

# Effectiveness of face-to-face career counseling: The role of working alliance

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## Introduction

Since the 1970s, working alliance has been extensively studied in the field of psychotherapy and personal counseling (Horvath & Greenberg, 1994). Researchers' inability to find large differences in effectiveness across therapies led them to consider the alliance as a common factor explaining that psychotherapies are generally effective. Currently, this process variable is regarded as a key variable in explaining outcomes in therapeutic interventions (Martin, Garske, & Davis, 2000).

In the field of career counseling, it is commonly assumed that relational aspects are less important. Consequently, almost no studies have been conducted to study empirically the impact of working alliance in this context (Heppner & Hendricks, 2003). However, there is an increasing call to support the integration of career and personal counseling as comprising comparable process variables (Bedi, 2004).

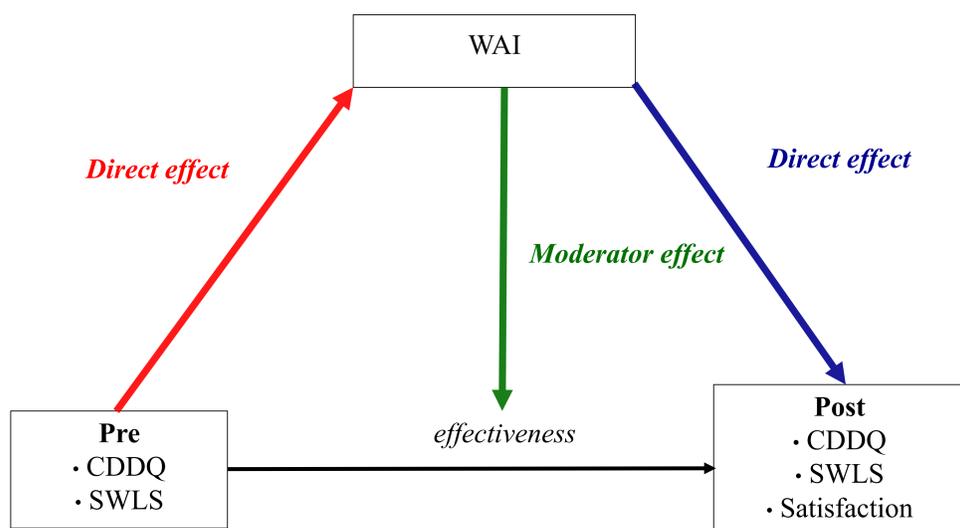
The authors hypothesized that working alliance has an important role in career counseling effectiveness. More specifically, it is assumed that working alliance and outcome variables not only have direct influences on each other, but also that working alliance has a moderator effect on the evolution of the outcome variables from the beginning to the end of the intervention.

## Materials and Method

### Participants

The sample is composed of 188 career counseling clients, 94 women and 93 men, between 14 and 56 years of age (mean age = 21.72,  $SD = 7.36$ ). 69% were students, 19% were working and 12% were unemployed.

### Study design and instruments



Note. WAI: Working Alliance Inventory (Horvath & Greenberg, 1989)  
CDDQ: Career Decision-Making Difficulties Questionnaire (Gati et al., 2000)  
SWLS: Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985)  
Satisfaction with the intervention (Rossier et al., 2002)

## Results

The results indicated that initial levels of vocational indecision as well as satisfaction with life slightly to moderately predicted the level of working alliance (see Table 1). Moreover, the level of working alliance has a massive impact on the client's satisfaction with the intervention (see Table 2). Finally, the level of working alliance has a moderator effect on the evolution of vocational indecision, specifically on the subscale "lack of information" (see Figure 1).

**Table 1. Influence of the initial level of outcome variables on working alliance**

R square change	Working alliance			
	Total WAI	Goal	Task	Bond
Satisfaction with life	.04 **	.04 **	.02 *	.03 **
CDDQ Total	.04 **	.07 **	.02 *	N
Lack of Readiness	.03 **	.04 **	N	.03 *
Lack of information	N	N	N	N
Inconsistent information	.08 ***	.11 ***	.05 **	.03 *

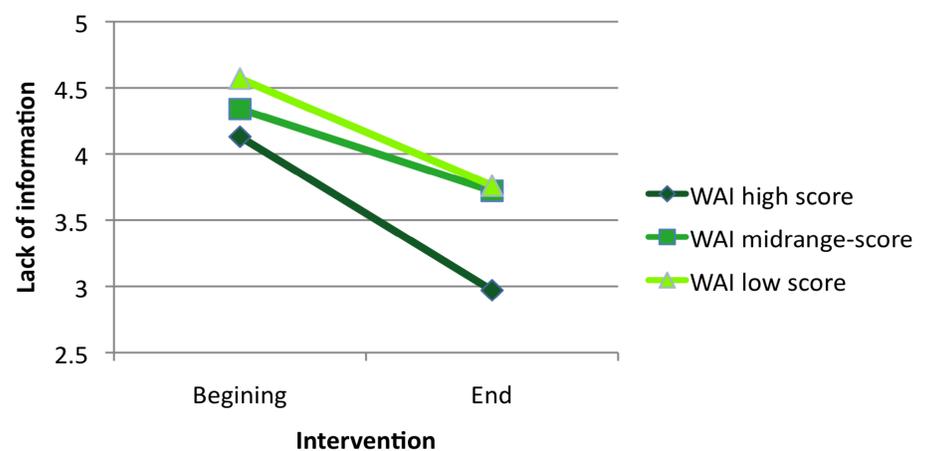
Note. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 2. Direct and moderator effects of working alliance on outcome variables**

R square change	Working alliance			
	Total WAI	Goal	Task	Bond
Satisfaction with life	N	N	N	N
CDDQ Total	.02 **	.02 **	.02 **	N
Lack of Readiness	N	N	N	N
Lack of information	.07 ***	.08 ***	.07 ***	.02 *
Inconsistent information	N	N	N	N
Satisfaction	.32 ***	.24 ***	.33 ***	.18 ***

Note. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .01$

**Figure 1. Moderator effect of working alliance on the evolution of indecision**



## Discussion

These results yielded some important information for understanding the role of the working alliance in the process of career counseling and for the development of career counseling techniques:

- ✓ The development of the working alliance is dependant, in part, on the clients' personal characteristics. Specifically, it seems more difficult to reach agreement on intervention goals with clients who present high levels of inconsistent information.
- ✓ The quality of the working alliance developed between the client and the counselor had a massive impact on the perception of the quality of the service. Especially if the tasks of the intervention were well understood.
- ✓ The working alliance has a moderator effect on decreasing the clients' lack of information. Where alliance is high, this moderator effect boosts career counseling effectiveness.

This study attested that relational aspects and more specifically the working alliance, are key variables in the context of career counseling effectiveness.

## Reference

Masdonati, J., Massoudi, K., & Rossier, J. (in press). Effectiveness of career counseling and the impact of the working alliance. *Journal of career development*.

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