



# Practical wisdom in probation

Portrait of the working alliance  
with mandated clients

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# Practical wisdom

*Practical wisdom is a concept found in the Greek philosophical tradition.*

*Aristotle distinguishes different forms of knowledge<sup>1</sup>. Two of these forms are relevant to us:*

*General knowledge (episteme) or logic: this is knowledge obtained through research and logical reasoning. This form of knowledge leads to generally accepted rules of thumb for correct action.*

*Prudence (phronesis) or practical wisdom: this is knowledge obtained by 'practical virtue'. Practical wisdom arises through mediation between rules of thumb from general knowledge and considerations in special situations. This form of knowledge plays an important role in work that is not aimed at creating a tangible object, but at acting ethically and influencing. Practical wisdom is not a single act, because practical wisdom can only be developed by learning from mistakes. Practical wisdom is a property, which consists of the constant striving - including acceptance of trial and error - for the 'virtue of the equilibrium between two vices.' For example, 'courage' as the right balance between cowardice and recklessness.*

*Much Madness is divinest Sense -  
To a discerning Eye*

*Emily Dickinson*

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle (384-322 BC): Ethica Nicomachea, book IV.

# Preface

In this publication, we show how probation officers put the findings of the study ‘working alliance with mandated clients’ into practice.

The Research Group Working with Mandated Clients, part of the Social Innovation Knowledge Centre (SIKC) of HU University of Applied Sciences, has been working on this research programme since 2010. This is done in collaboration with the Knowledge Analysis Societal Security research group of the same knowledge centre<sup>2</sup>. Various interim results have been published in recent years, including in the methodology book entitled *Werken in Gedwongen Kader*<sup>3</sup>. (Working with Mandated Clients). The final results of the first study were published in a thesis<sup>4</sup> in 2018. In this study, the characteristics of a working alliance within a mandatory framework were defined, as well as the importance of these characteristics for the progress and successful completion of the probation programme. Two follow-up doctoral research projects are currently underway, in the course of which even more knowledge about the working alliance within a mandatory framework will be acquired.

The thesis is not particularly accessible for professionals in daily practice, although there is a strong demand for the results among them. That is why this version was made, with the emphasis on the significance of the results for the professional practice. This ‘practical guide’ has been produced in close collaboration between myself (the author), five professionals with long (current or past) track-records as probation officers, and a role play actor.

Chapter 1 summarises the findings of the study, namely the characteristics of the working alliance with Mandated Clients and their importance for the progress and successful completion of the probation programme. These characteristics have been found as part of empirical research that focuses on Dutch probation work. This form of knowledge leads to general rules of thumb in actual practice. As a professional, you can increase the chances of results with your clients if you take these rules of thumb into account.

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<sup>2</sup> The following three other SIKC research groups are involved in one of the follow-up projects: Debts and Debt Collection, Innovative Social Services and Youth.

<sup>3</sup> Menger, A. and Donker, A.G: *De werkaliantie in gedwongen kader: de theorie*. In: Menger, A., Krechtig, L. and Bosker, J. (2016): *Werken in Gedwongen Kader. Methodiek voor het forensisch sociaal werk*. Amsterdam: SWP, 3rd, revised edition.

<sup>4</sup> Menger, A.: *De werkaliantie in het gedwongen kader, onderzocht bij het reclasseringstoezicht*. Delft: Eburon

How you can do this in daily practice differs per client, per context and per probation officer. Chapter 2 therefore focuses on the practice of probation and after-care service. When we hear the term ‘substantiated knowledge’, we often think of ‘applying theory in practice’. This sounds like one-way traffic, whereas in this instance, we are in fact working on the interaction between theory and practice. Let us start with daily practice. We recorded various interview excerpts of probation officers with clients. Afterwards we jointly assessed the considerations made by the probation officer, consciously or implicitly, during the interview. We subsequently examined how we could see the characteristics of the working alliance reflected in the interaction. The interview excerpts were played out spontaneously, with an actor playing the role of the client. Only the data about the client (based on real clients, but made unrecognisable) were known. For each excerpt, we only made a general agreement about the strategy to be followed. We wanted to show practices that varied in suitability; probation and after-care service in which the positive characteristics of the working alliance coincide; and interactions in which the probation officer focuses (too) strongly on one particular characteristic. Not a single scenario was written out. All excerpts were played in a single scene, without any retakes. What happened then is what we see; scenes have not been edited (cut) either. We work with the material as is; so exactly as things progress in actual practice. After all, in actual practice too, what is done is done and we can and must learn from everything that happens.

These nine excerpts can be viewed at [www.werkalliantie.hu.nl](http://www.werkalliantie.hu.nl). The full text of this publication can be downloaded there as well. The clips are intended for educational and training purposes only.

In this written version of the clips, the interview excerpts are written out verbatim and provided with detailed comments. The one-to-one interaction between clients and probation officers is central to the clips and this book. Probation does of course involve more than that. Interaction with the social network, volunteers, partners in healthcare, the social domain and in the judicial domain also play a major role, and an increasingly important one. However, this does not affect the importance of interaction with individual clients. Moreover, I dare to assume that the characteristics of the working alliance discussed here also play a role in interactions with other parties involved in the probation.

I would like to thank, first of all, the probation officers for their professional courage to participate in the recording of these spontaneous videos. In addition, they show the courage to demonstrate deliberate dysfunctional interaction, thereby illustrating how an interview can derail in the event of a one-sided strategy. This requires a high level of professional skill. In a few joint

meetings, we discussed what we can see in the excerpts and how we can relate this to the characteristics of the working alliance. These meetings gave me inspiring insights into their considerations of their own excerpts and in their observations regarding excerpts of colleagues. In addition, it became clear to me which working methods they are not (or no longer) aware of. The meetings motivated me to write out the excerpts and reflections in detail, hoping to do justice to their professionalism. I would also like to thank the actor, who played the five different clients so precisely and sensitively that we completely forgot that we were, in fact, watching the same man.

I also would like to say thanks to the SIA for the Raak Pro grant that made the study and this practical guide possible. And I would like to thank Andrea Donker, Jo Hermanns and Peter van der Laan for their careful supervision during the doctoral research projects; the results thereof make the reflections on practice described here possible. Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to Jacqueline Bosker and Vivienne de Vogel, professors at Working with Mandated Clients, for facilitating this publication after my retirement.

