however Holland's test, as was mentioned above, did. The counsellor's doubts resulted from the fact that enterprise, as a feature of personality, is at present very desirable among young Poles, which is the result of certain economic pressures and commonly promoted patterns of personality (the requirements of market economy).

e) **diagnosis based on narration** – the counsellor did not decide to conduct a biographic interview with Jasiek. All the information about the client's life was collected from his spontaneous accounts in course of three meetings. The parents also gave some information spontaneously during the first meeting as did the mother during the last meeting.

At this moment we have to underline that diagnosis in career counselling has the character of a process – both at the beginning of the work, as well as in the course of further contacts with the client, different hypotheses appear. These hypotheses are not only formulated by the counsellor, the client and his surroundings can have an impact too. E.g. in the preliminary phase of contacts four hypotheses relating to Jasiek's motives of choosing the minister's seminar were put forward:

1. Jasiek claimed that he wanted to become a priest to help others and thought that having one's own family makes involvement in helping others very difficult, which he knows on the basis of observation of his parents' life.

2. Jasiek's mother was of the opinion that except for religious commitment, the desire to evade failure in applying to the state academy mattered (the fear

that the trauma like the one which followed the secondary school entry examinations will repeat itself).

3. Jasiak's father negated the idea of his son's spiritual calling. He was convinced that all that his son wanted was to have a safe and comfortable position in life<sup>6</sup>.

4. The career counsellor – after the first contact and general consultation of the case with the psychotherapist, made a preliminary hypothesis that at the basis of the boy's educational decision there may lie an unconscious fear of sexual contacts and underdeveloped gender identity. Jasiak is currently in the phase of adolescence which is the period of identity shaping. The basic developmental tasks of growing up are self-cognition (also in relationships with others, especially with peers of the same and opposite sex) and initiation to the male and female social roles. The young man is supposed to concentrate on one's "I", achieve emotional independence from adults, as well as experience intimate and erotic relationships, that is to aim at achieving existential and social, coherent gender identity.

Perhaps, all of the above mentioned hypotheses are to some extent true.

In the counsellor's opinion Jasiak is a mature person in the cognitive, ethical and social sense, yet he has difficulties in realization of life tasks connected with the sphere of love and sex. The counsellor also considered the social and cultural context in which the decision about a future occupation was made. Poland is a Catholic country and Jasiak took his decision in the period of intensifying Polish Pope's – John Paul the Second's cult, which may be a meaningful fact<sup>7</sup>. Moreover, seminars and military schools offer lower admission requirements for candidates, which increases their chances of becoming a student as well as their chances of finding employment after graduation. This fact also has a special meaning because of unsuccessful educational reform which has just been conducted and which radically altered the system of secondary school final examinations and recruitment to higher schools based on these examinations<sup>8</sup>.

2. **Work on the feeling the client's safety.** In the case of Jasiak, work on the feeling of safety and security (e.g. adaptation of the building) is not relevant since he is a healthy person. Obviously it is essential to protect the personal data and professional secrets here. These matters are regulated by the law concerning all professionals. The very institutional conditions – separate room equipped

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<sup>6</sup> Catholic clergy in Poland has a very high status, often coupled with the common perception of this occupational group's affluence

<sup>7</sup> After the death of John Paul II, Polish media reported on the increased number of callings.

<sup>8</sup> Previously students took the secondary school final examination and university entrance examination separately.

with comfortable furniture and light signal over the doors – which enables keeping the client's privacy as well as ensuring the continuity of the meeting (when the lamp is on it signals to the workers and clients that they are not allowed to enter the room). Meetings are held at fixed hours, adapted to the clients' needs (counsellors work both afternoons and mornings). Pauses between the subsequent clients' visits are long enough to make each client feel he/she has sufficient quantity of time.

Jasiek's parents came with their son to the first meeting with the career counsellor. In the experience of the counsellor parents seldom accompany older teenagers to the consultation clinic. Jasiek was thus an exception in this sense. His face showed that he did not appear at consultation clinic too willingly and just agreed to accompany his parents – the calm mother and the anxious father. The counsellor had to respect the weight of the problem concerning the parents as well as take care of Jasiek's feeling of comfort. The first question: „How can I help you?” was addressed to the whole family. In reply she got the mother and father's story referring to their son's choice of the priest's occupation. The counsellor defined her role very clearly informing everyone that it was aimed at identifying professional predisposition through tests and open conversations, and only the son's agreement could authorize her to use such procedures. The counsellor turned directly to Jasiek with the question of whether he would be interested in participating in this type of work. The counsellor's behaviour, underlining her impartiality and emphasizing Jasiek's autonomy, had the result that Jasiek willingly expressed his agreement to complete the tests. The counsellor informed him that the tests would take about an hour. The parents decided to leave the office, which strengthened Jasiek's feeling of safety and comfort in contact with the counsellor.

### **3. Psychological work (“sentimental work”)**

#### **a) work on the course of interaction, moral and ethical principles.**

Interactions between the client and the counsellor should be contained within the frames of ethical norms. These matters are regulated deontological codes of practice. In Poland career counsellors are bound by an ethical conduct code of principles. Codes do not decide about all doubtful matters. The matters of respect of the customer's autonomy are obvious (though diverse, depending on the model of counselling). However, the borders of subjectivity are clearly differently outlined, e.g. in the case of the counsellor – expert and the counsellor – laissez-fairist. Moreover, problems often appear and solving them depends on intuition and the common sense of the counsellor. E.g. in the case of Jasiek the issue appeared of who was the counsellor's client – was it just Jasiek, his parents or the whole family? At the beginning of first meeting the parents located themselves in the clients role, later Jasiek took over this role, and the parents

resigned from the interaction with the counsellor. The mother appeared at the last meeting as a representative of the family again. Full recognition of the emotional situation of Jasiiek would require involvement of the whole family and even several sessions of family therapy, which lies beyond the counsellor's competences but is possible in the institution in which the counsellor works. Is the counsellor however supposed to inform the family about the necessity of family therapy or to gently suggest the possibility of such work, or should they not give out this information at all?

The client's system of norms and moral values also impacts on the course of interaction. If the counsellor's and client's systems differ considerably, then it will be more difficult for them to reach agreement. The counsellor cannot a priori assume his/her similarity with the client – he/she should recognize and reconstruct the client's cognitive system. Narrative interview can be of help here.

b) **work on trust building.** The very defining of the contract and the role of the counsellor were the bases of trust building in the case of Jasiiek. Further, the counsellor's behaviours such as following the client, manifestation of interest in him, attentive listening, not interrupting, expressing confirmation through verbal and non – verbal signals, skilful and accurate asking of questions, refraining from comments – all these allowed Jasiiek to speak freely. The client needed to share his experiences, considerations and problems with a counsellor whom he recognised as his ally.

c) **work on staying calm and controlling emotions.** Within counselling relations both clients and counsellors experience emotions. It would be a truism to say that the counsellor should control his/her emotions as well as the emotional communication with the client. On the one hand, the counsellor should be able to show positive emotions towards the client and his/her successes. Manifestation of calmness, control, optimism and confidence in the client's progress favour the development of interaction. In the described case, the atmosphere of acceptance and trust created by the counsellor made Jasiiek spontaneously tell his story. The counsellor should also take into account the clients' emotions. In the contact with Jasiiek's family, the father's anxiety was clearly revealed. The very fact that the counsellor expressed her understanding for his emotions made Jasiiek's father calm down. Concentration on the task of establishing the contract allowed the father to master his negative feelings. The question arises concerning the source of Jasiiek's fathers emotions. Several hypotheses are possible – from disappointment resulting from blocking the line of biographic and professional inheritance (earlier professional plans of Jasiiek's were the continuation of the father's occupational career), to a very far-reaching

hypothesis relating to the fathers' unaware fear of homosexuality<sup>9</sup>, etc. Work on verifying these hypotheses would however have the character of psychotherapy and not counselling. In the counsellor's opinion sessions of family therapy would help to solve difficult relations between the father and the son. Counselling work can as well constitute an introduction to further assistance processes, etc.

d) **biographic work.** The work with Jasiak is an illustration of so-called „developmental counselling”. One of the counsellor's tasks is helping the client in solving the crises resulting from the current phase of biography (here adolescence). It should be noted that the crises of the life cycle are not the result of traumatic events although they may be trajectory experiences. These crises have a normative character – each person during the course of his/her development passes through subsequent developmental stages. The task of the counsellor working with the client in the developmental crisis is one of concentration on emotional and adaptive problems, supporting development through setting off and enforcing mechanisms of psychological adaptation, and helping in passing to the next phase of biography. Obviously developmental tasks do not only refer to the adolescence period, nevertheless the counsellor's role is particularly important here. Negatively solved adolescence crises imply identity problems as well as the lack of client's maturity in different meanings of this word in future life. The counsellor should help the client in understanding the current processes as well as offer him/her support in overcoming adaptive difficulties. The counsellor helps only to activate the possibilities of the individual, bring a change in his/her attitudes, emotions and behaviours caused by the encountered problems and contributes to developing the ability for more effective coping with the problems.

e) **work on identity.** Work on identity in the case of career counselling focuses, to a large extent, on occupational identity. Identity results from the individual history of life, success or its lack in realizing the previous stages of life and from anticipation of whom an individual may be in a near or more distant time perspective. The individual's identity is also related to the definition of lifestyle in a gender and social roles context. Occupations like that of a priest, chosen by Jasiak, determine other life roles very strongly, i.e. lifestyle and ideological system as well as system of ethical values. The counsellor's task is to check if the candidate has full awareness of the consequences connected with the choice of occupation and occupational identity as well as the roles connected with them. Jasiak's choice was defined by the counsellor as non-accidental.

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<sup>9</sup> The hypothesis which appeared during the already mentioned consultation of Jasiak's case with the psychotherapist.

f) **work on the awareness context** (towards the open context). Strauss and others referring to the awareness context described situations connected with disclosing information to the ill and his/her family about his/her state (Strauss et al. 1985). In the counsellor's case, the matter of awareness context refers to the hypotheses set by him/her. The ethical attitude as well as diagnosis of the client's personality and situation, condition disclosing of the hypotheses. In the case of Jasiak the counsellor wondered whether to disclose the hypothesis relating to the sexual sphere and to Jasiak's alleged fear of erotic relationships, and if so – in which moment and how. The counsellor decided to mention this matter at the third meeting, in a situation where there was already a high level of trust and confidence, but the counsellor decided that she had no right to interfere in the intimate sphere and did not openly formulate her hypothesis relating to sexual identity. She did however unlock the problem of Jasiak's relationships with the opposite sex and accepted the client's information without any comment. Such a decision was influenced by the course of interaction with the client, and not by an earlier plan of the course of the meeting.

It should be noted that Jasiak's decision about not undertaking erotic contacts may result not from personality deficits but from a mature decision to realize a definite professional role.

g) **mediatory work**. Mediatory work is not a routine procedure in the case of career counselling. It occurs though in counselling with young people. Mediation in the case under discussion was taking place during the last meeting of the counsellor with Jasiak when the mother was also present. During the meeting Jasiak revealed that he had broken the parental prohibition on fulfilling the role of the minister, the counsellor mediated in the client's communication with his mother. Mediation may also occur in the case of work agency, when the counsellor participates in talks between the candidate and the company.

h) **rectification work**. It should also be noted that in the case of various kinds of psychological work the counsellor who has relevant qualifications may even undertake the role of a psychotherapist or refer the client to a person professionally prepared to undertake deep psychotherapeutic work. The consequences of psychological work done during the interaction with the client may be immediate – e.g. silencing strong emotions in the case of Jasiak's father, or distanced in time and deeper – e.g. work on identity or a sense of client's value<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Strauss and others give an example of the situation when the client who is shocked loses control and the staff helps him/her to 'collect' himself/herself assuring him/her that despite outburst of tears or anger he or she is still a person worthy of respect (Strauss 1985: 139–140).

Undertaking this kind of activity was not necessary in the work with Jasiek. The rectification work refers to the situations in which the client, as a result of a traumatic course of interaction with a professional (e.g. being treated perfunctorily, being given too difficult information for which they are unprepared, etc.) starts to feel strong emotions and insecurity. His/her state requires immediate intervention of the professional whose task is to restore the feeling of security.

**4. Planning, programming of work as well as co-ordination of actions contained in the total arc of work.** The counsellor leading the client takes care of the planning and programming of work. Then he/she, in co-operation with the client, establishes the frequency and duration of individual meetings as well as predicts the time of the end of work. The necessity for consultation on some cases exists. Depending on the formula of the consultation clinic staff's work, each client's diagnosis has to be discussed at team meetings or just the most difficult cases. The counsellor may also use the support of other professionals (psychologists, psychotherapists, doctors, rehabilitants), but he or she is the person leading the client<sup>11</sup>. The counsellor who worked with Jasiek used short consultation with the psychotherapist during which the hypothesis referring to possible unconscious motives of Jasiek's choice were discussed.

**5. The client's work is a** very important element in the present-day concepts of help. The work should have beneficial consequences for the client and for the course of the trajectory. The kind of task should therefore result from the kind and phase of the trajectory. The work can be carried out together with the helping person during a meeting session – e.g. the client learns to write a CV and application letters under the counsellor's guidance or exercises job interview skills of self – presentation. The work may also be done by the client alone beyond the counselling hours. E.g. the client is supposed to visit the recruitment departments at several higher schools and to collect the necessary information. Such an individual task in the case of Jasiek was reading "The Magic Mountain". The task however proved unsuitable to the client's abilities. Such an unsuitable task can lead to the clients' frustration and affect the further course of counselling interaction.

Different ways of encouraging the client's work by the counsellor (expectation, offering, negotiating, teaching) can be used. The realization of a task by the client is the object of the helping person's evaluation. The matter of standards of this evaluation is essential. Different criteria should be applied e.g.

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<sup>11</sup> Obviously if we take into account the whole system of social services the counsellor may fulfill a purely auxiliary role, whereas the main coordinator will be the social worker or the psychotherapist.

in relation to handicapped people, in whose case the very completion of a task and not its quality may be of value.

## 5. Conclusion – Difficulties and Paradoxes of Counselling Work

In the case under discussion the counsellor was in a situation of a lack of earlier information about the client and his problem. Since during the first meeting the clients were Jasiak's parents, the counsellor assumed the relevant role. However, during the meetings with Jasiak she fulfilled the role of an understanding "guardian – laissez-fairist". This role required being on good terms with the young client, supporting the atmosphere of a real conversation and acceptance of Jasiak's uniqueness (in comparison with other boys of his age). As a result of the conversation, during which the active person (the narrator) was the young man, the preliminary diagnosis and hypothesis could be made. The psychological test fulfilled only an auxiliary part – it strengthened the credibility of the counsellor's role by the introduction of the criterion of objectivity. The counsellor decided intuitively that this would be essential in her relations with the boy's parents. During the last meeting with Jasiak and his mother, the counsellor played the role of mediator. Fulfilling such a role in a situation of the multi-dimensionality of the client's problem (the ethical, ideological, biographic and family dimensions) brought up tensions related to the counsellor's identity. These tensions were connected with questions about the borders of explaining meanings (negotiation of meanings), translatability of perspectives and specifying the non-specified (ambiguity). The described tensions were strongly felt by the counsellor, which resulted from the fact that three people of different age, social roles, cognitive structures, emotionality and approach to the problem were involved in the interactions with the professional. Additional tensions resulted from the non-directive style of fulfilling the counsellors part in the situation of directive patterns of behaviour and traditions present both in Jasiaks family and in the Polish cultural system (the heritage of the socialist society). The counsellor – who wishes to work non-directively – is required to put additional efforts into keeping to such a role.

The counsellor's difficulties were connected with paradoxes<sup>12</sup> which appeared in the course of interaction with Jasiak and his parents. Already in the course of the first meeting the counsellor had to ask herself a question – who is in fact the client? Paradoxically, the father seemed to be more in need of help

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<sup>12</sup> F. Schütze enumerates a list of 15 paradoxes which can occur in professional work (Schütze 2000).

than his son. Such a situation often takes place in the case of adolescence – parents seem to be more confused and lost than their children. Sometimes they need a support group or system therapy/ family sessions. Let us now look at the history of the counsellors' contacts with different people.

**Meeting 1:**

Counsellor                               - Jasiak  
    - Jasiak's mother  
    - Jasiak's father

**Meeting 2:**

counsellor                               - Jasiak

**Meeting 3:**

counsellor                               - Jasiak

**Meeting 4:**

counsellor                               - Jasiak  
    - Jasiak's mother

Paradoxically the final contact of the counsellor with the person who needed help the most (the father) was missing.

Another paradox that requires consideration is the context of the Polish Catholic tradition – the priest's family of origin used to receive a lot of respect from society. Jasiak's parents – true Catholics, were bringing up their son in the religious spirit, but paradoxically did not approve of the boy's choice.

The last paradox is connected with the awareness context of particular people involved in interactions with the counsellor. It refers to the knowledge of the counsellor about the young client, parents' knowledge about the son and Jasiak's self-awareness. The counsellor paradoxically has more knowledge about the sexual development phases and identity formation than the client. Consequently, the counsellor's awareness of the problems related to Jasiak's sexuality was higher than his parents'.

This paradox is related to the problem of the impact of sexual identity on the choice of profession.

**Exercises for students:**

1. Discuss the possible hypotheses for Jasiak's occupational choices. Which motives can be related to these choices?

2. Think about two diagnostic methods used by vocational counsellors – the Holland test and the interview focused on a client. Compare these methods taking into account possible outcomes connected with:

- a) a/ gaining knowledge about the client's identity
- b) b/ the possibilities of conducting biographical work with the client.

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## **Working on Problems Analysed in Counselling: General Intervention Strategies and Dealing With the Uniqueness of Each Specific Life Situation**

### **SHORT DESCRIPTION**

Drawing upon case studies and discussion presented in previous modules this module discusses some of the stages and activities that are involved in the process of counselling. It draws attention to the importance of each clients unique life situation and to the counselling stages of entrance, assessment, planning and preparation for future activities, realisation of intervention strategies and closure and evaluation.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

1. To understand and to recognise the importance of each clients' individual life situation.
2. To understand the stages of and the activities involved in the counselling process and the need to adapt these to individual life situations.

Work within the framework of help systems is performed on the basis of different procedures. These procedures operate on several levels – the level of theoretical reflection on a given area of social practice, the level of resources of practical knowledge disseminated in the professional environment, the level of administrative decisions and the level of activities of concrete professional centres and teams. To ensure the effectiveness of the procedures it is necessary to individualize occupational activities taking into account the client's biographical experiences and his/her present situation.

## 1. The Uniqueness of Each Specific Life Situation

During work on the “Invite” project, biographical data have been collected. The attentive reader of all the modules has an opportunity to acquaint himself or herself – in a more or less detailed way – with life story excerpts of the clients of social and psychological help centres in different European countries.

In the module by Björkenheim, Levälahti, Karvinen-Niinikoski Mikko’s story is presented. Mikko is a Finnish workman, a widower with three children living with his partner. Alcohol, drug addiction and depression are the main problems in Mikko’s life. We know from the text that Mikko was drinking for 40 years, he tried to committed suicide and after a suicidal attempt, when he woke up in the hospital surrounded by his family, he decided to undergo treatment. His partner also underwent therapy. Mikko has been sober for last two years and is now an AA member. In the Sundman, Björkenheim’s module contains information about the German man – Mr Funke, suffering from Morbus Betcherev disease. The symptoms caused Mr Funke to resign from his occupation in heavy industry. He got into serious financial trouble, was rejected by his girlfriend and nearly lost his flat. He suffered from depression and low self-esteem. He abused alcohol and could not adapt to his new post-transformational reality.

Gerhard Riemman describes another 34-year old German man, the father of two children, living out of wedlock with his girl friend. This man has serious trouble with his spine. His health went from bad to worse when he – conscious of his illness – was trying to earn money by working hard on building sites.

In the Golczyńska-Grondas’ module we describe Polish cases – of Alicja, Ewa, Leon, Pola, Małgorzata and Elżbieta. Ewa was brought up by a single mother and was a well-looked-after child. Thanks to the support of her intimate others she finished her studies, overcame the trajectory of unemployment and now she enjoys her life. Pola, who comes from a big rural family and who graduated from rural vocational school, is unemployed. Ela, encouraged by her father to take up education in a secondary, textile vocational school, was later employed in the same textile factory as him. In the module by Borucka, Golczyńska-Grondas, which discusses issues of the arc of work, is based on the story of Jasiek – a teenager from a well-educated family who wants – against his parents wishes – to become a Catholic priest.

Professional help of different kinds was given to all the people described in the modules. Mikko took part in the Minnesota programme, in support group meetings and he also profited from family help. Mr Funke was a client of a very committed vocational counsellor, he was a participant in group therapy and self-experience groups and he went through a 2-year programme in a specialist

vocational-rehabilitative centre in Eastern Germany. The man described by Gerhard Riemann took part in vocational counselling sessions, participated in a pre-support class in the same centre as Mr Funke, served his apprenticeship as a car salesman and finally found a new job in a tax consulting firm. Leon, Pola, Alicja, Elżbieta and Maria took part in group classes organized for the unemployed by the Social Service Help Centre. Małgorzata, together with her husband and children were the clients of a family therapist, Jasiiek had sessions of vocational counselling.

Even superficial analysis of the above mentioned cases indicates the **multidimensional and meaningful differences in the life stories and present situation of the clients of support institutions**. Although it is impossible to present the complete list of these differences, we can point to the basic conditions which differentiate the clients' biographies.

First of all, the **heroes of our stories live in different countries, speak different languages and have been brought up in different cultural, political and economic circumstances**<sup>1</sup>. Beside the common European frames, in Finland, Germany, Poland and Wales we deal with distinct political systems. The actual state of social system is differentiated too. Post-socialist Poland is fighting with the problems different to those of united Germany. Great Britain and Finland seem to have more stable economic and political situations. Labour market conditions are also different – for example unemployment rates in project partner countries in 2004 were as follows: for Austria and Great Britain about 4,5%, for Italy 7,7%, for Finland 8,7%, for Germany 9,9% and for Poland 18,4% ([www.bezrobocie.net](http://www.bezrobocie.net)).

The persons to whom support has been given live not only in big cities, but also in smaller centres, towns and villages whose functioning is under the influence of a regional culture and characteristic features of their communities (in the module by Björkenheim, Karvinen-Niinikoski).

Following the **clients' fates** we can observe significant differences. The families of origin were differentiated in their structures (full families, lone-parent families, reconstructed families, etc.), in their way of fulfilling family roles, in the division of domestic labour, and – what is also very important – in

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<sup>1</sup> Due to increasing mobility of employees cultural differences have important meaning for social practitioners in the European Union countries. We can assume that foreigners will visit help centers more often and that practitioners will need to learn new professional skills. In the area of social work the culturegram is used. The analysis based on this tool refers to ten dimensions: reason for relocation, legal status, time in community, language spoken at home and in the community, health beliefs, crisis events, holiday and special events, contact with cultural and religious institutions, values related to education and work, values related to family structure, power, myths and principles (Congress 2004: 252–253).

their cultural, emotional, social and economic resources. Some of the clients – like Jasiek – were brought up by well-educated parents, engaged in the relationship with their child, others had very traumatic experiences (adverse childhood experience. In the module by Björkenheim, Karvinen-Niinikoski), or were slightly neglected but their care takers who were nevertheless able to provide them with essential emotional resources.

In spite of the unification of state educational systems, the clients' **educational careers** are differentiated too. Not only is the formal degree of education significant, but also the type of school and the quality of education processes which the client has experienced.

Dissimilarities can also be found in the analysis of the vocational careers of the clients. There are individuals who have a stable professional role in one company for their whole life and there are persons who negate the very sense of earning money through work. Others change vocations, posts and firms during their lives. There are also temporarily or permanently unemployed individuals.

The adult clients have solved the dilemmas connected with their **private sphere** in a different way – some of them are single by choice, some have stable formal or informal relationships, their partners and children are individuals who live a different life. Some are divorced, others do not have any stable relations but seek temporary hetero- or homosexual relationships.

When we consider the issue of helping practice, individual dissimilarities are very important. Some of these differences like **age** and **gender** are obvious to the observer, other are almost invisible – like **state of health**. In the module by Björkenheim, Karvinen-Niinikoski we read that there is not a life story without gender. The biographical story is gendered. Men and women go through life experiences such as unemployment or disability differently<sup>2</sup>. According to traditional perception of gender roles, for the last two centuries earning money has been seen as a man's occupation. Authors dealing with men's studies underline that work and the vocational role have a central position in an average man's life and that for a man the act of losing a job can be compared to the act of losing gender (Golczyńska-Grondas 2004, Coyle after Elliot 1996: 87). Obviously, unemployment is an experience equally traumatic for women, but women have – especially in more traditional environments – more social consent to take up domestic activities and to be maintained by their partners.

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<sup>2</sup> Since the 1930s, we have been dealing with a controversy connected with the origin of dissimilarities between women's and men's behaviours in social sciences. The research projects are leading to contradictory results (see for example Brannon L., *Gender: Psychological Perspectives* 1999). Despite of the origin issue – these differences in gender behaviour and psychological functioning can be treated as social facts.

The client's age also seems to be important. Succeeding generations participate in distinct historical events, their experiences are differentiated, and we can talk about the phenomenon called the cohort effect (in the module by Björkenheim, Karvinen-Niinikoski). Biological age means that the client is in a certain phase of the life cycle and a keen practitioner can estimate if an individual has fulfilled the developmental tasks connected with a given phase and assess the extent to which the client adapts her/himself to the norms connected with the social clock (in the module by Björkenheim, Karvinen-Niinikoski). The social environment treats persons from different generations differently. For example, in modern western culture both young and old people are infantilised by those who perceive them as persons in need of special care (the Betts' module).