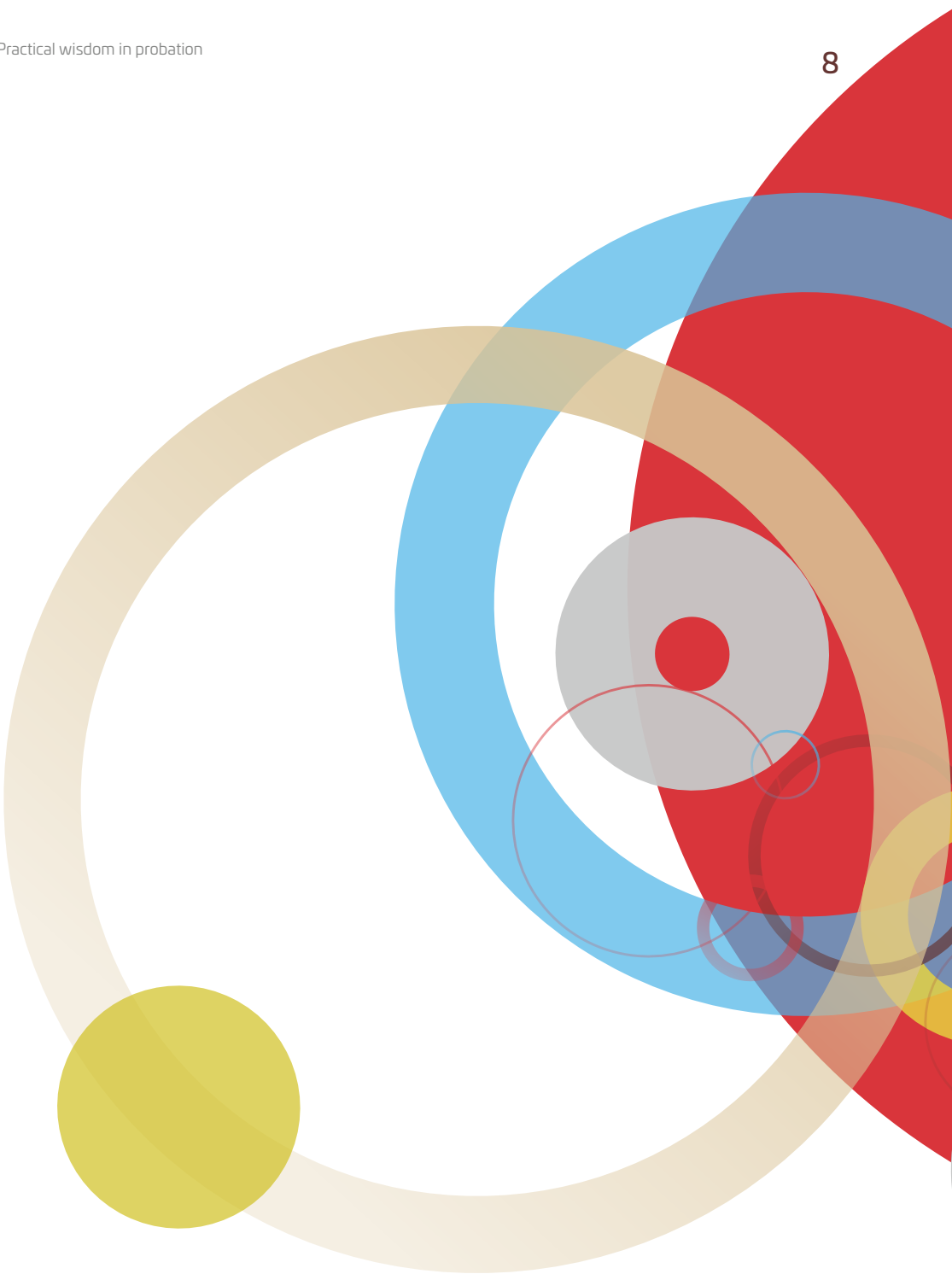
Anneke Menger

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# 1

## **The working alliance with mandated clients : findings from the study**

In this chapter, I will briefly explain what science teaches us about the working alliance with mandated clients and what this means for your professional practice. I focus on probation officers who work with juveniles and adults.

# 1. Effective probation is more than 'what works'<sup>5</sup>

Probation and after-care service is of great social importance and you want to do a proper job. 'Doing a proper job' tends to revolve around effective interventions or instruments. Which is important, but doing a proper and effective job involves more than that. We distinguish three forms of effectiveness:

- **Effective methods: what works?** For example, working according to the principles of Risk, Needs and Responsivity<sup>6</sup>. Or structured behavioural training according to the cognitive-behavioural model. Or working according to the Good Lives Model<sup>7</sup>. Or the network approach. Methods are referred to as 'effective' if there is scientific evidence that they increase the chances of achieving the probation objectives. The risk of recidivism decreases if you work according to these methods. Proper coordination of the working method with specific clients is always part of an effective methodology.
- **Effective professionals: who works?** Methodologies do not lead a life of their own, they only become effective in the hands of professionals<sup>8</sup>. Effective professionals are rooted in professional values, work with theoretically consistent methods, stand behind their working methods, are able to interact with different types of people (also with people who find this difficult) and systematically provide specific feedback on their actions and results. The importance of effective and open client feedback is important in this. Furthermore, an effective professional attempts to connect his own experiential knowledge to scientific knowledge to the best of his ability. A professional who meets these characteristics is in a better position than other professionals to 'ensure the effectiveness' of the method.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information on this, see: Menger, Krechtig and Bosker (2016): *Werken in Gedwongen Kader. Methodiek voor forensisch sociale professionals*. Amsterdam: SWP. 3<sup>rd</sup>, revised edition.

<sup>6</sup> Andrews and Bonta (2010): *The psychology of Criminal Conduct* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Newardk, JH: Lexis-Nexis

<sup>7</sup> Ward, T. (2010): *The Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation: Basic Assumptions, aetiological commitments and practical implications*. In: F. McNeill, P. Raynor & C. Trotter (Eds): *Offender Supervision, New Directions in theory, research and practice* (pp41-64). Cullompton: Willan

<sup>8</sup> See Hermanns and Menger (2009): *Walk the Line. Over professionaliteit en continuïteit in het reclasseringswerk*. Amsterdam: SWP. And Menger (2018): *In berekende bezieling. Afscheidsrede*. Download free access (in Dutch): [www.werkeninjustitieelkader.nl](http://www.werkeninjustitieelkader.nl)

○ **Effective interactions: the working alliance (how does it work?)**

Methodologies and professionals gain meaning in proper interaction with clients and other stakeholders (for example, social network and volunteers). A proper quality of the working alliance increases the chance of successful completion of a probation programme. The risk of problems within the process is reduced and the risk of dropout (no-show or a negative report) decreases.

This effective interaction, i.e. the working alliance, takes centre stage thereafter.

## 2. Interaction between you and your client: the working alliance

While you work according to a certain methodology, for example a cognitive-behavioural or a network approach, you can behave differently when interacting with your client. For example, you can be business-like or warm and empathetic, you can go along or be confronting, inspire or temper emotions. You can be more or less clear about the judicial framework. And you can vary the extent to which you provide direction. And your client may feel understood, or experience clarity and structure, to a greater or lesser extent. This interaction between you and your client is referred to as the working alliance. The quality of the working alliance contributes to an effective probation as well. The working alliance is not a separate method, it is something that always plays a role, with every method you use and with every client you speak to, including the networks of clients such as parents in juvenile rehabilitation or young adults.

Until recently, this interaction was often referred to as ‘the relationship’, following on from the psychological treatment. In literature, the classical concept of a ‘relationship’ is often described as a strongly non-directive approach: characteristics such as unconditional acceptance and empathy feature strongly. Originally, ‘the development of a positive relationship’ was an objective in its own right: Freud and Rogers<sup>9</sup> assumed that no additional specific methods were required. This image of the relationship is still reflected in questions that probation officers have asked us over the years.

For example: ‘Wouldn’t I need to have a relationship first before I can start imposing restrictions?’ And ‘Won’t I lose contact, if from the outset I tell my client what the rules are? Shouldn’t he have to trust me first?’ Or vice versa: ‘I have to supervise this person, and building an open relationship simply doesn’t fit that concept. Besides, I don’t have the time for all that.’

These questioners seem to assume the notion that you can only start restricting and confronting after having built a positive relationship first. That is a tricky notion for a probation officer. After all, their task is to develop proper cooperation within the context of a pre-imposed judicial framework.

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<sup>9</sup> Freud, S. (1912): The dynamics of transference. In: J. Strachey (ED): The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (volume 12, p 99-108)  
Rogers. C (1992): The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 60 (6), p 827-832.

That is why, in recent years, we prefer to use the term ‘working alliance’ within the context of the social and judicial domain. In ‘the working alliance’, as is the case in ‘the relationship’, the interaction between the client and the professional is key. Much research has already been done into the characteristics of the working alliance in voluntary aid work. Three important characteristics emerge from this, namely agreement on objectives, agreement on tasks and mutual bond. The working alliance is always a means to achieving objectives outside the alliance. That is why the working alliance cannot immediately be regarded as an objective in its own right. An important assumption about the working alliance is that both the professional and the client are acting more or less deliberately within the relationship. Both are purposeful in their approach, sometimes they work with each other, sometimes they work against each other. Both are also subject to more unconscious impulses, which can disrupt the cooperation. After all, both professionals and clients have gained experiences in life that have an adverse effect on their cooperation with others. It can be difficult for clients to trust someone. Professionals may experience fear in the event of a threat or be undermined by passive aggression. Hence the perspectives of both the client and the professional are necessary to be able to discuss and assess the quality of the working alliance.

### 3. The working alliance with mandated clients

Clients come to you within a mandatory framework and the probation officer should be clear about that from the start. After all, citizens who are suspected or have been convicted of an offence are entitled to be correctly informed of their rights and obligations. For many clients, this mandatory framework affects the way in which they start the relationship. They can experience this imposed contact and your monitoring role as a restriction of their freedom and put up resistance. That resistance is sometimes also aimed at you personally and that can impede the cooperation. So how to best approach this?

That is not always easy. With the aim of pointing you in the right direction, our research group has researched this. This was done at the request of probation officers at the time. Paragraph 2 already described the main characteristics of the working alliance with mandated clients, such as social work in local teams. Now we also want to know what the special characteristics are of a working alliance with mandated clients and how important the working alliance is in terms of the results achieved by the probation.

I will now briefly explain what we learned about this during our study. We first read a lot about the subject, after which we interviewed 267 client and probation officer pairs during two of their supervision sessions<sup>10</sup>. We used questionnaires to ask them how they experienced the cooperation with each other.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This interviewed group of 267 clients represented slightly fewer clients with high risk profiles than the total group of probation clients. This does not necessarily mean that the results of the study are not valid for the higher profile group of clients, but it does mean that the validity among them has been demonstrated to an even lesser extent compared to probation clients with medium and low risk profiles.

<sup>11</sup> Menger, A. (2018): *De werkaliantie in gedwongen kader, onderzocht bij het reclasseringswerk*. Academic Thesis. Delft: Eburon (in Dutch, with English summary).