Another factor which determines the individual's functioning is her/his state of health. More serious impairments influence everyday life organisation, determine chances in the labour market<sup>3</sup> and relationships with the social environment – a disabled person can be for example stigmatised by others, isolated, or – on the contrary – can act within the frames of a well-operating support network. The disabled differ in their ways of self-defining. In the module by Betts' we read that invalids – although conscious of their illnesses – do not define themselves in terms of disability and their self-concepts are similar to the concepts of "healthy" persons. At the beginning of the help process we can thus – due to our stereotypical view of world – make the mistake and ascribe a false identity to our client.

Clients in the help system are also differentiated also on a very personal level. We can classify them as **different personality types**<sup>4</sup>. Their **traits** of character, their **level of mental maturity, temperament, predispositions, view of the world, value systems and self-concepts** differ<sup>5</sup>. We face this dimension

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<sup>3</sup> The state of health does not necessarily limit labour market chances. For example, in contemporary Poland we observe that the disabled unemployed are – in some respects – in a better position than the healthy ones.

<sup>4</sup> In the areas of psychology and psychiatry we come across various personality typologies. It is important for vocational counsellors and social workers to have a coherent classification system consistent with their professional activities. In the case of team- work it is necessary to have shared classification schemes.

<sup>5</sup> Let us remind ourselves that in the first two modules (module 0 and A.1), the authors underline that certain identities can be described as disempowering – for example – the individuals ascribed to an underclass do not have enough power to resist the way others define them (module 0). There are also identities which can – due to attacks from others – threaten the life or health of the individual (e.g. Jews are attacked by the neo Nazis or Anti-Semites). On the contrary there are groups like feminists, homosexuals or Black Power activists which fight to gain some social acceptance for their collective identities.

of differentiation not only while diagnosing the client on the basis of tests and conversations but also during everyday work with the client. The client's attitudes towards other persons, especially towards the professional helper are important, too. At one extreme we have self-dependent persons who accept responsibility for their own decisions and fates and at the other extreme we meet either individuals who are dependent on others and prefer to submit themselves to external authorities, or individuals who are trying to manipulate the helpers<sup>6</sup>.

The **biographical structure currently experienced by the client** is also significant. For example, Jasiak fights for the opportunity to realise a biographical action scheme while his parents are trying to push him into an institutionalised scheme for organising biography. The behaviours of persons who experience the same biographical structure can also be distinct. Persons in trajectory can be susceptible to others' influence, too passive and apathetic or too overwhelmed by their trouble to take up activities proposed by a helper.

Social services clients have various **experiences** connected with their participation **in the labour market**. There are working persons with more or less stable positions, some – like Pola – have gone through short unemployment episodes, but are still able to gain part-time jobs regularly, some (Ela) have lost a job for the first time in their life. Others, for example, Jasiak – young enough to plan an occupational career – expect a vocational counsellor's support in their educational decisions.

The **current life situations** of persons seeking help are different too: their material conditionings, their social surroundings and their possibilities for being supported by others. **The quality and quantity of institutions to which a client can apply for support** is one of the most important factors here. The motivation of a potential client should also be considered. The decision to visit a professional helper can result from developmental crises, traumatic life events, processes of impoverishing, etc. It is important to know what events caused an individual to get in touch with a given institution (Garvin, Seabury 1996: 156, 159). Some clients appear in the help centre of their own free will, others apply for help under the pressure of their significant others (e.g. family delegate in systemic therapy) or of representatives of other institutions. There is also a group of "compulsory" clients who face the choice of legal sanctions or taking up therapy (ibidem: 156). Thus, the clients' attitudes towards the institution and its employees are differentiated, too.

Finally, clients have **different problems**. According to Compton and

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<sup>6</sup> Such a claiming person is described by G. Riemann. The client was expecting that the vocational counselor would solve all his problems connected with qualifying for a new job and with his apprenticeship at the car dealers.

Galaway, “all human living is effective problem solving”. These authors presume that: “troubles in living stem from difficulties in effective problem solving activities in relation to specific motivation (often an imbalance in hope and discomfort relative to goal achievement), capacity (needed knowledge, social skills, adaptive skills, rational skills, our interaction and relationship with external reality, and some interplay of current and past biopsychological factors in development) and opportunity (access to support system, needed resources and helping relationships)” (Compton and Galaway 1993: 371).

## **2. Working on the Problems Analysed in Counselling**

### **2.1. The Differentiation of Theoretical Concepts**

Vocational counselling as well as social work appeal to different theoretical concepts. In vocational counselling we can mention at least three different schools – behavioural, psychodynamic and person-centred<sup>7</sup>. The Polish author, H. Skłodowski, referring to A. A. Helwig’s handbook, enumerates six types of personality concepts that are used in counselling work:

1. The social influence concept directed towards understanding of the self, of interpersonal relationships and towards understanding the client’s problems and an adequate selection of intervention activities;

2. The non-directive concept, in which the relationship between a client and a counsellor has the most important meaning and in which attention is focused on the “here and now” and on the client’s feelings in the present;

3. The dynamic concept, in which individual functioning results from the subconscious sphere (classical psychoanalysis, neo-psychoanalysis) and the relation to object theory;

4. Cognitive-behaviouristic concepts according to which the experiences gained in the processes of learning are the most important for future behaviour. Change in behaviours and cognitive structures is the aim of intervention here (behaviourism, Eysenck’s theory, rational-emotive theories);

5. Humanistic-existential concepts appealing to values such as responsibility for one’s own life, mental maturity, self-directedness, development (Roger’s theory, Gestalt psychology, existential concepts);

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<sup>7</sup> We can also talk about different approaches such as, for example, the constructivist approach or cognitive approach.

6. The interactionist-systemic concept – where the basic assumption is that the subject’s activity depends on social relationships and the system in which an individual is placed (Skłodowski 1999a).

Besides this, in vocational counselling we deal with different vocational development theories which refer in their assumption to basic psychological theories (e.g. F. Parsons’ concept of estimation, developmental concepts of vocational career, psychodynamic concepts by Roe and Hoppol, the concept of decisive process model, the concept of social/sociological models of vocational development (Paszowska-Rogacz, Skłodowski 1999:140–145).

In the area of social work we face a similar situation. The authors of “Social work processes”, in the chapter “Theoretical perspectives for social work practice” describe: the ecological system theory, ego psychology, the concept of learned helplessness, the concept of stress aging and crisis and the concept of diversity and difference (Compton and Galaway 1993: 123–173). Since the 1930s it was common practice for social workers to operate on the basis of psychoanalytic theory (Garvin, Seabury, 1996: 53). Later – as a reaction to psychoanalytical trends – the option of concentrating on the present not the past evolved – “Problems are not dwelt but redefined into goals” writes the author of in the module by Björkenheim, Levälähti, Karvinen-Niinikoski.

It seems however that, apart from theoretical dissimilarities, the professional helper’s everyday practice is realised on the basis of common schemes and that there exists a set of activities which are taken up in work with clients despite the professional’s theoretical and methodological choices. We will describe this issue in the next part of this module.

## **2.2. The Helping Process**

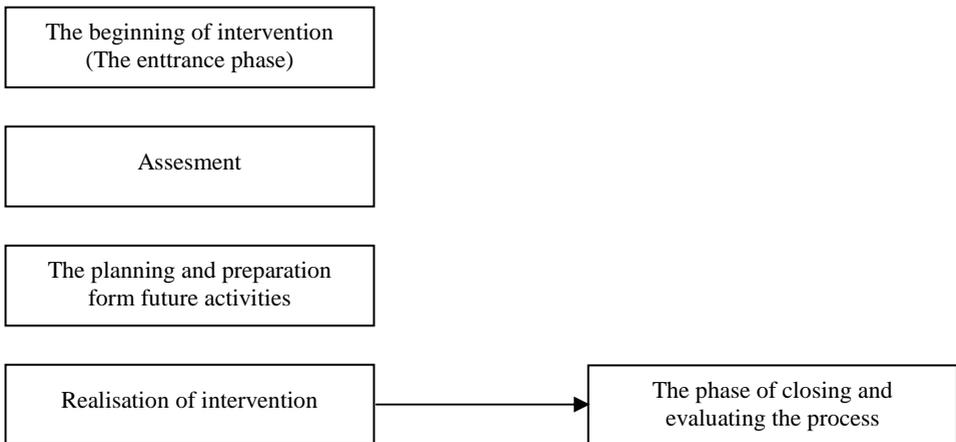
The aim of social work and counselling work is to bring about changes in individuals’ lives and in group functioning. In both areas of practice professional activity should be based on some key principles. According to Skłodowski (1999b: 101) these are:

- Care and respect for the client’s individuality;
- A stress on each person’s value and dignity;
- The supposition of each client’s freedom and her/his ability to identify key features and capacities;
- The promise of a better life oriented towards the future.

The professional helper driven by these principles will recognise that the helping process consists of several phases. Different authors identify different

numbers of phases. They also describe the activities ascribed to each phase differently. For example, Compton and Galaway (1993) write about three phases of the problem solving process: 1) contact (engagement) phase, 2) contract phase, 3) action phase which also includes the activities connected with finishing and evaluating the whole process. However, Norm Amundson (1995) identifies four phases typical of the centric career counselling model: 1) readiness (establishing the working alliance), 2) career exploitation and assessment, 3) evaluation, compromise and integration, 4) commitment, action planning and follow through. Garvin and Seabury (1996: 61–62, 74) propose a more general scheme of the helping process. They mention four components of intervention in social work practice: 1) the choice of aims at which the change is directed, 2) specifying the aims, 3) the choice of means of intervention and 4) the evaluation of the consequences of intervention. These authors describe the model of the helping process, which is realised step by step, according to the following pattern:

We follow this pattern in the next part of the text. However we should note that the duration of the helping process will depend on various factors. Sometimes a client needs just one session in which case all the mentioned phases are realised in a very short period of time (e.g. one hour). Sometimes there are several sessions, in other cases (like in the projects conducted in the centre in Strassfurt) contact with a client may last for two years.



### *The Entrance Phase*

The commencement of work with a person applying for help is connected with defining the situation between social actors. This definition is based on two

roles – the role of the client and the role of the professional who helps a client. In this phase specifying mutual expectations is very important – a client's expectations towards a practitioner and a practitioner's expectations towards a client. The client can for example assume that the professional is a person who, after having got information from them, gives “prescriptions” – points to concrete solutions (Pola refers to such an image of the psychologist's professional role in her interview). The practitioner should also be aware of the fact that he or she has some expectations and demands towards herself/himself (Garvin, Seabury 1996: 183). Amundson (1995) underlines that the first meeting of the practitioner and the client strongly influences the whole process. The vocational counsellor should create the “mattering climate”, in which the client will feel that she/he is treated subjectively, with respect and attention. The counsellor should also pay attention to the unfulfilled needs of the client who, for example, wants to talk with the practitioner and normalize his/her experience of unemployment before beginning any form of assessment (Amundson 1995). In this phase of the helping process communication procedures are first of all individualised. The professional has to pay attention to the client's style of communication and to the essence of the client's story. The client can be an open person, who is spontaneously talking about her/his problems – in this case the counsellor's main task is listening. Or – on the contrary – the client can be a timid individual who needs support and the practitioner has to be more active in the conversation and ask adequate and relevant questions.

### *Assessment*

Diagnostic techniques have been described in the module on the Arc of Work. Here we concentrate on some other issues. The aims of the diagnostic phase are:

- Specification of the client's needs,
- Recognition the client's resources,
- Initial assessment of the client's expectations of participation in the helping process.

The biographical interview is only one of the methods which can be used in diagnosing. Depending on the definition of the client's situation and the assessment of her/his emotional state, such an interview can be used as a indispensable or support method but in some cases it may be impossible to gather this type of data. Certain clients will not be eager to tell us their stories. At times, some additional diagnostic tools – like tests – must be used. For example, when a client has limited verbal skills the IQ test can explain if this lack of skills results from low IQ or from the client's personal traits. The need to

use tests can also result from the client's declared aims, for example if he/she wants to check his/her predisposition to a chosen vocation.

In planning the helping process we also need to recognize the potential barriers which can hinder or even block work with a given client. The client's resistance can be such a barrier. John Enright reveals five sources of resistance in psychotherapy. These sources should be disclosed and worked through during the initial meeting with a client. According to Enright resistance can be caused by:

1. The client's feeling of compulsion (a client was "sent" to the practitioner by another institution, she/he is under pressure from her/his relatives, she/he applies for help to avoid formal sanctions like imprisoning);
2. The contradiction between declared and real aims (e.g. an unemployed person does not really want to find a new job but desires to live properly without the necessity to work for money);
3. The awareness that it is impossible to achieve certain goals (a long-term unemployed, 55-year old workman would like to become the head of a company);
4. The expectations towards a practitioner (a vocational counsellor is too young or too old, a client would like to have the sessions with a woman and not with a man, etc.);
5. The existence of motives competing with the described goals.

Thus, a client will not resist the process when she/he wants to work on the problem, focus on the source of suffering or difficulties which are authentically experienced, feels that goals are realistic, trusts a practitioner and does not experience a situation of contradictory values or competitive aims (ABC psychologicznej pomocy 1993: 32–57). Of course, the barriers in the helping process are not necessarily the effects of a client's present situation and his/her functioning. They can also result from the macrosocial situation (the conditionings of the labour market, rates of unemployment, etc.). Work can also be hindered by the client's convictions about vocational choices<sup>8</sup>.