## 4. Characteristics of the working alliance with mandated clients

In this study, we discovered that four different characteristics can be distinguished in the working alliance with mandated clients. Clients and probation officers experience these characteristics in their mutual relationship in differing degrees. The first three characteristics in the probation programme have a positive effect. They are:

**Goals and Conditions:** clients sufficiently understand the goals and tasks of the probation service and the mandatory framework within which this service takes place. The probation officer too thinks this is clear enough for the client and both believe to be in agreement on this.

**Trust:** the client thinks that he/she can express himself/herself freely enough in the relationship and believes that the probation officer is committed to him/her and that he/she is sufficiently trusted by the officer. And the probation officer believes that the client will trust him or her enough, if necessary.

**Bond:** the client feels sufficiently respected, supported and encouraged as a person. And the probation officer believes that he or she listens well and that he or she is supportive and stimulating in the relationship.

If both the client and the probation officer believe that *Goals and Conditions*, *Trust* and *Bond* are all sufficiently present, the risk of violations during supervision and of a premature negative dropout decreases.

In addition to the three positive characteristics, one more characteristic has been found that has a negative effect on the relationship. If clients or officers experience this characteristic to a strong degree, the risk of violations during supervision or premature dropout is higher. Namely:

### **Reactance:**

- The client thinks negatively about the cooperation with the probation officer. His feelings of opposition to the obligatory sessions remain in the foreground. This is referred to as *reactance*. And the probation officer notices that this is the case.



- The probation officer experiences a sense of 'burnout' with the client or losing control of the relationship. This is referred to as *contra-reactance*.

In order to achieve a high-quality working alliance, the combinations of characteristics are crucial. That is particularly true for *Goals and Conditions*. If your client experiences a lot of *Goals and Conditions* (in other words, as an officer, you are clear about the objectives and the framework and your client understands this well) combined with sufficient *Bond and Trust* at the same time, then the experience is positive. There is a better chance that the probation programme will go well and that your client will complete it successfully. If your client experiences a lot of *Goals and Conditions*, but you yourself feel a loss of energy and control (*contra-reactance*), then the experience is negative. Most of the time, your client's defensive behaviour (*reactance*) remains in the foreground. In that case, the risk of the probation programme faltering and your client dropping out prematurely is higher.

## 5. Sufficient can be enough

Note the words 'sufficient' and 'enough' in the description of the three positive alliance characteristics. Bond and trust are not objectives in their own right, but they serve to achieve probation objectives and do not need to be stronger than necessary in order to achieve them. Complete mutuality about goals, complete openness and trust and a strong bond are often too much to expect within the probation relationship. Certain clients are unable to do so, for example due to past experiences or a deeper personality disorder. And many clients (for example, if the court case is yet to come or at other tense moments within the process) may have strategic interests that stand in the way of bond and trust. You would be asking too much from these clients if you were to demand more trust from them than they feel is good for them. Sufficient bond and realistic trust can develop better if you calmly accept that they cannot show this immediately or to a limited extent only, even after some time.

## 6. Differences between clients and probation officers

If you and your client think very differently about the working alliance, for example your client experiences a lot of trust and you very little, or vice versa, then the risk of dropout increases. If you tend to agree more about the alliance characteristics, the chances of things developing positively are higher. It can therefore be important that you regularly discuss with your client what you both think of the cooperation. It is not so much about whether your client achieves the goals, which is more part of the regular periodic evaluations. Instead, check whether you are still on the same page and what your client thinks of the openness and clarity in the relationship. And what you think of this yourself. You can use the alliance monitor for that if this helps you. More about this monitor later.

## 7. The working alliance at the start and after nine months

Contact can be difficult in the first phase of probation supervision. After all, this is when you need to set out clear frameworks and at the same time show respect for the person and work on trust. This study can reassure you somewhat in this respect. The fact is that if both your client and yourself think the working alliance is not going so well in the beginning, it does not say much about the chances of a successful outcome. The valuation of the working alliance after nine months says a lot more about the possibilities of successful completion of the process than the experience at the start.

## 8. The working alliance and different types of clients

Certain groups of clients value the working alliance lower or run a higher risk of dropping out of the probation programme. This applies to clients who are young adults, unemployed or addicted, who require an assisted form of living or who show a high risk profile. For young clients without the support from a parent, the working alliance with the probation officer matters more compared to clients who are supported by their parents. Clients with mild intellectual disabilities do not value the working alliance any higher or lower than other clients. Probation officers of such clients say they only put slightly more emphasis on *Goals and Restrictions* than with other clients. It is striking that, in our study, the premature dropout rate is somewhat higher among clients with mild intellectual disabilities. When talking to these clients, it is especially important to regularly check whether you are still on the same page, to make sure you both remain in step. Otherwise, you will lose them<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> For a guide to working with clients with mild intellectual disabilities, see: Vrij, P., Kaal H., and Bernard, R. (2018): *Licht Verstandelijke Beperking en de Reclassering*. Leiden University of Applied Sciences and 3 RO.

## 9. What does this mean for your work?

We now have created a somewhat better scientific basis that clear communication about the mandatory framework need not be an obstacle for a close relationship and a positive development of the probation programme. Offering and maintaining this clarity works well if your client trusts you enough and feels sufficiently respected and supported as a person. If you purely focus on goals, conditions and obligations without creating bond and trust, *Reactance* is much more likely to arise: a lot of resistance from your clients and loss of control or energy within yourself. Or vice versa: if you only start focusing on conditions and obligations when you can feel your energy starting to drain away, restriction can develop into a reproachful atmosphere. This will undermine your effectiveness at that moment. This also applies if you are forced to write a violation report and end supervision prematurely. In that case too, clarity is required, but this can also go hand in hand with respect and understanding. Your own loss of energy or control with a client matters more than you might think, because it can cause or reinforce a negative spiral in the relationship. A fair reflection on this and structured and safe peer consultation are therefore important. This can help you and your client to achieve a positive completion of the probation programme. Do not make the mistake of thinking that you do not have time for professional deliberation. It can save a lot of ineffective time if you invest in working effectively and in your own resilience.

## 10. The alliance monitor in consultation with your client

You may consider using the alliance monitor if you want to discuss the quality of your cooperation with your client. The study showed that (compared to other questions) the questions from this monitor were found to be most strongly associated with positive results. More importantly, discussing your cooperation so explicitly on the basis of questions answered by you both can lead to an open dialogue about how you experience the cooperation. Clients may experience the fact that they are heard explicitly and within a structured framework as a form of relationship management that has a motivating effect. It is not you, the probation officer, asking the questions to your client, but a 'third party' asking them to you both. A small pilot with the alliance monitor showed that this can be quite effective.

The questions are listed below. The questions for the client are referred to as C. The questions for the probation officer are referred to as P.

C: You clearly explain what you expect from me.

P: I clearly explain what I expect from you.

C: Together we have worked out what I will work on during the supervision sessions.

P: Together we have worked out what you will work on during the supervision sessions.

C: I always know what to do for the next appointment.

P: I make clear agreements with you on what you need to do for the next appointment.

C: You trust that I'm honest.

P: I trust that you're honest.

C: You think I keep important things to myself.

P: I think you keep important things to yourself.

C: I dare to be honest with you.

P: You dare to be honest with me.

C: I can tell you like me.

P: I think you like me.

C: I can feel that you're really listening to me.

P: I really listen to you.

C: I find it difficult to stick to the conditions.

P: You find it difficult to stick to the conditions.

C: You're positive about me.

P: I'm positive about you.

C: You'll be strict if I don't keep to the agreements.

P: I'll be strict if you don't keep to the agreements.

C: We agree on the objectives I want to achieve during supervision.

P: We agree on the objectives you want to achieve during supervision.

C: I often disagree with you.

P: You often disagree with me.

C: You respect me.

P: I respect you.

C: I say things that aren't quite accurate.

P: You say things that aren't quite accurate.

C: I'm not afraid of telling you everything.

P: You're not afraid of telling me everything.

C: I soon forget what we talked about.

P: You soon forget what we talked about.

C: You trust me.

P: I trust you.

C: We agree on what needs to be changed

P: We agree on what needs to be changed

The alliance monitor is also available in the form of a card game. More information about this game can be found at [www.werkalliantie.hu.nl](http://www.werkalliantie.hu.nl)







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## Interview excerpts

## Introduction

Below are nine verbatim interview excerpts in which probation officers show how you can put different combinations of characteristics of the working alliance into practice and how clients (may) respond to that. The excerpts include advice, community service and supervision. The excerpts are based on real casuistry, but have been made unrecognisable. As stated in the preface, these excerpts were acted out and recorded on video first. The excerpts were acted out spontaneously and in one go, based on a general agreement about what we wanted to show. We wanted to show practices that varied in suitability: appropriate interaction in which characteristics of the working alliance converge, with positive consequences for the conversation, as well as less appropriate interaction, in which the probation officer applies a one-sided focus on one of the characteristics, with negative consequences for the conversation. There were no retakes and the scenes were not edited. This better mimics actual practice than acting out a model scenario that has been worked out in advance. What happened is what we see and we work with the material as is. Just like in actual practice.