As mentioned in the module by Golczyńska-Grondas, Grotowska-Leder, the assessment made in the entrance phase can and should be modified in succeeding phases of the counselling process. Initial assessment of the situation gives the foundation for individualising further activities. In this phase decisions are made about anticipated time of work and about the key forms of help, for

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<sup>8</sup> Norm Amundson describes the typical myths connected with this area. Clients believe that vocational choice is made once in the lifetime, that the chosen vocation should guarantee the possibilities of total self-development and, that the proper choice leads inevitably to life success (Amundson 1995).

example about the client's participation in either individual or group sessions. This phase ends with the initial contract on taking up professional activities.

### ***Planning and Preparation for Future Activities***

In order to plan and prepare activities it is necessary to formulate and specify the problems which are to be solved, to set these problems in time frames, to make a list of the persons involved in the problems, taking account of their perception of the key issues, and finally to establish the hierarchy of difficulties (Garvin and Seabury 1996: 189–193). We define long and short-term aims, the frequency of meetings and the conditions of cooperation between the client and the practitioner. We plan forms of help, decide if and with which institutions we will collaborate. This phase is closed by the signing of a contract. In the contract we state the aims of intervention, tasks, division of labour between a client and a professional and time limits. All the elements mentioned here are tailored individually to each client. Consider for example the situation of a long-term unemployed person and a person who lost a job in the previous week. Although it seems that finding a new post is the principle aim in both cases, on the basis of the assessment it may become evident that the long-term unemployed has first to overcome his or her feelings of isolation and apathy. Thus, the first task for the counsellor may be to activate the client to take up everyday routine jobs. The next task may be connected with looking for a part-time job, etc. We may also find that this client does not have his/her basic needs satisfied, that he/she does not have any money for living and that his/her family is threatened by eviction – in such a case intervention to stabilise the life situation would be the principal activity. On the other hand, the short-term unemployed person may need to master a sense of loss and feeling of danger before attempting to look for a new job<sup>9</sup>.

### ***Realisation of Intervention***

In the phase of realisation, the professional engages in various activities: taking direct action, advising, informing, teaching, supporting and counselling. Garvin and Seabury note the following:

- Exerting influence (manipulation, persuasion founded on the practitioner's personal authority and other communication techniques);
- Tension increase – confrontation (visualizations of the client's behaviour effects, pointing out weaknesses, describing a realistic picture of the situation);

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<sup>9</sup> The reverse situation is also possible, for example, a psychiatrist working with a group of women suffering from neurosis came to the conclusion that the source of her clients' problems was the lack of work. She got in touch with the help centre and proposed cooperation aimed at solving her clients' problems of unemployment.

- Tension reduction (calming, indicating the strong points, logical reasoning, universalisations which can alleviate feelings of guilt or shame, different techniques of supporting);
- Encouraging tension reduction;
- Exercising and activating (the client is engaged in different tasks and activities).

The professional also:

- Passes on information – points out the possible solutions and their consequences, indicates other sources of information;
- Receives information from the client about the results of his/her activities, commitments, difficulties, emotions – this activity provides the base for introducing some corrections to further plans;
- Works together with the client on her/his self-esteem, sense of efficiency and his/her power of resistance against failures.

In this phase the work on biography takes place. This is only one of the possible directions of activity – “the biographical interview cannot be safely or sensibly offered as a stand-alone intervention in someone’s rehabilitation”. The professional chooses the concrete strategies, methods and techniques and individualizes her or his choices in relation to the client’s personality traits and to the course of the helping process. In Mr Funke’s case, for example, it was necessary to establish a deeper relationship between the counsellor and her client to support the client and to build his sense of value and self-direction. The work on closing the trajectory of illness, poverty and unemployment lasted for a long time. The activities of the practitioner working with Jasiak were connected mainly with informing and supporting the client in the process of making autonomous decisions.

### ***Closing and Evaluating the Process***

In the last phase we deal with summing up our activities. The client assesses the changes that took place during the common work and their effects in relation to his/her initial goals. The client reflects on his or her level of satisfaction. The skills of closing the relationship, parting with the client and evaluating our own activities are indispensable in this phase. Quite often we deal with the exchange of feedback, sometimes some special evaluation techniques like questionnaires are used.

### 2.3. Professional Activities and Practitioner's Personal Skills

Authors of handbooks as well as practitioners in the field highlight the fact that the personal skills of social workers and vocational counsellors are a decisive factor in the helping activity. Particularly in the first three phases the practitioner should concentrate on creating a climate of mutual trust and safety. Communication skills are important here – listening, paraphrasing, following the client, asking relevant questions. Among other important skills are: clarifying, summing up, giving feedback, provoking critical thinking or confronting. Certain attitudes and traits like empathy and the ability to concentrate on the client's problems are also needed. The significance of dialogue and respect must be underlined too (in the module by Björkenheim, Levälähti, Karvinen-Niinikoski). A practitioner's personal convictions and prejudices can be treated as an element of the professional's own work in the helping process. The professional should consider his/her attitudes towards the given client, to think if she/he is competent enough to support that person and to reflect on the possible influence of stereotypes on activities that have been taken up.

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## Appendix

- 1 I ( ) how you got ehm your occupation and ehm I just would like to ask you  
2 to tell me about this .
- 3 M that started with the apprenticeship (°)
- 4 I you can decide  
5 that, well I don't want to give you any guidelines. Although I can  
6 imagine too that it was already earlier as well, so partly at school  
7 there were times where you think about it or even earlier on. Well my  
8 experience is that it is sensible to begin even earlier . ehm.  
9 It's possible that the family played a role too, where you come from, what  
10 what you got on orientation there.
- 11 M mhm
- 12 I just see how it goes, you will get to know this in the course of telling me
- 13 M Ok,  
14 I start  
15 I great
- 16 M Well, with the/ so well with the profession when I was a kid I  
17 wasn't thinking about this at all, so like other people did . so . who wanted  
18 to become engine drivers or something like that
- 19 I Yeah
- 20 M that was with me that  
21 wasn't with me and the first occupation which I, well it was quite bad with  
22 me, I have to say that, because I was to the time the wall came down
- 23 I mhm
- 24 M In the first trainee/ so I was trainee right to that time, to  
25 GDR-times . . well normal jog finding<sup>1</sup>, that was all done a bit  
26 differently, I had school then, that was PW. You know this (°) that is like  
27 productive/
- 28 I don't assume too much from me. I come from the West/  
29 M that is so,  
30 like Productive Working already in school, let me say that right (°) but then  
31 in the factory as well and that's how, we were asked in the 8<sup>th</sup> , 9<sup>th</sup> grade

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<sup>1</sup> No free choice of career.

- 32 then, it got started then . whether you don't, whether we haven't got interest  
 33 in the firm to learn there, then actually I had/ then I had actually a dream job  
 34 . that was . fitter for controlling facilities
- 35 I mhm
- 36 M but there were in the GDR , in  
 37 GDR at that time, there were actually just two places for that and I've told  
 38 them straight away that we needn't to try. The two places where they  
 39 instruct trainees, that's how I/
- 40 I well, two places, where you could have  
 41 trained to be that
- 42 M nay, two . trainees so to speak
- 43 I ah, two trainees (^)
- 44 M so to
- 45 speak yes and that's why I said "Nay we needn't to try this at all", then I  
 46 started to learn fitter for heavy machinery . I applied at two firms, both of  
 47 them would have taken me in. in GDR at that time no problem, everybody/  
 48 every firm took in everyone, let me say that right (^) and I decided for that .  
 49 at my/ where I have been already through school (^) I started there, only  
 50 under the precondition / it was known then that I have problems with my  
 51 back.

- 1 I mhm
- 2 M growing differently, because I am quite big too, let me say so, the  
3 pelvis and such grew differently . but they said “Well compulsory measure” ,  
4 but I wasn’t allowed to work in the pipes and stuff where I couldn’t move  
5 and so on . . and let me say that , it was over then, when my growth was  
6 finished, let me say so, when this was finished, let me say that right (^) that  
7 with the problems with my back . and then I learnt normally there . . this  
8 was two years in GDR at that time, and right then the wall came down, to  
9 that time I finished, then I was put on short-time work in that firm  
10 immediately . . I did then . with 18 good money half a year, at that time they  
11 paid 90 % or something like that for short-.time work
- 12 I yes
- 13 M I did that for half a year .  
14 stayed on short-time work and then my parents wanted absolutely that I  
15 work, then I started to work
- 16 I mhm
- 17 M In Stuttgart, as a locksmith too, let me  
18 say that . . but I didn’t keep it up for too long, because I was too young and .  
19 my family and friends weren’t there, I was all on my own in a very small  
20 flat
- 21 I yes, yes
- 22 M just kept it up for quarter of a year (^) . then I did (.) to  
23 that time . I was unemployed again . . . then I was doing some further  
24 education so for quarter of a year to become a welder, I already had  
25 some (certificates) of a welder, let me say that, I already continued to  
26 qualify myself for quarter of a year and then I met my present girl-friend .  
27 this was eleven years ago and she . mhm lived outside of Magdeburg,  
28 that was in the direction of ( ). After that/ nay . I am  
29 getting mixed up now, then I started/ then that was finished, then  
30 I was unemployed for half a year, then I started to work as a driver  
31 for pharmacies, so only vans and did that for ( ) maybe you  
32 know that, these pharmacies that are part of a chain, which supply the  
33 pharmacies, had my/ route every day that was always the same one,  
34 wasn’t a bad job . I did that for about two years, two and a half years .  
35 then I met my girl-friend . . she did then/ I was still driving and then  
36 out of the blue he said, he gave me the notice of dismissal , because  
37 he couldn’t do it any longer, because he had lost the commissions.  
38 After that I tried to get a job in that area back there and a friend  
39 of mine, he was in that area back there as well, he met his  
40 girl-friend there as well, in that area back there, and he worked in  
41 such a ( ) firm, such a ( ) firm), I started there then

42 I mhm

43 M and I worked there for about four five years . as (  
44 ) and such, you can accept this all, let me say that, I wasn't trained in  
45 that at all and such, let me say so, but such professions such professions  
46 relating to trade that is eh/ after a few years I was foreman in that firm that  
47 is, well things relating to a trade, that is something for me

48 I mhm

49 M then was  
50 that/ then we moved back to Magdeburg from there and because my girl-  
51 friend was working in Magdeburg, then the kid/ with kids, shall I tell you this

- 1 with the kids as well ( ^ )
- 2 I hmh/ I think this belongs to life as well
- 3 M then the first
- 4 kid was born . my girl-friend has work in Magdeburg too, after that we
- 5 moved back to Magdeburg . then . I was ill for half a year . because I had
- 6 hernia but they didn't operate that at the hospital , then there was a huge
- 7 quarrel about that and so on, you know
- 8 I mhm
- 9 M then I worked . to earn good
- 10 money, I connected iron railings
- 11 I mhm
- 12 M on building sites . you might know this
- 13 I are
- 14 these the mats which are ( ) ( ^ )
- 15 M yes, right,
- 16 those really heavy ( ) right ( ^ ) . did that for about three years
- 17 . and . was foreman there, had building sites down in Bavaria. But
- 18 I did that only because of/ did that because of the money, so in
- 19 between times, because my goal was always /I always wanted to
- 20 make a retraining . with 30, let me say that, I wanted to work first,
- 21 wanted to put back some money, let me say that, so that you can
- 22 say "Yes, now you can do it" because you had kids as well and
- 23 there I said "with 30" . . so and then . . I always had problems with
- 24 my back with my disc, you know, because connecting iron railings
- 25 was a really hard job, but I always went back to work, let me say
- 26 that . . then was this over with that firm, it went bankrupt and then
- 27 I did/ I was home maybe for quarter of a year . but that was/ I had
- 28 there already my first slipped disc . with that iron railings thing, I had
- 29 there my first slipped disc and he threw me out immediately and then
- 30 I was in hospital, but they didn't operate on me, the disc was . was
- 31 already damaged, had there a real slipped disc, where they had to
- 32 get me out of the flat with the help of the fire brigade, because I
- 33 couldn't move myself anymore and I was in a lot of pain and they
- 34 Injected some strong things and so on. Then that was finished ( ^ ) . and
- 35 nothing was said there though . after that I was then/ . . I started at . firm of
- 36 steel-girder construction, such an assembly plant, with a friend again . ( in )
- 37 did that, that was over a quarter of a year and then we went on to Paderborn
- 38 to the airport . and finished that, then we came here to Hannover and then it
- 39 already started . that he didn't want to pay
- 40 I mhm
- 41 M and then you

42 always do either . you call in sick or (laughs) in any case you do  
43 something and don't go to work anymore, because . you have to think  
44 that you, maybe when he goes bankrupt or something like that, then that  
45 you don't get money right (^)

46 I mhm

47 M so I was calling in sick and that was  
48 then/ I really had problems with my back all the time, I struggled on  
49 the whole time and stayed ill (^) and the doctor said "we have to do  
50 something now" . and that dragged on over a half/ three quarters  
51 of a year, I sent the firm into

- 1 bankruptcy and did start myself the insolvency proceedings/  
 2 you can do that as a private person as well so I get my  
 3 money
- 4 I so, you did, ehm you registered insolvency for that firm
- 5 M yes, I did  
 6 that so I get my money because that was delay of payment, together with  
 7 a lawyer and he was doing that then . and then we got our money and so on,  
 8 because it would have dragged on for eternity . . and . then the health  
 9 insurance company put some pressure on me, what's going on with me,  
 10 said then that I can't continue being ill, they didn't want to pay  
 11 anymore and said "Now we have to do something", so it was said  
 12 that I shall go to the health resort
- 13 I mhm
- 14 M then I went to the health resort ( ) . was  
 15 operated there and the doctor said right away in the interview  
 16 "Well, you are just allowed to do light professions and not that what you do  
 17 now". After that someone came from the LVA<sup>2</sup> from Halle, because I was in  
 18 the health resort in Bad Schmiedeberg . someone came from Halle  
 19 and asked me and so on what I plan and whether I would like to make  
 20 a retraining and so on . and that there are certain opportunities  
 21 from the (church?) and the Bfw they have their big thing in  
 22 Staßfurt
- 23 I mhm
- 24 M such a huge object and they said there that I shall go there  
 25 for two days and shall do something like "finding-an-occupation-class" there  
 26 and so on . but actually everything was clear to me what I wanted  
 27 to do
- 28 I mhm
- 29 M that was already/
- 30 I yes
- 31 M because I talked with  
 32 friends about this, because they had done this already and  
 33 do that, so I said immediately "I want to become a car dealer"  
 34 and . then it was done with. I did that for two days, then the  
 35 time in the health resort was up and then I went immediately  
 36 to the LVA here in Magdeburg and said "Look, I want to do  
 37 retraining" . I was really taking care of that and it went relatively  
 38 quick with me ( ) Ehm . I was supposed to start in June , came  
 39 back from the health resort in April. I said there "Nay, that

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<sup>2</sup> national pension fund

40 doesn't work out this way. First I want to go into holidays  
41 for four weeks " and then they said . that I can start in  
42 December  
43 I mhm  
44 M then I started in December (^) as a car dealer (^)  
45 First they always do this pre support, because you always do at  
46 he BfW or I don't know how to say that now, in the end it is the  
47 BfW, they only pay for two years. Normally it goes over three years.  
48 There you attend such a 8-weeks-course . . and I attended this one  
49 and in January they got me a car dealership where I was suppose  
50 to start and so on and .  
51 I Could you please shortly, well I don't know how the Bfw

- 1 does this. You can 't assume the least bit with me
- 2 M yeah, well in the end
- 3 it is like that, the LVA my pension fund pays my retraining, but they
- 4 say "We only pay for two years and not for three" like a normal occupation
- 5 takes that long and so you do before to . ehm to make up that one
- 6 year, you attend those eight weeks . mhm . where Mrs. Brühl is in the
- 7 Eisvogelstreet, you do that there
- 8 I yes
- 9 M there the classes are put
- 10 together a bit, according to the similar occupations. and then you
- 11 do there/ actually that was enough, because normally in the vocational
- 12 school and such, let me say that, you only have that once a week,
- 13 classes. And where you have eight weeks on a row every day. Then
- 14 you make up for it, I would say so righ (^). The only problem was, let
- 15 me say that. I am a bit ( ) then they got me a car dealership .
- 16 interview , started there, but it went alright for only . one and a half
- 17 months in that firm there (^), because I said "That doesn't work this
- 18 way, I want to become a car dealer, I only have two years time and I
- 19 can't wash cars every day". Finish and there I said "Nay" and then I
- 20 had a few priva/ private problems , because . a lot of people knew
- 21 him and I knew him well , yeah they ( ) threw me out .
- 22 I right
- 23 M so then . me
- 24 and Mrs. Brühl were trying really hard to get a new car dealership, because
- 25 normally the apprentice/ apprenticeship would have been finished. So.
- 26 Then we found one . . but that wasn't anything good too. They didn't like me
- 27 from the first day on/ they let me run the gauntlet. They said . ehm . ((fast
- 28 till+)) interview "in suit everyday" that was BMW + so just for that I bought
- 29 myself three suits, got there wearing a suit on the first day, then they ask
- 30 me "What do you want wearing a suit here (^) please get changed" and
- 31 things like that, let me say that. Didn't work out for too long. Ehm, overnight
- 32 too be/ because you were in trial period then (^) and I was sacked
- 33 immediately , let me say that.
- 34 I yeah, yeah
- 35 M after that the car dealer
- 36 thing was finished (,) . because I didn't have an apprenticing
- 37 company anymore and let me say it this way and then I had to/
- 38 overnight the LVA said "good bye" . so, then this was done with.
- 39 Mrs. Brühl said to me that I wouldn't get another retraining again .
- 40 and after that I said "I don't believe that", then I went to the LVA
- 41 again and (did) put some pressure on them and so on. As I said,



- 1 that for me, the LVA would do that, but I could have it done at the job  
 2 centre . yes, because the LVA says then “Well, we take him in, we  
 3 pay it” . and I could have done it there, but by that time it wasn’t possible  
 4 anymore, so I had to do such a (thing now) . and from this year onwards  
 5 first of June I have started again to learn . . as an articled clerk . .  
 6 and . .
- 7 I mhm how did you come to/ to that now (?)
- 8 M actually I have always been interested in that, because I was good at  
 9 maths, let me say that, I thought that something has to happen after  
 10 the thing was the car dealer, something which really interests me
- 11 I yes
- 12 M because with the car dealer it was a bit, well a lot of people  
 13 do that and maybe you can earn good money there, although it  
 14 isn’t really like that, if you look behind it , it really isn’t  
 15 that great
- 16 I yeah yeah
- 17 M and now from the first of June onwards I  
 18 learn articled clerk . did the first eight weeks again . I know how things are  
 19 going, because I’ve just done it a short while ago. I found a good tax office  
 20 now (˘)
- 21 I mhm
- 22 M vocational school the only problem is of course that it is  
 23 very . difficult
- 24 I could you what you/
- 25 M It is really the most demanding  
 26 profession, let me say that, which you can learn without studying, let me  
 27 say so (it comes right after it) because in the vocational school you see it all  
 28 <lengthened> from the grammar school, started to/ to study, only people  
 29 like that are in the class and then with me, normal education who has only  
 30 GSCE , then all is even more difficult, have even a year less than they  
 31 have, get there and start immediately in the second year
- 32 I mhm
- 33 M those eight  
 34 weeks aren’t that great, because . you had together with other people, like  
 35 with assistant-lawyers or so, you won’t get trained in specific things, let me  
 36 say that, what it is about, but they really made progress in this year right (˘)
- 37 I mhm
- 38 M ((soft till+)) and I really have problems there (say in school, really a lot)+  
 39 things in the firm are good, because I have elderly people there,  
 40 who are understanding, who already had apprentices , who/ who  
 41 try to teach me something, ((soft till+)) that is the only good thing .

42 but it is very difficult at school + I find the system/ they say you are  
43 <lengthened> older and you are <lengthened> more mature, but let  
44 me say it like this, they come directly from school an so on, they are/  
45 normally we should learn a year longer, that is my opinion (fast till+))  
46 we should always have those three years always . it is impossible  
47 that you have to do it in two years + never in this demanding/ if I  
48 learn office administrator with commercial training now or  
49 something like that, then that is I believe not so difficult, like I've  
50 seen it with car dealer

51 I mhm ah

52 M no problem . there isn't much demanded there, let

1 me say that, but it is with those things so . pure memorizing so  
 2 like tax/ income tax and so on, you can't get it done in those two  
 3 years . I have done now half a year, so actually I have to prepare myself for  
 4 the exam

5 I mhm

6 M and then the stress at work. you get there/ earlier on I have  
 7 always been at construction sites, desk, never had that/ no computer  
 8 nothing and so on for/ for me every thing is difficult there. let me say that

9 I yeah yeah

10 M (taking in a  
 11 deep breath) . . and that's why , let me say that, that is very difficult for me  
 12 with those two years/ ((soft till+)) (well they really should ) differentiate ,  
 13 whether for some professions you could do the normal three years like (  
 14 ) that is/ + (3 sec.) I think Mrs. Brühl has chosen me for that because  
 15 (I there ) second one and she thinks now that I am really going for it  
 16 and that I am actually quite good at it ( ) ((soft till+)) but school is  
 17 really really difficult ( ) that's crazy +

18 I (are there) for people like  
 19 you who basically got into vocational school much later than the  
 20 others special supportive measures or did you have to attend a  
 21 remedial course ( )/

22 M yes, I did go there immediately , did say .  
 23 .ehm it was like that for instance my headmaster/ had first school day (^)  
 24 my/ and I was only told that only the sales tax from the first year of an  
 25 apprentice / ((fast till+)) I get there at the vocational school + they say "you  
 26 are nearly through with your income tax" after that they said that I could  
 27 have a bit if a support , ehm that was for the lessons, because I didn't have  
 28 to attend the sport class, so I got there a bit of support, but that wasn't the  
 29 right thing, because you can/ normally you have to catch up the whole lot  
 30 and ehm Bfw says already "Well, we don't get the two years paid with that  
 31 support". After that I said to them "Alright. Then we don't do the support  
 32 right now anymore, but then more intense in the time of the examination "  
 33 let me say that right (^)

34 I yes

35 M and now I try to wrangle my way through those  
 36 two years somehow because the grades ((fast till+)) aren't that  
 37 Important , the main thing is that I pass the exam later on. Let me  
 38 say that right (^)+

39 I yes

40 M that is important to me . I try to learn a lot in  
 41 the practical training, so because it is too ( ) so/ ((fast till+))

42 what a huge problem is for me+ is are the school systems. I  
43 grew up with a different school system than nowadays . I see it with  
44 my daughter. My daughter is in the fourth grade. Nowadays  
45 they do/ at my time it was like that, with us the teacher tried to teach us  
46 things at school. I believe no teacher tries this anymore nowadays ((fast  
47 till+)) well my daughter is in the fourth grade and they don't try anything  
48 there+

49 I mhm

50 M my daughter/ when I see how advanced they are in maths and how  
51 far we were at that time

52 I yeah

53 M that is very/ so I suffer because of that in school as  
54 well . and that is like that, the teacher stands in front of the  
55 class and says "Well the most important thing is your home,

- 1 not here in school, you don't learn anything here"
- 2 I yes
- 3 M then I could say to myself "I could stay home and learn at
- 4 home"
- 5 I mhm
- 6 M because it is/ teachers are in the most important subjects there,
- 7 they only take the book, which I have at home and read/ I shall take notes
- 8 and they read out of the book right (^) (6 sec.)
- 9 I mhm mhm
- 10 M ((soft till +)) that is quite
- 11 problematic+ ( 7 sec.)
- 12 I yes
- 13 M but let me say it like that , now, what I have now, is
- 14 very/ (well) the/ the things I do, what I think or so , I can imagine quite well
- 15 that I do that, let me say that, but that's . because it is with maths and so
- 16 on, that is my cup of tea, so with calculation, numbers that's my cup of tea
- 17 I yeah yeah
- 18 M but I wasn't specially (supported) by the BfW, so that I
- 19 should do this ( ) well there are additional
- 20 requirements , let me say that, that the people maybe in that
- 21 direction/ first do something a bit there, so that the people
- 22 (what kind of interests they have) or something like that
- 23 I yes
- 24 M well I/ I did talk to
- 25 a lot of people, that is even like that, that they, they get there so the other
- 26 people and you noticeIn those eight weeks . actually they haven't got any
- 27 interest in doing a retraining, actually they have to do it
- 28 I mhm mhm
- 29 M It isn't so that/ with
- 30 me it was always like that, wellIt was always like that with me in the
- 31 second case that I was happy , let me say that, and that there is somebody
- 32 who pays that, because let me say that, I don't earn bad money in this
- 33 retraining, because I get 80 % from my last salary
- 34 I mhm
- 35 M plus ferry dues, plus
- 36 money for food that's not bad, let me say that, I earn more money there
- 37 than my people in the firm and I do/ I am a retrainee , let me say so right (^)
- 38 I mhm
- 39 M you have to see that and that costs a huge amount of money, let me say the
- 40 LVA right (^)
- 41 I yes

- 42 M and you should go up with the point of view that it/ when you  
43 see  
44 a lot of people there, so and, who get worked up about everything and by the  
45 end of the day they should be happy that they got another chance, especially  
46 I in  
47 M times like this, when the job centre isn't doing anything anymore right (^)  
48 mhm mhm  
49  
50 I when  
51 M they got a chance and then they should think about what you  
do . . . but (mostly) . . . it is not the right thing (4sec.)  
yes mhm  
that was it so