The video clips can be requested via the website [www.werkalliantie.hu.nl](http://www.werkalliantie.hu.nl). In all excerpts, the client is played by a role play actor with a lot of experience with training courses in the judicial field. A total of four different probation officers are at work.

The nine excerpts show five different clients. Four out of those five show the interview in two different versions on the website and are described here. Only one version is available of a fifth client. By showing two versions of the same interview, it becomes clear how different interactions with the same client lead to very different outcomes with varying degrees of desirability.

## Different combinations of characteristics

As is clear from the above, not all excerpts are intended to exemplify good practice.

Some excerpts illustrate the results if you set one-sided accents. The probation officers act out what happens if they consistently pursue a one-sided strategy. How does an interview progress when concentrating only on *Goals and Restrictions* and a strict application of rules? Without taking into account

clients' characteristics and the importance of *Bond* or the development of *Trust*? How do you trigger *Reactance* in clients? What can happen if your own *Contra-reactance* becomes dominant? What will the result be if you are convinced that *Bond* and *Trust* must be established first before you can give *Direction* and define *Goals and Conditions*? What can happen if you are taken aback by (near) recidivism, causing you to go off course? The four probation officers involved have sufficient knowledge and experience to deliberately initiate different types of dysfunctional interaction. In addition, they are inspired by their own dilemmas in everyday practice and by the many questions they receive from newly trained probation officers and students.

Other excerpts illustrate how the characteristics of *Goals and Conditions*, *Bond and Trust* can converge. We can once again see different ways of achieving this. What happens in the interview if you clearly separate *Goals and Conditions* from working on *Bond and Trust*? And what would the result be if you were to allow these three characteristics to converge smoothly and simultaneously? What do probation officers do to reduce *Reactance* within a client? These excerpts illustrate appropriate methods, but they are not 'the one and only way'. The best way forward differs per client and is by definition customised. However, customisation at its best is in turn based on the general principles of effective probation, including our knowledge of the working alliance within a mandatory framework. Critical, detailed questions can also be asked for each excerpt. Your professionalism forces you to do that, even when things are going relatively well.

## Implicit knowledge

The interview excerpts also illustrate something else. We can see to what extent (experienced) probation officers act on the basis of their deep-seated experiential knowledge, also known as 'implicit knowledge'. We sometimes witness them intuitively do 'the right thing'. And they are not always aware of that. We can see that this implicit knowledge can be very similar to findings from scientific research, including findings that they may not be familiar with. This is an important observation, because this shows that 'applying effective methods' is not a matter of one-way traffic. Probation officers are not empty vessels in which researchers and trainers pour their knowledge. Probation officers must always act in practice, even if there is no knowledge available at that time. In their job, they are continuously engaged in 'reflection-in-action': they make lightning-fast assessments and take decisions about the next step more or less instantly. They are often aware of their emotions and

handle or adjust these more or less deliberately. This way, i.e. through trial and error, they accrue knowledge on 'what works' in their daily practice<sup>13</sup>. The professionalism of the probation officer can develop through the conjunction of this experiential knowledge and explicit scientific knowledge.

However, it should be borne in mind that you cannot always blindly rely on feelings or thoughts that you experience as implicit knowledge. We are also subject to impulses derived from experiences gained elsewhere in life (which we might interpret as 'intuition' and confuse with 'implicit knowledge') which can, in fact, leave us wrong-footed. For example, the reflex to fight when clients show *Reactance* or to flee when they need guidance. These feelings can lead to *Contra-reactance* and undermine your effectiveness. To continue to sufficiently distinguish the more effective and less effective forms of implicit knowledge, you need structured professional consultation. This at the same time allows for dialogue between new scientific knowledge and implicit experiential knowledge of professionals; and it is through this dialogue that the best possible probation can be achieved.

## Initial responses and professional reflections

At the end of each excerpt, the client and the officer give a short initial response to the interviews. In these responses, they both remain in their role, close to their experience that is apparent from the excerpt. In addition, the fragments are provided with 'professional' reflections. First in detail, following the line of the interview. What does the interaction show, with what effects, and what critical detailed questions can be asked? Each excerpt is then followed by an overall summary, with the emphasis on characteristics of the working alliance with mandated clients. What characteristics of the working alliance can be seen and what were the effects of this combination of characteristics?

How you use these comments is up to you. You can read it before or after your own reflections, team discussion or training. The commentary is not intended as 'universal truth'. We aim to interpret the interaction on the basis of characteristics of the working alliance, to clarify the theory and as input for your own analysis and discussion. The excerpts are also suitable for analyses

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<sup>13</sup> Schön, D.A. (1983): *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books.

from various other frames of reference; for example motivational interviewing, goal formulation, communication theory, characteristics of the RNR approach, working on self-management as part of risk control or combining monitoring and guidance. Alternatively, you can check how the professional values of the probation officer are reflected in the excerpts<sup>14</sup>. You are of course free to use the excerpts for that as well. We leave it to you to and the trainers involved to reflect on these frames of reference.

The five cases are outlined in nine excerpts below.

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<sup>14</sup> Krechtig, J. and the Jonge, E.: Reclasseringswerk als waarde(n)vol werk. In: Menger, A., Krechtig, J. and Bosker, J. (2016): *Werken in Gedwongen Kader. Methodiek voor Forensisch Sociaal Werk*. Amsterdam: SWP. 3rd, revised edition. This research among probation officers revealed that, with each client, probation officers pursue the best possible balance between the values of Safety, Care and Autonomy.





## Case 1

# Advice Vincent

Vincent is 19 and has been invited by the probation service for an interview on account of an advisory report order. Vincent is suspected of (complicity in) committing burglary. He has a track-record with various care providers, including youth protection and juvenile rehabilitation. This is his first experience with adult rehabilitation. The probation officer has had access to the official report and requires permission from Vincent to request additional information from the various support agencies. His own version of events must be discussed as well.



## Advice Vincent Version A

**What can we see?** - How do we reflect on that?

**V:** agitated, strongly articulating and in a high-pitched voice: “nice one, putting me back behind the desk for some chitchat. You really like me, don’t you, you have had it out for me ever since I was a kid. You took me out of the house when I was little, as it had to be me who’d done it again. You don’t like my face or something, is that it ... I wasn’t even around, man, I haven’t done nothing dude, why do I’ve to sit here again ... all this talk and chitchat, like great, we got him again or something ...”

He’s very agitated about his perception of the crime he is suspected of and about his past, he expresses feelings of injustice, he is once again the one sitting here. He doesn’t look at her. There seems to be intense stress. In his rage, his emotions remain self-centred, he shows no unacceptable behaviour towards the probation officer. With this attitude, he expresses *Reactance*. Yet at the same time, he provides reference points for dialogue. What is he trying to tell the probation officer?

**PO:** first looks surprised, then interested, remains calm and listens. During a brief gap when V. isn’t talking, she smiles gently, raises her hand as to say stop and asks: ‘would you mind if I just stop you there?’

Her inviting look after the initial surprise means V. keeps talking, revealing information about his perception of the crime he’s suspected of and his past. When V. takes a breath, she asks permission to interrupt. It’s a small question to ask, but nonetheless an important one. She invites interaction and V. senses that he has an actual voice in how the interview progresses. By doing this, she also shows respect, thereby positively affecting the alliance characteristic *Bond*.

**V:** yeah, you know....

| He takes the bait and his flow of words dries up, he goes along.

**PO:** because I can tell you're really (mimics his emotion), like you're close to erupting or something ...

| She shows empathy, in a literal sense: she mimics emotions and expresses the intensity she sees. This way, she shows she actually listens and observes, thereby positively affecting *Bond* in the process.

**V:** yeah...

| This means that V. upholds his approval and that the PO can continue to talk. Although he keeps looking in anticipation (suspicious, even?).

**PO:** lots of emotions, stories, things that happened in the past, things that are going on now, I think it's all one big blur.

| She expresses the kind of emotions she sees and what he seems full of. In the event of expressions of *Reactance* and stress, this is a good way to steer the conversation into calmer waters. V. can tell that she keeps listening. This way, she contributes to mutual *Bond* and clears the way for more *Trust* to develop.

**V:** continues to lean back and listens, with a big frown on his face.

| V. continues to implicitly approve that she's the one talking now, although his attitude shows that he certainly doesn't trust the matter yet.

**PO:** uhm yeah, and I'd like to know more about that, but I also want to explain why I sent you an invitation.

| She says she wants to know more about that, by which she tries to clarify that after she has had her say, there's room for him to talk again. But before she explores his side of the story, she wants to make clear what the probation service can and cannot do in his case. By doing that, she works on the alliance characteristic *Goals and Conditions*. By saying that she will continue to listen to him she continues to work on *Bond*.

**V:** well...go on then...

He responds positively to her friendly tone, but doesn't yet know what to make of it/what he wants out of it. In any case, he appears to be willing to engage.

**PO:** okay?

She again seeks approval, thereby reinforcing the interaction and giving him a voice in the conversation. This increases *Bond* and can create *Trust*, because he's not overruled during the conversation.

**V:** remains silent, waits to see.

The fact that he remains silent can mean different things, but his verbal diarrhoea has stopped.

**PO:** well, the thing is, you are suspected of committing an offence.

She doesn't package the reason, although she knows that this is sensitive to him and may only further fuel the fire. This clarity is nevertheless important, also from the outset, so that V. understands where he stands and what the probation service can or cannot do. This gives him room to develop realistic expectations. This means that the PO and V. can start building on cooperation on the basis of that honesty, from where *Trust* can blossom. That's much better than being explained the role of the PO at the end of a positive conversation.

**V:** leans forward: but I didn't do it!!

That response was to be expected. But he leans forward, looks at her and actually engages (which is more than at the start of the dialogue).

**PO:** the court will look into it. And in this case, the court has requested a probation report, because they need to know a little more about you before you appear in court. And on the other hand, the probation report is also intended to give advice to the court, *if you are found guilty* (with emphasis).

She reacts calmly to his outburst and moves the question of who is to blame out of their relationship ('that's something the court decides and therefore

plays no role between us'). She then carries on with her explanation. She explicitly expresses a ruling of guilt by the court as an option, not as a fact. She continues to focus on *Goals and Condition* and at the same time remains alert to his reactions and sensitivities.

**V:** I'm not!! I didn't do nothing man!

The predictable response. He's consumed by it, he constantly wants to tell her what he thinks about it. He remains fierce, but does communicate: he listens *and* responds to what she says.

**PO:** keeps looking friendly: yes, but that's not *my* decision, that's for the court to decide later on. But suppose the judge says, well, I rule that this gentleman did it, regardless of anything else. In that case, the probation service will issue advice about what elements should be part of the punishment. This can be a normal sentence with you having to pay a fine, you can be ordered to do community service or you have to go to jail.

Again, she continues calmly and repeats that this is separate from the sessions between V. and her. She might have calmed V. further down by saying that she understands that *he* thinks he didn't do it (slightly more explicit investment in *Bond*. She continues to explore the option 'the judge says you did it' and explains what she can do in that case. You may wonder if this is not a lot of information to take in during a single session and whether V. is still taking it on board but from his responses. But it's clear that V. keeps listening and that he shows an understanding of what he hears. The PO calmly and neutrally explains the *Conditions* here, as well as the *Goals* (based on the general objectives) of the probation relationship. It's important that she does this before any problems arise, so that it need not be done in a corrective atmosphere. By doing this at this early stage, they can build on *Bond* and *Trust* in the long run.

**V:** right, great...

V. takes in the information and always responds at the point you would expect him to do so (what do you mean, jail??!!). Fierce, but interacting nonetheless.

**PO:** either that or a probation programme needs to be ordered, that takes two years and needs to be combined with support for you.

She provides the last bit of necessary information and ends in the here and now: the conversation with the probation service and possible support. We don't know whether she does this deliberately, but it appears to be an opening to continue with the story of V. The last sentence sounds like an invitation. She shifts her accent from *Direction and Framework* and starts listening, thus continuing to work on *Commitment*.

**V:** I'm done with that, I don't need support anymore...

He responds to what she's saying now, thereby feeding the interaction and indicating what he *doesn't* want anymore. A good reference point to continue to hear out his story and to explore what he *does* want. His tone appears to suggest that there's room for a discussion about this.

**PO:** looks interested: Okay, I can tell that you have an issue with support.

She stops informing, the main thing has been said, and she responds to what V. says about support. With an open suggestion, 'you have an issue with support,' so that he has the opportunity to explain it in his own words. By doing that, she's again showing, implicitly, that he has a voice by which he can influence the discussion.

**V:** yes, always, I don't need any help anymore, man, I'm completely done with that, these therapists and everything, I can't tell all their fancy titles... like these people I've had to talk to all the time, I'm done with that, it's useless anyway...

V. can take control of the narrative again and starts telling his story. Not everything at once, but focused on support. The chaotic start of earlier has reached calmer waters. In his objection to support, it at the same time becomes clear that he has an (implicit) picture of what he *does* want. He appears to sense that the PO is listening to him (an important aspect in the alliance characteristic *Bond*).

**PO:** softly: tell me, how old were you when you first received support...?

| She conforms to his fragile openness, responds gently and kindly and asks an actual question. Calmly enquiring about the facts is a proven method for reducing *Reactance*.

**V:** more calmly: eight.

| He responds to her, showing again that he's engaging in conversation.

**PO:** eight ... and do you still need support?

| Repeating the response ('eight') is good at this stage, she has heard him, thereby showing her involvement. The conversation continues about support then and now. The PO can now probably start peeling off the main issues one by one in order to prepare the probation report.

**V:** no

| He continues to engage in the conversation with the early signs of a process in which clear *Goals and Conditions* can start to develop, as well as *Bond* and *Trust*.

**Initial response Vincent:**

I completely had it, having to come here and talk again. I do like the fact that she's calm and friendly and tries to explain things a bit. And she can listen. But I really don't want them to think again that I did it, I really don't!

| V. thinks she's friendly but remains concerned, as he hasn't done anything. Note that he does make an explicit distinction now between his fear of a conviction and his contact with the PO. This is an important step towards an effective working alliance. It seems that he'll be cooperating in order to come to a balanced probation report.

**Initial response PO:**

Quite overwhelming at first, because of this outburst of words, frustration and anger all coming out. I thought, just let him blow off some steam, to get it out of his system and clear his head. This perhaps creates the room needed to tell and explain my story.

The PO confirms that she first wanted to give him some space, so she could have her say afterwards. She reflects broadly on her phased approach. She doesn't comment on her (apparently) small gestures, such as asking permission to interrupt him, shifting the blame issue outside their relationship and calmly enquiring about the facts. This probably is implicit professional knowledge, of which she's no longer aware.

## Summarising: which characteristics of the working alliance do we see here, and with what effect?

We see a client who is emotionally charged in the beginning with a strong objection to the call-up. And he objects to the suspicion that he did 'it'. The probation officer acknowledges this and gives him the necessary room to express this, thereby keeping the interaction open. Before his story immediately starts dominating the entire conversation, she, with his approval (a small gesture that can affect *Bond*), first acknowledges that he's full of emotions and that he wants to let it all out. She says they'll come back to that later. This tells him that she's listening and interested (*Bond*). This is even more important to him, because he enters the session with distrust, apparently due to past experiences. She then carries on, again with his approval (*Bond*), explaining what they need to do together and what the probation service can do. At this stage of the conversation, the alliance characteristic *Goals and Conditions* is dominant. She continues to inform calmly and kindly, even if he sometimes fiercely interrupts her about the question of who is to blame. She consistently places that blame issue outside their relationship, thereby reducing the risk that the *Reactance* is aimed directly at her. She nonetheless does always respond to his wild interruptions, either verbally or non-verbally, thereby showing that he has been heard and by which she continues to work on *Bond*. After the information has been given, she naturally reverts back to his story. He now speaks more calmly than at the start.

*Goals and Conditions* are clearly dominant throughout the excerpt and in her friendly attitude and through small interventions she's always working on *Bond* in the background. She does this, for example, by mimicking emotions, asking permission to interrupt and continuing to enquire after the facts. These may seem to be innocent details, but they're vital and their effect has often been demonstrated in research<sup>15</sup>. With this combined investment in *Goals and Conditions* and *Bond*, his distrust may be curbed to a sufficient level of *Trust*. As is clear from Vincent's initial response after this first session, he distinguishes between the issue ('I don't want to be blamed again') and the relationship with the probation officer ('she's friendly, she actually listens'). This is an important step towards an effective working alliance and a balanced probation report.