- 1 roughly . . . the thing about my life
- 2 I mhm ( I found this very/ very  
3 interesting too) I got there now ehm I believe a good insight how it got  
4 from one thing to another/
- 5 M I had to do it a bit faster . I couldn't so the years  
6 now/ you don't know this yourself how it all happened precisely from  
7 1992/93 or so on/
- 8 I yes. the years, that isn't so important. A few  
9 moot points are I believe there. I would like to ask . ehm . in  
10 general from the course I got a good orientation . ehm it came to my  
11 attention that you started your telling with (you) finished school and  
12 you had a very clear idea of what you/ very ehm very clear orientation  
13 up to the point when you were told ehm that there are only those two  
14 places for that in the whole DDR
- 15 M mhm, but that was in the ninths grade,  
16 to DDR times this was coordinated in the ninths grade already , let me  
17 say that, you applied with your I believe I can't remember with your half-  
18 year certificate of the tenths grade you applied with that in the firms ,  
19 you had this sorted out in the school time, already had this sorted out
- 20 I yes
- 21 M where you start . not like nowadays that you leave school and then  
22 you don't know anything, you had this already sorted out . and during the  
23 holidays you got the replies from the firms and in my class there was nearly  
24 nobody who didn't get, who didn't get a positive thing
- 25 I I believe this was  
26 regarding that a completely different time, well
- 27 M yeah you to didn't  
28 think much about that or trainee or so, in general you didn't think  
29 much about occupation, let me say that, because you knew you get  
30 something right ( )
- 31 I yes mhm what I wanted to ask you was because you/  
32 obviously that was of special interest, well a field where there were  
33 only two places
- 34 M mhm yeah, let me say it like that, I can remember that/  
35 the name interested me . I didn't know what you do . I liked the  
36 sound of the name
- 37 I ah
- 38 M so it was only the name
- 39 I well, you had more far-  
40 reaching ideas ( )
- 41 M nay, I didn't have any ideas of what I wanted

42 to learn

43 I mhm

44 M so, and then I said, nothing with engine driver or something

45 like that, what everyone has or pilot or whatever one wants to become, with

46 me that wasn't like that right (^)

47 I yes

48 M earlier on I did a lot of sports or things

49 like that, but that wasn't good enough . in addition I had problems

50 with my knee cap already , from soccer and so on, then it got started

51 and then you didn't think much about it anyway and then the wall

52 came down and then you thought even less about it, because everything

53 was mixed up then here, then my parents always told me ((soft till +)) go

54 to work, go to work +

- 1 I yeah, I did  
 2 understand it like that too that after because because the wall  
 3 came down that basically a phase came , where regarding  
 4 occupation, other things (got more relevant) to one, what you  
 5 knew from the past what so to speak, broke down , which in the  
 6 past worked , didn't work anymore . a lot of firms got ehm bankrupt  
 7 and you are then too, if I remember correctly , you went to the  
 8 West quite early ( )
- 9 M mhm that was 90 or 91 . yes relatively young with 18, 19  
 10 I yes  
 11 M did  
 12 my driving license and  
 13 I mhm  
 14 M ((soft till +)) started immediately, but was  
 15 only for half a year+  
 16 I you did say a couple of times that that what  
 17 you did, that the importance was partly the money right, so the  
 18 thing was to earn money (which was legitimate especially in  
 19 this time ) . then you said and I didn't understand this now  
 20 completely , that you basically had the idea to do a retraining over  
 21 a long time
- 22 M yes, that has always been my idea , that I said I wanted to re-  
 23 orientate myself with 30  
 24 I aha  
 25 M and I did it like that .  
 26 I mhm  
 27 M I am 31 now and I have  
 28 done it. How I did it .  
 29 I ah  
 30 M that's a different thing you know. I really  
 31 had problems with my back , had them/ that is medically proven/  
 32 they did a CT-scan and you see it, but I can live well with it because  
 33 of my sport
- 34 I mhm  
 35 M I have ( ) back muscles, since then I have  
 36 started really to do sport, because the doctor said to me "The most  
 37 important thing with the disc is not to operate, but to get the muscles  
 38 going down there in the back " ((fast till+)) and I did that and since  
 39 then I haven't got any problems + well seldom, except, let me say, in  
 40 vocational school , I have problems there because they have bad seats  
 41 there and this forced (position) to have to sit so, but not in the firm

42 or so not at all . not in the firm , because you always get up or so .  
43 that is no problem  
44 I Ehm could you maybe to this, well I found this  
45 really interesting that you said well, that you had this long-term  
46 Idea, well to do a re-training ehm with 30. Maybe you could  
47 (tell me again), where you got this idea from, when you look, when  
48 did this idea come for the first time and what was connected with  
49 this idea  
50 M the idea came with, let me say, with 24, 25, where the first child  
51 was born and so on . my girl-friend was finished with school, with her  
52 retraining, found a good job

- 1 I mhm
- 2 M `Twas shift work, that wasn't  
3 that good. But she worked her way up quite quickly and then I always said  
4 and my mother said as well "with 30 so"/. I didn't want . to work at the  
5 construction sites all my whole life
- 6 I yeah yeah
- 7 M let me say that,  
8 I said there immediately, it was supposed to be a different job, which is  
9 not so hard for the body. Because I knew myself that it wasn't actually/ well  
10 let's say work out up to 60, well up to 35, 40 but then I would have broken  
11 down, let me say that, and (maybe then I couldn't have done anything  
12 anymore) well one knows one's own body, let me say so, when I just could  
13 train to be a fitter for heavy machinery when I was 14, 15, because I had  
14 different things/ and you always . worked , when you worked then really  
15 heavy work, so I was in pain in the evenings . sometimes I got up in the  
16 morning and was had still pains in my back and nevertheless I was supposed  
17 to go to work. This was going over years, so you know your way around  
18 somewhere, let me say that
- 19 I mhm
- 20 M that this won't turn out well over the  
21 years, that in this connection that was actually quite clear, that a retraining  
22 was needed, because to learn another occupation/ actually that wasn't my  
23 cup of tea, let me say that, that I just simply now/ I become an insurance  
24 agent or something like that and sell insurances all throughout the  
25 town, well that isn't my cup of tea, right
- 26 I yes. Was that  
27 idea of doing a retraining with with 30 ehm . was that connected  
28 with concrete ideas in terms of content . because you said earlier  
29 on that you have decided very fast to become a ehm  
30 car dealer ( )
- 31 M that was actually more than a knee-jerk reaction, let me say that.  
32 You thought about this over years, what you could do. First I thought of  
33 becoming a bank employee, how do you call them so bank/ they work in/ in  
34 the bank, I thought about that , but then it already started with the first  
35 dismissals and so on (in the banks). In just thought about earning good  
36 money, nevertheless ( ) and it was supposed to be nevertheless something  
37 for the future, where you think, that this will still exists in 30 years time
- 38 I yes
- 39 M ((fast till +)) for instance when I thought about articulated clerk , I  
40 always thought, there will always be taxes + right, that's why I do that  
41 right ( )



- 1 I mhm
- 2 M because that was so with whatsit, with working with hands and so on,  
3 I could think of that quite well, to that time (but I dismissed it then) I was  
4 really taking care of that for two years
- 5 I yes
- 6 M but that wasn't it then. Then this with  
7 the car dealer came up . where it was actually a knee-jerk reaction, I have to  
8 say that honestly
- 9 I mhm
- 10 M friends were doing that too, were finished  
11 (so I thought that's something for me too) but I realized already  
12 during the retraining that actually it isn't my cup of tea. I can't talk  
13 people into buying or so . (pf) how shall I say it, to persuade them  
14 or to mother them or however you call it, so they buy a car from  
15 you. That's not my cup of tea. I prefer to be straight forward and to  
16 say "Either you take it or you don't" but actually you can't do that as  
17 a car dealer
- 18 I yes, yes
- 19 M I had my problems with that during the retraining  
20 already
- 21 I mhm
- 22 M then those other (things) added up, that those car  
23 dealerships didn't work out , that you got exploited as an apprentice  
24 there and it is quite difficult for a 31-year old , I have to say that/ an  
25 18-year old doesn't notice that. You see it right now as well, to that  
26 time as a car dealer what they did there, well so did drive the kids  
27 from the bosses of the car dealer/ car dealerships to the doctors.  
28 They have never worked, right, only mowing the lawn right (´) and so  
29 on, a 31-year old doesn't/ if he has a mouth, he opens it, let me say that
- 30 I yes
- 31 M that's why I am actually so happy about the/ the tax office where I am now
- 32 I mhm
- 33 M well
- 34 I am partly acknowledged, although I am 31 years old, they say that it's  
35 good, try to help me, know that it is a bit difficult for me
- 36 I mhm
- 37 M that is quite good and ((soft till +)) that was very important
- 38 I yes
- 39 M let me say ( for the retraining ) that there is a firm too, which is a bit/  
40 approaches me, let me say it like that +
- 41 I yes, you described that



- 1 started, I was really happy to finally use my brains  
 2 again and so on, I really had fun, let me say  
 3 that
- 4 I mhm
- 5 M That now with those 18-years old or something like that, now I  
 6 only have 18-years old again because/ with the car dealer it was like that,  
 7 we were three, four, who did car dealer as well, who were from the Bfw as  
 8 well. We met before, that was no problem. Now I am on my own in the  
 9 class, let me say that. I really only have 18- and 19-year old there and that  
 10 Is a bit difficult, well I don't talk to them that much, let me say so, because  
 11 that's another class, because I have two kids at home and .
- 12 mhm
- 13 I when I have
- 14 M to hear what they/ what they are talking about, that aren't my problems, let  
 15 me say it like that. I have to try, to cope with it differently right (^)
- 16 mhm
- 17 I I don't go
- 18 M to mum and lie down all day . I have to cope with a whole lot other things,  
 19 let me say that right (^)
- 20 I mhm, yes
- 21 M especially with two kids, let me  
 22 say that, you have to/ & and that comes to it, two kids, then studying in the  
 23 evening, then the firm too, where you actually/ normally it is the occupation  
 24 which/ when you calculate all day long, sit in front of the computer, that tires  
 25 the brain, you feel empty, when it is closing time at half past three,  
 26 sometimes I am so empty in my head, right, so that actually I can't sit down  
 27 and study in the evening (breathing out heavily). And then there are my  
 28 kids. School . have to take care about this as well, let me say that, you want  
 29 that that / that the kids are successful. That is very strenuous and you want  
 30 to relax on the weekend as well, right
- 31 I mhm
- 32 M and not to study
- 33 I mhm mhm
- 34 M that is
- 35 the problem . ((soft till +)) a bit as well +
- 36 I mhm
- 37 M but it would really be different if
- 38 I have had those three years now, then I could have a lot/ have been there  
 39 right from the beginning, I come now into, you have to imagine that, into the  
 40 second, the second year as an apprentice and all the basics are missing
- 41 I yes

- 42 M I come into it somewhere right in the middle and . that doesn't work  
43 actually and I can't catch up too, I can't learn about this topic at home,  
44 because I don't understand it at all
- 45 I yes
- 46 M because those other basics are  
47 missing, that is based, the tax system is based on each other right (^) ((soft  
48 till +)) and that is very difficult + (3 sec.)
- 49 I mhm
- 50 M so if I were asked for my opinion  
51 about that, I would say that it is really, that for some occupations always

- 1 three years/ . it isn't possible that they say ehm you are the older and more  
 2 experienced one or something like that.yes (^) but I left school 15 years ago  
 3 I yes  
 4 M when  
 5 that adds to it .  
 6 I yes that is so like, like the way I understand that part of your  
 7 story , I would say as well, that is it sensible to look at the individual case.  
 8 Surely there are ehm measurements of retraining where you can say that  
 9 there brings in one who is experienced a lot . from which he can profit, where  
 10 you can say, that he might not need those three years, because of his work  
 11 experience , because he was train/ trained in those occupational things, which  
 12 a 17 or 18-year old can't know at all  
 13 M mhm  
 14 I surely there are different ehm fields too and it  
 15 seems that the one where you are in/ ehm belongs to them, where it is  
 16 clear that this training is demanding a lot of qualities, you are basically  
 17 handicapped, that's how I understand it, because you left school quite a long  
 18 time ago  
 19 M mhm  
 20 I the form of learning isn't fa/ familiar to you anymore, you  
 21 have to re-learn this too and there are things demanded, which/ well with  
 22 you haven't been in contact within the bounds of your occupation  
 23 M mhm  
 24 I and which you have basically you have to acquire it right from the basis  
 25 M mhm  
 26 I where  
 27 you can say surely that is a high demand, that you have to acquire all this in  
 28 that shortened time  
 29 M mhm  
 30 I If you take into consideration, what you have said  
 31 as well, that of course the life of a 30-year/ 31-year old is quite different,  
 32 where you basically/  
 33 M whereas for me actually, if I might interrupt you just  
 34 shortly  
 35 I yes  
 36 M for me it isn't too bad  
 37 I mhm  
 38 M because normally I am one of the  
 39 youngest in those measurements of retraining at the Bfw  
 40 I mhm  
 41 M because most of them

42 are nearly 40 . we even had some who are nearly 50

43 I yes

44 M who left school 30, 35

45 years ago/ well they don't become articled clerk anymore, they become now

46 maybe only office worker or something like that . but for them everything is

47 even more difficult than for me, let me say that, I was one of the youngest, let

48 I me say that .

49 M yes yes

50 normally the LVA pays only after 15 years, that you have paid into

51 the pension fund ((soft till +)) before that you only get that via

application or so + or something really fundamental happens .