How the information about the probation service can best be dosed and how often you have to check later on in the process whether he or she still knows and understands it, differs from client to client. You can't assume that someone will fully understand this after having been explained once, certainly not with clients who are there for the first time and who are tense going into the first session. The alliance characteristic of *Goals and Conditions* not only means that the probation officer offers clear explanations, but also and especially that the client understands them. In any case, Vincent (like all probation clients), as a suspect, has the right to be properly informed, before possibly confiding in her. This gives clients the opportunity to relate accordingly and you prevent clients from developing expectations that you can't fulfil. Moreover, by doing this, you define your own role and boundaries from the outset, which can help you avoid *Contra-reactance* on your part. The probation officer does, in fact, avoid this in this excerpt. She doesn't feel personally attacked by the violent start, but recognises what this means and is able to restrict respectfully. This appears to be effective in this case.

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<sup>15</sup> Norcross, J.C. (2011): *Psychotherapy Relations That Work: Evidence Based Responsiveness* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Oxford University Press.



## Advice Vincent Version B

**What can we see?** - How do we reflect on that?

**V:** agitated, strongly articulating and restless: “Yeah, great, back again, they’ve got it in for me, man, I wasn’t even around, man, I didn’t do nothing! like, nothing at all!”

He’s agitated about the perception of the offence he’s suspected of and about the call-up by the probation service. He expresses feelings of injustice, he’s the one sitting here, *again*. There seems to be intense stress. In his fierce agitation, his emotions remain self-centred and therefore he shows no unacceptable behaviour towards the probation officer. We interpret this attitude as *Reactance*. Yet at the same time, he provides reference points for dialogue. What is he trying to tell the probation officer?

**PO:** moves back, looks and takes on a defensive stance by trying to block his stream of words with her hands.

Her attitude is surprised and guarded. Creating a physical block with your hands is often more effective than just trying to edge in or waiting for the client to pause.

**V:** immediately stops the verbal onslaught.

His stress doesn’t prevent him from being susceptible to interaction. This is a good sign; he still wants to talk. This despite the possible lack of *Trust* that he shows, partly on the basis of his history.

**PO,** calmly: I don’t know if you intend to continue the entire conversation like this, I for one will not.

She doesn’t respond to his apparent attempt to make contact and what he shows in his attitude, such as being tense, being afraid, wanting to tell his story, wanting to be heard. She addresses him in a corrective way, thereby condemning the intensity of his tone. Does she experience his behaviour as a personal attack? Does she first want to lay down (her perception of) the *Conditions*? Anyway, due to this start, she immediately denies him space to express *Reactance*.

**V:** interrupts: well great, I'll give you a piece of my mind anyway...

His intensity increases, and at the same time confirms his intention of making it clear what he thinks. He doesn't seem to understand that the PO is having a problem with his tone. It's known that simply blocking *Reactance* often leads to its increase and therefore has an escalating effect.

**PO:** okay, these are your options, you can either talk to me normally or we can make an appointment for another time when you think you *can* talk normally.

For V. 'acting normally' at this stage of the conversation seems impossible, certainly now that he's no longer 'allowed' to show his stress. By giving him the option of 'talking normally' or 'making a new appointment', she intensifies the blockage of showing stress and *Reactance*. Is she trying to impose a standard as part of the *Conditions* ('this is not how we treat each other')? In that case, it's done from the outset in a way in which information isn't provided neutrally, but in an atmosphere of disqualification of Vincent's current powerless attempts to establish contact. She doesn't package it with positive comments, for example that she notices that he's very tense. A missed opportunity to work on *Bond and Trust*.

**V:** you know what, I'm just going home then! To hell with this shit hole, man!

He's unable to de-escalate. Nor should his role require this of him at this stage of the relationship. He acts on what he hears her say ('I'm sent away') and this is probably not the first time he has heard it. He turns in his chair pretending to get up and go and looks at the PO waiting for a response.

**PO:** well, you've made your choice then.

She isn't fazed by this threat and remains calm and collected. She doesn't yield and allows him to up and go, if that's what he wants. It appears that in the course of this short conversation, she allows herself to be increasingly guided by her own irritation and *Contra-reactance*. It seems she no longer feels any room for self-reflection in action and the question arises whether any professional action on display is still based on deliberate acts.

**V:** all right, bye then! Bye! He stays put for a while...

| V. hesitates, as he repeats his up-and-go movement.

**PO:** remaining cool: You still here?

| The PO still doesn't yield. Her irritation (*Contra-reactance?*) grows and she apparently just wants to get rid of him.

**V:** finally walks off and the PO lets him go.

| No contact of sorts has been established (for now) in order to come to a probation report.

**Initial response Vincent:**

Yeah, well, just a shit hole, man, I knew that before coming here ... same old story like always, that... well, I'm done with it, really really done with it, like, done with it!

| Vincent does indeed feel this as confirmation of the way in which he experienced previous (juvenile) rehabilitation and support. He's done with it. If he comes back, the probation service has ground to make up in terms of gaining *Trust*.

**Initial response PO:**

Yeah well, ridiculous, who does he think he is coming in here and showing me attitude like that. Does he have any idea where he is or what he is in here for...

| The probation officer confirms that she was irritated. She apparently felt that his attitude was directed at her, in her capacity as a probation officer. And she seems to apply the standard that clients, regardless of the stress they're under, should just tell their story and remain orderly and polite from the word go. She has only invested in establishing this standard and ignored the importance of *Bond and Trust*. Presumably, her own *Contra-reactance* had the upper hand.

## Summarising: which characteristics of the working alliance do we see and with what effect?

What was the probation officer trying to achieve? To what extent were her actions deliberate?

Her quick blocking intervention was a deliberate attempt to set the standard about the tone of voice and attitude. Can setting this standard from the very start be seen as a positive investment in the alliance characteristic of *Goals and Conditions*? We can only judge this after considering the following questions:

- Did Vincent's attitude justify this one-sided normative reaction?
- Is this a case of unacceptable behaviour?
- Can you demand a requirement such as 'conversing politely and calmly' from clients who are under a lot of stress and who show signs of (acquired) distrust?
- Are corrections about the tone of voice and attitude effective, without simultaneously paying attention to the stress the client is showing?

Vincent is agitated and shows unfocused anger, apparent powerlessness and the need to tell his story. He's not aggressive or unacceptable towards her as a probation officer. In terms of the working alliance, the PO therefore should have recognised this as *Reactance*, acknowledge this in contact and allow some room for this. This could have been combined with a restricting remark later on. Sometimes that's necessary, for example if it takes too long or if it leads to more and more agitation and negativity. However, this is more effective in an atmosphere of recognising and defining stress and anxiety. In this excerpt, the correction was in an atmosphere of reproach, which, in fact, does nothing in terms of clarifying the *Conditions*. And that's precisely why *Goals* derailed with it: after all, no contact of sorts was established which could result in a balanced probation report.

It also seems that, from early on in the conversation, the PO started to act from *Contra-reactance*. Did she feel the attack was personal? Was she afraid of escalation, that she would lose control in this instance? Does she somehow entertain the notion that, as a probation officer, you must be 'strict', thereby overriding her own inner tendency to remain friendly?

Anyway, what we witness here in terms of the working alliance is how *Reactance* of a client and *Contra-reactance* and firm action by the probation officer can reinforce each other to the extent that no fruitful probation relationship is established. These characteristics continue to dominate. Driven by her irritation or fear, the officer loses sight of the intended Goals. The PO fails to explain the *Conditions* neutrally (other than corrections in a negative atmosphere). There is soon no more opportunity to invest in *Bond* and *Trust*. In her irritation, she seems to be pushing him away more and more. Ultimately, it's not the client that 'pulls out', but the probation officer, all this with the inevitable and perhaps serious consequences for Vincent.

Aged 19, Vincent is a young adult. The working alliance with young adults requires extra attention and investment, according to our (and other) research. The officer involved should take this into account. As regards the probation officer involved, it's important that she learns to recognise and investigate her basic motive in her relationship with certain clients (for example, her fear of losing control, standard rules about politeness, irritation in the event of an alleged attack or the notion that, as a probation officer, you should be particularly strict). She could do so in structured professional consultation or individual consultation, allowing her to continue to act at a higher level of professional awareness when working with clients who show a strong tendency towards *Reactance* or other forms of resistance.



## Case 2

# Ongoing supervision Richard

Richard is 48 years old. One year ago he was sentenced to eight months suspended and four months non-suspended imprisonment for downloading child pornography. His sentencing was made subject to the condition of undergoing treatment at a forensic clinic and probationary supervision. Richard has been undergoing treatment for ten months now. In addition, he has a meeting with a probation worker once every two weeks. Richard is single and works as an ICT consultant. Outside the professional context, no one in his surroundings is aware of his conviction and problem. Today, as always, Richard is well in time for his meeting with the probation worker. But the probation worker notices that there is something different about his behaviour. Richard seems more hesitant, restless, and absent-minded.

## Ongoing supervision Richard Version A

**What can we see?** - How do we reflect on that?

**PO:** cheerful: hello Richard.

| Open start, friendly smile.

**R:** hello

| Greets, looks tense.

**PO:** how are you doing?

| Open question, keeps smiling.

**R:** yes, not too bad.

| His intonation makes it clear that he is far from fine.

**PO:** smiling: yes not too bad? It sounds like there's more to be said, err, is something going on?

| She continues to smile, at the same time she can see his hesitation and probes further based on what she thinks she can see.

**R:** nervous: well, something going on, not really, but I did feel the urge to watch again but so I didn't, you know. I didn't look at anything.

| He puts things into perspective first, nothing happened and then comes up with what is bothering him. That first response (nothing happened) can be a defensive reflex to her directive question. But he immediately comes clean and straight away says that he didn't do it, twice.

**PO:** you just had a bit of a wobble, right...

| She shows that she understands that he struggled with his demons. At the same time, she puts it into perspective by saying 'a bit of'. She's not asking any further questions, for now.

**R:** well yes, right, it was a bit of a wobble, I really felt such an urge to look but (sigh) I didn't do it.

| He copies the perspective set out by the PO ('a wobble'), but continues to make it clear through his tone of voice that the urge was strong and that he found it hard not to do it. And to come out with it.

**PO:** well hats off to you! It shows how much you can control yourself!

| She applauds his self-control enthusiastically. For now, she's not responding to the struggle that he has experienced and the tension that appears to rise up in him for telling. The appreciation for his self-control is important, but does she do sufficient justice to the effort, commitment and willingness to change that he demonstrates?

**R:** (relieved): yes, well, thank you..

| He seems relieved. It's OK. For now.

**PO:** it's really good that you managed to control yourself, really, yes.

| Enthusiastic repetition of compliment.

**R:** well thanks (laughs with relief).

| With the same effect. Relief. But for how long? Does he also feel recognised in his struggle and his desire to do it differently, to do the right thing?



**PO:** and how are things at work?

She lets it rest and switches to another topic. As if she would rather avoid the elephant in the room. Does she think it's too scary? She doesn't dare to go there? Or does she think that it will help him more to merely appreciate his self-control? In any case, the intended *Goal* of the supervision appears to be off track during this session. What about the risk of repetition, combined with his own wish to work on this? That's not discussed.

**R:** a bit surprised: Oh? At work? Well that's all fine.

His surprise is clear. Work? His attitude changes. The nervous man who is struggling with his demons and who chooses to share this with his PO now becomes cheerful. Does he copy the emotion of the PO (who has been happy from the start)? Is he truly relieved? Is he confused about how this conversation is going? Does he feel understood? What does this mean for his sense of *Bond*? Does he perhaps feel disappointment too? Does this increase his *Trust* in this officer or not?

**PO:** yes? Do you need to go to work later today, too?

They continue to chitchat about work. The lack of *Goals and Conditions* is growing stronger.

**R:** cheerful and self-assured: today I took the day off, actually, tomorrow I'm working again.

Why would he have taken the day off? Was the upcoming visit to the PO something significant for him, because he had intended to talk about his urge? Or was it just because he felt like it?

**PO:** well OK, great. Did you take the whole day off, are you planning to do anything fun?

She doesn't enquire about his original intentions and continues to chat superficially. She continues to feed the informal talk, as a result of which the previous confession and the task of the probation service are left for what they are.

**R:** cheerful, yes, maybe go to the cinema or so.

| He responds on the same footing (what else is he supposed to do if the PO is so light-hearted about it?)

**PO:** well alright, that's nice...

| She assumes that catching a film is a fun social event, but isn't it likely that he'll be on his own? Chances are that she's not in touch with his world (see case description).

**R:** mmm

| His response is neutral and short.

**PO:** really good. Well ...OK.

| Another compliment.

**R:** OK!

| And he concludes a bit surprised and cheerful.

**Initial response Richard:**

I was really not looking forward to this meeting, but it was OK. I told her and she complimented me and then she just started talking about work, so... Nice.

| He mainly responds to his relief here. It turned out much easier than he had expected. Was he particularly afraid of the consequences and were things not so bad in that respect? Whether this does him any good in the long term remains to be seen. After all, he does show a willingness to change. Does he feel understood? Has his sense of *Bond* grown or has it declined? And what about his *Trust* in the competence of the PO?

**Initial response PO:**

I was taken aback when Richard said that, and I was very pleased that he remained in control and I thought, OK that's done then!

What can be felt in the conversation is confirmed by her first response. She wanted to know what the problem was and once he put it out there, she was startled by the consequences. She expressed appreciation for his self-control (which is a positive thing), but preferred not to address the possible risks arising from his confession. Particularly not the risks for herself. R. is left with his concerns and it remains to be seen whether the risk of recidivism has decreased. *Goals and Conditions* remain off track. She may have had the idea that her approach somehow benefits the characteristic of *Bond*, but because she took his concerns so light-heartedly, it's possible that he didn't see it like that.

## Summarising: which characteristics of the working alliance do we witness and to what effect?

This conversation appears to be calm and friendly. We don't witness any *Reactance* and at the end, both discussion partners seem to be happy. But is the working alliance as such of high quality?

What's happening here?

The probation officer starts by probing further when she can tell that Richard doesn't look comfortable (working on *Bond*). After the confession, she immediately plays down the significance of it, both verbally and non-verbally. She concentrates on applauding his self-control and ignores his signs of concern. It may be that, by doing this, she aims to strengthen his sense of *Bond* and *Trust*. Appreciating his openness and control is, in itself, important. But in her highly appreciative response, she fails to address his concerns. She leaves Richard to struggle with his demons on his own. Her responses don't primarily reflect Richard's needs, but merely her own relief that he hasn't given in to his urge to watch. This can, in fact, undermine the *Bond* and the *Trust* which he has built up (as is apparent from his decision to discuss his concerns). In addition, the alliance characteristic of *Goals and Conditions* is pushed to the background, unnoticed at first but then in its entirety.

The excerpt shows what can happen if the PO finds it too scary to start the, often difficult, conversation about risks. So scary that she steers clear from it. It's not the situation of the client, but the PO's own hesitation that seems to be the guiding factor in her decision to avoid that conversation. The probation officer remains vague and continues to downplay her role and what needs to be done. Consequently, Richard is insufficiently supported in the positive direction that, apparently, he wants to go in. And any trust built to date is sitting on 'quicksand' and can suddenly disappear, if the PO has to intervene when it's too late.

The working alliance itself is not about maintaining pleasant relations. It's about an effective relationship aimed at achieving the probation objective. This session failed in that respect. Despite the friendliness during the conversation and the happy ending, the working alliance in this excerpt clearly lacks quality.

It's important for the probation officer involved that she learns how working on *Bond and Trust* can go hand in hand with *Goals and Conditions*. That this can be scary is understandable, and recognising this fear is important. It's part of the professionalism of the probation officer that she learns to convert this fear into an appropriate approach. When at work, a timely awareness of one's own emotions (reflection-in-action: I find it scary, but it needs to be done) can help her through this. This also requires that she has knowledge about how she can do this combined with practical examples from colleagues.

## Ongoing supervision Richard Version B

**What can we see?** - How do we reflect on that?

**PO:** looks interested and says: hello Richard, how are you doing?

| The PO starts in an inviting and involved manner.

**R:** looks uncomfortable and answers softly: yes, quite alright.

| His body language reveals that all is not well.

**PO:** yes? And gives him a searching look.

| She can tell there's something (her 'okay?' sounds like an inviting question) and she leaves him space to open up.

**R:** yeah yeah, really.

| He tries to reduce the doubt that has arisen, all good!

**PO:** you sound a bit unsure.

| She now articulates the fact she actually notices there's something. She doesn't ask if there's something wrong, but only tells him what his attitude is telling her. That way, she keeps the door wide open for him to take control of the conversation, which contributes to *Bond*.

**R:** nervously: Err, well you see, err, the thing is that I felt the urge to look around again, but then I didn't. So...

| He takes the step to come out with it. It's him who takes the initiative to tell. He explains about his urge and immediately reassures (himself and her) by saying that he didn't ... He shows that it troubles him, there's a reason he comes out with it, apparently he wants things to remain good. He may also be afraid of the consequences. The fact that he immediately tells this shows a (sufficient) degree of *Trust*.

**PO:** looks concerned: Oh. How did that come about?

PO: She isn't covering it up and doesn't express disapproval. She looks concerned/involved (reflecting R.'s emotion) and enquires about the fact in a low voice. This will reveal more information for the PO, whereas R. can face the facts in more concrete terms. This way, she creates an environment in which *Goals and Conditions* can prosper: the focus is on the purpose of supervision, but this is part of a careful approach during the sessions, in which both *Bond* and *Trust* appear to remain intact.