1 for instance we had one there with the car dealers , he was 23 , had a car  
 2 accident , motorbike accident. He couldn't really do so much with his arms  
 3 anymore, let me say that, so that he could do his locksmith thing. I was told  
 4 <loud> that you have to pay in for 15 years (before it is worthy of  
 5 consideration) or something like that

6 I mhm mhm

7 M I just don't know how they  
 8 do that fundamentally (,) . . .

9 I mhm yes ( ) you said earlier on, that you  
 10 well you/ that you did a lot on your own initiative , so you got that  
 11 retraining financed/

12 M ehm financed, that is not a problem, let me say that, that/ ehm that  
 13 this works out, let me say that, that is nowadays, if you put pressure on  
 14 them, then you get what you want, let me put it like that

15 I mhm mhm

16 M If you are there often enough then/ actually it isn't about those funds ,  
 17 let me say that right ( )

18 I mhm

19 M I put enough pressure on them  
 20 and that's why it always worked out quite fast, explained it to  
 21 them, then they said "Well, ok" Let me say it like that, if so/ if now/  
 22 with me/ with me I am in a bad position. I had that now/ car dealer,  
 23 that was, that I got unemployed again ( ) . now you go to the job  
 24 centre

25 I mhm

26 M you can't work in your old profession anymore . what  
 27 are you supposed to do actually ( )

28 I yes

29 M actually you can't do anything  
 30 at all

31 I mhm

32 M because you are not allowed to work normally, because if  
 33 something happens ( ), let me say that, the health insurance company will  
 34 say ( ) "Nay, what did

35 I mhm

36 M you do here now . actually you are not  
 37 allowed to work anymore"

38 I yes yes

39 M If I am unlucky then something will  
 40 happen and they won't even pay me the operation or something like that.  
 41 And so, what is left over in the job centre. Then they will tell me that I

- 42 can do unskilled work or so . . . that's why it was even more important  
43 to me
- 44 I mhm
- 45 M let me say it like that, well, that's why I always say ((soft till+))  
46 that this is my last chance now, because I won't get another chance +
- 47 I mhm yes . .
- 48 M but so fundamentally I haven't got any problems with the  
49 retraining, for me, I am a better person since then, let me say so. I have  
50 fun. Haven't got financial worries
- 51 I mhm
- 52 M which have a lot there, let me say that
- 53 I yes

- 1 M I have been clever enough for that, let me say  
2 that, that you get it this way, let me say that, that was a long  
3 decisive process for me. I knew that I won't be able to work  
4 that long (´) so I thought about that and that/ that's why I knew  
5 before that I have to earn enough, so that that then/ that  
6 everything works out, let me say that. My girl-friend started with  
7 a retraining again as well
- 8 I mhm  
9 M and everybody is asking "Are you sure you  
10 have enough money" (´)  
11 I yes  
12 M I say "Nay, it's working out alright." She is  
13 done with hers (6 seconds) ((soft till +)) so, let me say that  
14 I yes, mhm  
15 M Regarding the system it is quite good for both of us (  
16 ) + . . .  
17 I mhm. Yes. I could understand this all quite good and comprehensible  
18 as well. There is one point ehm which is important to me ehm, you  
19 talked about that partly already in the interview. You are relatively  
20 / were far-reaching settings, which are carried out in such a ehm  
21 process. If you get the idea ehm now ehm to make a retraining.  
22 Ehm. You described it yourself, if this measure fails then it will be  
23 difficult to get a second one well, that means, the decision  
24 mhm  
25 M to make a retraining in a special field are very momentous .  
26 I well, basically it is also important that those processes of decisions are well  
27 supported and advice is given  
28 mhm, let me say that, that they get the right  
29 M Idea put into their heads, what they want to do  
30 definitely ( )mhm/  
31 I so that they  
32 M back it  
33 yes  
34 I and that, this is my opinion, that they don't ((soft till+)) do this at  
35 M all + (,) but they know that themselves, I believe and that's why things are  
36 getting done . but it is my opinion that it is going very very badly (,) right (´)  
37 mhm  
38 I when they say ehm "sit down here, here you've got the catalogue" and  
39 M you can choose there, the occupation so to speak, that's how I know how  
40 this goes on and then (put my finger somewhere). Well, I don't believe that  
41 they think a lot there about what everybody could do. Where they test you



- 1 let me say that I see it with me that are all my things, which I have thought  
 2 up by myself, right (˘)
- 3 I yes
- 4 M nobody gave me advice there/ well they might  
 5 have discussed it with me .
- 6 I Mhm
- 7 M what I want to do .
- 8 I yes, well, there  
 9 was on the one side, I think, you said that basically you had a clear  
 10 idea
- 11 M mhm
- 12 I well you (explained) I want to become this and that/  
 13 M exactly the way it is now  
 14 for instance. You go to the health resort (˘) at the treatment they say “You are  
 15 not allowed to work anymore” (˘) go two, three days later you shall/ (louder  
 16 till +) haven’t had the chance to talk to your family about that, are supposed to  
 17 go there, it would be best if you make a decision there right on the spot + (˘)  
 18 what you want to do. This is actually impossible
- 19 I yes
- 20 M within those two days,  
 21 let me say that, I went there immediately that/ wasn’t difficult for me, but  
 22 for a lot it was .
- 23 I nay, I find, I find it very interesting, I find what you tell me,  
 24 because these are aspects as well ehm which we will pay attention to in  
 25 the research
- 26 M mhm
- 27 I ehm I said in the beginning too that I think,  
 28 although I haven’t paid attention to retraining , I start out from that,  
 29 that they are very basic ehm life story wise settings. that you have  
 30 to find out how they take place
- 31 M mhm
- 32 I and what you have described there is yes ehm you are confronted with it at the  
 33 treatment within a short time, well what you did there/  
 34 M that was with me the case,  
 35 let me say that
- 36 I yes. At the moment I am interested in your case, well
- 37 M mhm
- 38 I you are confronted with that within a relatively short time, that you can’t  
 39 continue doing that what you used to do (˘) that you will have to do a  
 40 retraining and ehm it seems that ehm that’s how I understood you now ehm  
 41 that in your case everything happened really fast



- 1 M "Ok let's do it" I went there for  
 2 two days, I knew beforehand that I wanted to become this and that  
 3 I yes  
 4 M it's not like that, that they say now on the spot "You have to do  
 5 that now" right . it is not like that (.) you get asked/ you get asked  
 6 there, but it is quite difficult at the treatment, family isn't there  
 7 <lengthened> because normally you are not allowed to  
 8 go home  
 9 I mhm  
 10 M and then . let me say that  
 11 I surely it wouldn't have been  
 12 wrong ( ) to have more time , well with your girl-friend as well  
 13 ehm to talk about it with your family, so think about it in more depth/  
 14 I you  
 15 have that chance, but then it takes longer, well that is the problem right (^)  
 16 but you know it yourself how things are going, you are finished with the  
 17 treatment, then they say, well ok, then you have to go there twenty times,  
 18 so you get things going, let me say it like that right (^)  
 19 I yes  
 20 M ((soft till +)) after that I said "Let's do it this way then" ( ) + then  
 21 everything went really fast, if you take into consideration that I finished my  
 22 car dealer thing last year in June or July and within a year I've got my next  
 23 retraining  
 24 I yes  
 25 M well/ it can't be faster than that. And the LVA had  
 26 my documents for quite a long time, so I couldn't do anything,  
 27 let me say that  
 28 I yes  
 29 M they said ( always here in) Magdeburg "Nay, we can't  
 30 do anything right now because your documents aren't here" . then things  
 31 went relatively fast. That wasn't that clear to me, for me it was a problem/ .  
 32 this retraining. How do you call it, this, the measure happens well now not  
 33 as a trainee, how I always called it, but the job centre ( ), but let  
 34 me say that, then it was of course/ with the job centre thing it is always like  
 35 that . you have work placement only for 6 weeks, by the end of the day it is  
 36 more theoretical  
 37 I yes yes  
 38 M and of course this is better in my case, when  
 39 you work in a firm, you do learnIn those two years a few/ you get more  
 40 out of it, as if I only/ you know it yourself you have a firm now, and  
 41 a trainee comes in, he is in for 6 weeks, what am I supposed to teach

42 him ( )

43 I yes

44 M that's not a lot, let me say that, with those two years, which normally  
45 are three years, that is ( )/ the best example is at my firm ( ) we have  
46 a trainee . she is in the second year of apprentice too, exactly as far as I  
47 am, but she is working in this firm for one and a half year right ( ) and what  
48 she is able to do, I am not able to do by any means, because I have been  
49 here now for four months , she is there for one year and four months .

50 I mhm

51 M I keep catching up but that is because of me, let me say that right ( ) .

52 That is very difficult because she had already that year.

- 1 I mhm mhm yes . . .
- 2 where there possibilities which ehm ( )
- 3 CHANGE OF CASSETTE
- 4 I where you got relatively fast dismissed, if you had worked there for four weeks
- 5 then you might have noticed that it is not your cup of tea/
- 6 M yes
- 7 I are there possibilities
- 8 before you get fixed ehm on something that you well/
- 9 M I don't know that ( )
- 10 I haven't heard of anything
- 11 I yes
- 12 M let me say that, you know that from trainees, the
- 13 normal ones, there is something like a work placement I haven't heard of that
- 14 I (yes) any kinds of/ of pre-hand orientation/
- 15 M haven't heard of that. I only know that you in Staßfurt in their huge thing
- 16 there in Bfw, you can test yourself there for four weeks, but I can't imagine
- 17 that they do something there specifically for professions/ well I was going
- 18 through that there in those two days too, that's like, a lot with <lengthened>
- 19 talking to psychologists and so on, well they ask you there ( )
- 20 you can say what you like right (^)
- 21 I yes
- 22 M for me it was clear at the beginning
- 23 the others/ the one who was with me at the treatment he didn't know
- 24 anything and didn't feel like thinking about it, let me say that
- 25 I mhm
- 26 M It is
- 27 always like that as well that a lot at the treatment/ . well actually they
- 28 weren't that ill, let me say that right (^) and they then/ it's not that they really
- 29 want a retraining or have the ambition to do that. That is the problem that
- 30 you / get the people motivated for that, so that it is of use, let me say that
- 31 I mhm
- 32 M I can't imagine that there at the Bfw that they/ they always
- 33 say that they all/ it is supposed to be good, that a lot of them work
- 34 after that (that they get a job) apparently 87 % they tell us there.
- 35 That is so, that when the retraining is finished that you are looked
- 36 after a bit
- 37 yes yes
- 38 M they are getting fixed up with jobs or/
- 39 not fixed up but it's asked around and you always get
- 40 send offers ( ) that's how I have heard it, I
- 41 don't know it, but I have heard it, that you get a bit looked

- 42 after there . that isn't a bad aspect, let me say that, in  
43 this time of apprentice, if I am a normal trainee or at  
44 the job centre . I haven't got a contact actually but  
45 that isn't bad actually at the Bfw
- 46 I yes  
47 M there is always one coming around, if  
48 you/ let me say that/
- 49 I mhm  
50 M how shall I put it ( 5 seconds) well  
51 they drop in
- 52 I yes  
53 M but it has to/ actually/ well, they only do it , let me say  
54 that, because they have to right (^) it is of no use . right (^) that they drop in

- 1 at the firm/ You don't understand this now right( )  
 2 I mhm well not right now/ I  
 3 have the feeling you mean more than I understand  
 4 M <lengthened> yes . for  
 5 me it is of no use at all and it's in my firm/ but it/ you always have, I've got a  
 6 telephone number where I can phone up anytime, if I, let me say that, if  
 7 I had problems at school, then they would maybe help me now, that's not  
 8 that, well you always have a contact, you are <lengthened> always/ let me  
 9 say that so to so speak that's not/ that's better than with a lot of other  
 10 things, you get ( ) as I said, after that too . it is something there  
 11 I yes . those visits ehm at the job do they happen automatically ( ) or when  
 12 you make it clear ( )  
 13 M nay, nay they happen automatically  
 14 I automatically  
 15 M mhm everyone has a person who looks after one, in my case it is Mrs. Brühl  
 16 I yes  
 17 M and she comes around every six months or so .  
 18 and talks to  
 19 I talks to you ( )  
 20 M talks to my boss  
 21 I your boss  
 22 M in our firm it is like that that you get called in and then  
 23 I yes  
 24 M they ask, whether there are problems  
 25 I mhm  
 26 M ((soft till+)) actually there aren't any , that was it then +  
 27 I how was it when you actually had problems ( ) like with your  
 28 old job/  
 29 M that was only , let me say that, I wasn't a long time in that firm, so  
 30 she didn't come around , she wasn't there, she wanted to come, but it was  
 31 over and done with by then, I was out of it already  
 32 I mhm  
 33 M right ( ) that was actually with each of them only a bit more than  
 34 a month or two months, let me say that  
 35 I and then there wasn't the/ the  
 36 possibility or you haven't seen the possibility that basically to talk about that  
 37 outside the time where it was clear that it will be difficult ( ) and you get  
 38 difficulties that ehm the person who looks after you could come earlier or  
 39 (wouldn't have been that possible)  
 40 M well with the first one I didn't think that  
 41 I would get along , it happened there overnight, with the second one I

42 already had the feeling that I knew there will be problems. And it was like it  
43 then, if you are honest now . nobody believed me anymore, they thought it  
44 was my fault

45 I mhm

46 M Mrs. Brühl and so on had the opinion that it was a bit/ . that  
47 is was my fault as well right ( ) . (although) I said that I don't believe that

48 I yes yes

49 M and what you see now too and that's why she  
50 recommended me for this, because I started with another  
51 motivation now again. I talked with Mrs. Brühl about  
52 everything, what I think, when there were  
53 problems with my illness and so on, because I had to get

- 1 injections at school now and again, (with my back) and so on let me say that,  
 2 when I sit there for too long . I talk with her about that and it seems that she  
 3 likes that
- 4 I mhm
- 5 M that wasn't the case with my first retraining . she  
 6 knows that I haven't got any problems in the firm. When I phone up then she  
 7 asks me
- 8 I yes
- 9 M I say then "Nay, nothing" because I/ whereas I would say  
 10 something now, if I got problems, I would say "Nay, something has to happen  
 11 there", so that then, when you know that it won't work out for much longer  
 12 then you can search (for another firm) in the run-up yes,  
 13 I certainly
- 14 M because when the note of dismissal is there/ well now it is/ now it is finished,  
 15 let me say that, you've got/ for instance with me my quarter of the year is over
- 16 I mhm
- 17 M so the firm can't say overnight/ you've got your  
 18 dismissal( ) too
- 19 I yes, yes
- 20 M a month/ and you can look around  
 21 easily right ( ^ ) only because with the car dealerships (that was always) in the  
 22 trial period, there they could do that overnight/ came to the firm and tomorrow  
 23 I didn't need to come anymore, let me say that right ( ^ ) and they could do that  
 24 without giving any reasons right ( ^ )
- 25 I well ehm I am looking on this  
 26 from the outside , well my impression is ehm well when it finally happens that  
 27 the dismissal is given out, it will be rather difficult to cancel that again
- 28 M mhm
- 29 I basically it is important to intervene before that, doesn't matter in which  
 30 case, well basically . before this happens that then the employee/ that the  
 31 employee says "Ok, you don't have to come back anymore" so that you talk  
 32 about your problems (which are there) before that and so see, whether it is  
 33 possible to eliminate them because as a rule such a dismissal won't be taken  
 34 back ( ) once it is given out. Then it will be left by that
- 35 M always with (the trainee always) ((soft till +)) but I haven't got any doubts  
 36 with my whatsit now, I do believe, that I can pull through my two years there  
 37 without any problems
- 38 I yes
- 39 M Is alright +
- 40 I mhm
- 41 M I think it is better now, but by the

42 end of the day that was all my ( ) that I do that/ that I do that again  
43 now  
44 I mhm  
45 M right (^) I said "I want to become that" and everyone /  
46 from the LVA they were shaking there heads and said "Alright then"  
47 it is something quite different now with the articulated clerk than the  
48 car dealer  
49 I yes, yes  
50 M well with me there was nothing with finding . that was  
51 actually/ and I only can talk about these things, which I have heard from  
52 others, what I was aware of ( ) how the people are

1 I mhm mhm  
2 M many haven't got the right motivation right ( ) there are a lot of people yes  
3 I yes but it  
4 M isn't much better at the job centre, let me say that, which do the  
5 retraining there, let me say that right ( )  
6 mhm  
7 I maybe they are more motivated there at the Bfw, but depends on the  
8 M people  
9 yes  
10 I well, for instance we had (where I did car dealer) the class was  
11 M all quite motivated , what I recognized there ((fast till +)) well, I was the loner,  
12 because I was the only articled clerk (sometimes I was the only pupil) in the  
13 lesson let me say that, so where you didn't come to know the others  
14 yes  
15 well for me, if I had something to say, three years would be important to me  
16 I yes  
17 M because I think that it is important for some occupations, very  
18 important, that there would always a better support given, where  
19 I the people decide what they shall do that would be really/  
20 M yes  
21 that would be, let me say that, that you really test what they are  
22 able to do, that you really/ maybe not test but that you say with them, like the  
23 way we do it with CV , and ask what you think and hobbies and stuff, check out  
24 I the private stuff, that you see "Well, that could be the direction" that you advice  
25 M them a bit before that and that it then a bit longer/ whereas actually you've  
26 got enough time because it is never that they from the Bfw or LVA say ,  
27 that takes / takes half a year, three quarter's of year/ or a year, you can  
28 get this over with within this time  
29 mhm mhm  
30 let me say that, that the people are really motivated and that  
31 they know then too what they are supposed to do, that you really find out what  
32 the man/ what he is able to do, let me say so  
33 mhm . . yes, well .  
34 I alone from understanding, regarding what those decisions determine then too (  
35 M that is quite a lot) there I have ehm learnt a lot from you of what you told me  
36 (well) to understand that there were basically plans, which you had for a long  
37 time . which are all of a sudden/ well the idea of ("I will do it some time later  
38 I on ) a retraining"/  
39 everyone is different there  
40 yes  
41 let me say that

42 certainly

43 I have always been structured, let me say that, clear and structured,

44 M when I go into holidays/ everything is planed pre-hand, in the run-up right (^)

45 I mhm

46 M nothing is going wrong there, everything is according to

47 I plan, not on the dot, but let me say planed on half an hour right (^) like a

48 M Christmas party and such, I plan this all pre-hand . that's

49

50

51 I

52 M

53

- 1 why it was planed with the retraining but not everybody is like that/ (a lot of  
2 people aren't like that)
- 3 I ( ) have to get everyone there where he is .  
4 and have to do a good consultation for every individual case and that/ it has  
5 to be basically, that is my point of view different to everybody else's,  
6 because people are different, but it is always about, those far-reaching  
7 decision, which result from a retraining in the professional view, to go with  
8 them in this way that you can say, the prospects that it will be done  
9 successfully are ehm after all, what you can evaluate ( )
- 10 M mhm
- 11 I ehm there is one question left over for me, you have told me beautifully like  
12 how the whole way has developed up to now so to speak ( ) ehm now you  
13 are well with the second retrain/ retraining . you have also told me how you  
14 ehm get along with it ehm maybe you could just shortly tell me what your  
15 idea is how it could develop further at the moment . well what your ideas  
16 ehm are how this could develop further professional , on the basis of what  
17 you have experienced there
- 18 M well if it goes according to my idea, I want to  
19 become a tax consultant
- 20 I so you want to start your own  
21 business
- 22 M mhm (no) , that is a long way because to become a tax  
23 consultant you have to work first for 10 years, have to work for 10 years  
24 first, it's not that you just become it like that
- 25 I mhm
- 26 M well, I would have to  
27 finish my articted clerk ( )
- 28 I yes
- 29 M then there is the tax assistant<sup>4</sup>, you can become  
30 that after three years ( )
- 31 I mhm
- 32 M with a very hard exam, let me say so right ( )
- 33 I mhm
- 34 M then after 10 years you can become tax consultant and  
35 ((soft till +)) only a few get there, let me say that, ( )  
36 especially the chambers, they decide that like "Do we need  
37 a few tax consultant or not" and then they let them  
38 all flop +
- 39 I mhm

---

<sup>4</sup> Original „Steuerwart“; that's something in between of articted clerk and tax consultant.



- 1 I will achieve it/ whereas . . . I say to that I could take my time there,  
 2 I want to stand on my own two feet first for a while, that I do that for  
 3 I three, four years, my kids are grown up by then too  
 4 M yes, yes and  
 5 then I can really make a go for it, because tax consultants aren't absolutely all  
 6 I that young  
 7 M mhm mhm  
 8 most of the time it starts with ((soft till +))  
 9 40, 45 let me say that on average, because they have to have this work  
 10 experience first + or you study, then it goes a bit faster . . . but I want to go a bit  
 11 further ((soft till +)) (but it is always) depending on whether I pass the exam,  
 12 I which is always very/ very difficult +  
 13 Well but that sounds  
 14 like all in all that you have a long-term occupational prospect or  
 15 M Idea in your mind  
 16 I mhm  
 17 M that  
 18 I only have to see then . it requires  
 19 that I pass the exam first, definitely I won't be taken over by my firm, because  
 20 they always have only a few trainees, you know that already ( )  
 21 ) maybe there is a possibility because we are quite a big firm ( )  
 22 I mhm  
 23 M what you get offered there, maybe you go in a firm, like  
 24 into bookkeeping or something like that right ( )  
 25 I mhm  
 26 M ( ) you can do everything there, let me say that right ( )  
 27 I yes yes  
 28 M whereas  
 29 they get better paid than articled clerks  
 30 I mhm  
 31 M ((soft till +)) anyway in the East they are  
 32 badly paid + it's a money thing as well, I have two kids, you have to pay there a  
 33 bit too right ( )  
 34 I mhm  
 35 M It doesn't seem that it gets cheaper  
 36 I I know (both are  
 37 laughing) I have two kids at home as well (9 seconds)  
 38 M I have plans there,  
 39 how it is supposed to go on, always under the condition/ you can always say  
 40 "Sure, I pass" right ( )  
 41 I mhm

42 M ((soft till +)) but what now directly/ where I will start, you will see that  
43 then how the offers are (maybe you move away from Magdeburg), let  
44 me say that + because my girl-friend has a good occupation, had  
45 one before where she would always find work, but she didn't want  
46 to do that any longer , that was geriatric nurse, because of the  
47 shifts and so on, now she is working as an ergotherapist, is nearly  
48 done with it and actually it is . looked for everywhere ((soft till +)) ( )  
49 in Magdeburg, which is well paid, let me say that, where I would get more in  
50 the West  
51 I mhm

1 M and that's how it looks like with me too +  
2 I yes  
3 M ( ) my sister has moved away  
4 as well, let me say that, she lives down there at the ( ) Sea . that  
5 would be a possibility as well . . to do something  
6 I at least you would be a bit  
7 older than to that time regarding moving ( )  
8 M and I would go with my family  
9 I yes  
10 M to that time all on my own/ ((soft till +)) to that time friends and  
11 so on were important + now the family is the main person, let me  
12 say it like that, when you have your normal job, you come home  
13 In the evening, family and kids, you are running to capacity . on  
14 the side doing sports, my girl-friend (has a horse ) and we  
15 don't see each other that much  
16 ((LOOSE CONNECTION))  
17 END  
18

## Key to signs of transcription

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| .                 | short break                             |
| ..                | medium break                            |
| ...               | longer break                            |
| (( 5 sec.))       | long break                              |
| ( )               | word not understood/ possible utterance |
| <u>emphasised</u> | word emphasised                         |
| :lengthened:      | utterance lengthened                    |
| :>softer<:        | softer in comparison to normal volume   |
| :<louder>:        | louder in comparison to normal volume   |
| &                 | „fast connection“                       |
| „we go ..“        | quotation                               |
| ((faster till +)) | comment on utterance                    |
| (,)               | voice goes down                         |
| (^)               | voice goes up                           |
| (-)               | voice in the balance                    |
| (?)               | question                                |
| th/ the           | self-correction                         |
| [...]             | remark of the interviewer               |
| M                 | narrator                                |
| I                 | Interviewer                             |

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## **General rules regarding submission of articles**

1. The journal only reviews and publishes articles in English. Authors writing in any other language are welcome to submit English translations of their work.
2. Articles submitted must be original works of their authors, not published previously and must not have been submitted for a review to another journal.
3. Articles that do not conform to the rules will be returned to the authors for appropriate revision, prior to being submitted to the review process.
4. It is the responsibility of authors to obtain permission from copyright holders for reproducing illustrations, tables, figures or lengthy quotations previously published elsewhere.
5. Articles must be between 5000 and 8000 words in length, including footnotes and references. Articles of more than 8000 words will not be accepted into the reviewing process, and will be returned to the author.
6. All manuscripts should be accompanied by an abstract of 100-150 words (if you have a command of Polish, please prepare abstract also in Polish language version) and 5 or 6 key words.
7. Please do not use any special formatting, also when using headings and subheadings.
8. Each table should be typed on a separate page. Insert a guideline, e.g., [Table 1 about here] at the appropriate place in the manuscript.
9. Tables and figures should have short, descriptive titles. All footnotes to tables and their source(s) should be typed below the tables. Column headings should clearly define the data presented.
10. Use endnotes, not footnotes. Endnotes should be indicated by superscript numbers in the text. They should be collected at the end of the text and should be kept to a minimum.
11. Submitted articles should be prepared in MS Word format.
12. Please follow the American Sociological Association text formatting style available at:  
<http://www.asanet.org/page.wv?name=Quick+Style+Guide&section=Sociology+Depts>
13. Articles will be subject of review by at least two reviewers. Every effort will be made to reach a decision about publication within three months.