**R:** I just didn't feel good. I felt bad.

| He responds by revealing more about his feelings.

**PO:** yes...

| She makes it known that he's heard and creates the space to talk more.

**R:** nervously: Yes, it just had to happen, so to speak ...

| He continues to talk about his urge. Apparently, there's sufficient *Trust* in her.

**PO:** nods encouragingly: But you just said that it didn't happen, so you managed to control yourself.

| She quietly focuses on his ability to control that urge. That way, he can feel better about himself and remain confident that he can keep doing the right thing. With this positive approach, she's working on *Bond* and *Trust*, in addition to self-management when managing his risk.

**R:** yes I did, yes (sighs deeply).

| He shows that he's having a really hard time with it, he may have overcome it but apparently, the urge was very strong.

**PO:** that's something to be proud of, then, yes?

She shows that she recognises the seriousness of the situation and therefore confirms that it was a great feat on his part to control his urge. She ensures that her non-verbal positive approach keeps equal tread with the seriousness he shows. By showing this attitude, she at the same time ensures that *Goals and Conditions, Bond and Trust* converge.

**R:** hmm, thanks.

He hears her and thanks her. It sounds as if he perceives her compliment as scant comfort, but he does look up a bit more calmly (literally, to her).

**PO:** right.. (looks at him and thinks for a moment): but it's really bothering you, no? I can tell by how you are breathing, it's so... (sighs deeply, mirrors his body posture).

The silence at the beginning, when she looks at him for a while, is likely to be interpreted as understanding his situation. She carries on by showing empathy for his feelings and the apparent struggle he has; by mirroring his deep sigh, she relates at an emotional level. These moments, with contact at an emotional level, are signs of sufficient *Trust*, from both sides.

**R:** yes.

He confirms this. He can safely do this, probably also because the PO steers clear of any interpretation and only mirrors what she can see.

**PO:** so... do you feel easier now that you've told me?

Enquires about his emotions in the here and now, in this session with her. She shows that she understands that it must have been difficult for him to tell.

**R:** yes, I wasn't looking forward to mentioning it but... I guess it's good I did so.

He answers honestly and reconfirms her positive attitude: he expresses his relief now that he's told her.

**PO:** decisive tone: Yes, I definitely think so. The next question of course is, what now?

She reinforces this self-appreciation, but doesn't linger: instead, she shifts the focus to how to proceed? By stating this, she starts working on *Goals and Conditions* even more explicitly.

**R:** yes, so what now?

He's asking himself the same question. He seems to leave the initiative with her: it's up to you.

**PO:** well I am really happy you managed to control yourself, but it is of course important that you remain in control of yourself, right, you are in this treatment programme. And keeping control is very important at this point... (low voice) So... you will need to do something with this in the treatment.

Again appreciation for his strength, emphasising that he must continue this self-control, supported by the treatment. When, for the first time directly in this conversation, she tells him that he needs to do something with this, she talks in a lower voice than before. By doing this, it appears she wants to soften her directive intervention, but in tone of voice only, not in content. That content is fixed. The substantive emphasis in the conversation clearly shifts to *Goals and Conditions* now, while the tone of voice and use of language remain soft and respectful, thereby keeping a clear focus on the importance of *Bond and Trust*. She leaves the initiative for the session with the therapist with him, thereby investing in R's self-management in controlling the risk of a relapse. And as a result of which he doesn't feel overruled, but feels respected instead (*Bond*).

**R:** well I thought, I'm telling you now, so ...(nods as if to say: then it's done).

He's a bit disappointed. Apparently, he thinks it's somewhat easier to tell the PO than the therapist. This is the first time that he goes against her, albeit carefully.

**PO:** I think you need to tell your therapist as well.

She repeats her directive message, a little stronger in tone now, but still cautious and friendly.



**R:** oh, I see... (keeps quiet for a moment, nervous hand movements). Well I'll think about it...

He hears the message, but takes the freedom to do it or not. By doing that, he aims to take back control. Apparently, he not only finds it difficult to discuss it with the therapist, but is also sensitive to directive interventions. That may be why the PO, who knows him, was so alert at the start of the conversation to avoid that.

**PO:** friendly but forceful: To think about it is not good enough for me. I really think that you need to tell him. It is important for your treatment programme and to prevent any relapse later.

She can see what's happening and repeats her message, using the same words R. uses (think about it...). This way, he can continue to feel heard. She remains friendly and gentle, but it's becoming clear that she's not going to yield at this point.

**R:** nervous, remains silent for a bit. Well alright... then I will.

Apparently, he notices her resolve and gives in.

**PO:** nods and says softly: Right... And after your next appointment I will call your therapist to discuss how to go on from here.

To underline the importance of her message, she says that she'll call his therapist. He doesn't have a choice now.

**R:** as a kind of check...

He feels he is being checked, which is in line with his sensitivity to loss of control in the relationship, and also expresses that straight away. By doing this, he communicates his emotions, as a result of which the conversation can remain open. Apparently, he has enough *Trust* to do this.

**PO:** in part it is to check, yes, but it's also to see what the rest of your treatment programme should look like. Remains silent for a bit and gives him a searching look.

| She persists (in part), but also gives a substantive reason, which is that the treatment must continue to be in keeping with his urge and his ability to control this.

**R:** also remains silent for a bit and then says: OK.

| It appears he can no longer wriggle out of it and gives in.

**PO:** do you find it difficult to talk to him about it?

| She shows him that she can tell that this is difficult for him, asking about it, allowing him to open up.

**R:** well yes, it's not something I really look forward to doing ...

| He confirms it, by understating it, which gives some respite.

**PO:** no, of course, I can imagine ... Perhaps we can talk about how you can prepare for that meeting? Or how you can let him know ahead of time?

| She offers support. It needs to be done and if it's so difficult, I can help you with it. This lowers the threshold for him yet at the same time, this means he can no longer get out of it. The PO remains steadfast in her friendliness. *Goals and Conditions* converge with *Bond and Trust* to a maximum extent here. Control and support coinciding.

**R:** well I think... I should just be straightforward about it, no?

| He plays it down again, he can do it, just tell him.. (he takes control again).

**PO:** yes, that's an option...

| She joins him, probably feels confident that he'll do it.

**R:** so that's how I'll do it, then.

| He repeats it and now formulates it as an intention (instead of a possibility, as before).

**PO:** friendly and softly: Do you think you'll manage?

| Again, paying friendly attention to his struggle with this (instead of pushing).

**R:** yes.

| And again his confirmation.

**PO:** then I hope you'll have good talk with him, and after that we'll look at how to continue.

| She concludes and repeats her intention to discuss the next steps with the therapist, so that there can be no doubt in R.'s mind in terms of what is expected.

**R:** sure, yes, it will be OK.

| His intention becomes more concrete, not only does he know that it has to be done, he's confident that he'll succeed.

**PO:** right. Well I admire you for it!

| And she concludes with appreciation, so that the session ends positively, which is very important in such a conversation.

**Initial reaction Richard:**

I thought she was friendly, she spoke in a friendly way, with a nice intonation, so to speak, which made it easier for me to tell her. And that created a sense of trust.

| The PO's attitude gave him confidence. He doesn't respond to his task of talking to the therapist. Possibly, his relief about this conversation is greater

I than his reluctance to come out with it during his treatment.

### Initial reaction PO:

It was a bit of a shock to discover that he was so close to relapsing, while at the same time I admired him for telling me, so I thought I should emphasise that. To make sure that he deals with it in a good way, to regain control. Of course you know that there is always the risk of relapse. I thought that the treatment should concentrate extra on this, to pay specific attention to this element, besides all the other elements addressed in the treatment. I found it difficult to say that the check was indeed meant as a check. But it was necessary.

She clearly summarises the reasons behind her approach. The emphasis is on his ability to keep control while experiencing a difficult moment, while paying attention to the 'what's next' part. She also talks about her own feelings (I was shocked). She responds in broad outlines and doesn't talk about the smaller interventions that made the conversation effective, such as mirroring emotions, linking up in language, being persistent but friendly.

## Summarising: which characteristics of the working alliance do we see and with what effect?

This excerpt shows how the alliance characteristics of *Goals and Conditions*, *Bond* and *Trust* can work together positively. Clear responses to risk and tenacity about 'what needs to be done' go hand in hand with kindness, respect, alert response to needs and positive appreciation. This excerpt shows no signs of *Reactance* or *Contra reactance*. The probation officer clearly gives direction ('you need to do something with this during the treatment'), leaving no room for misinterpretation or negotiation: it has to be done. This way, she keeps *Goals* and the *Conditions* clear. At the same time, she is consistent in making him responsible for controlling this risk within himself. She doesn't say: 'I'm going to call the therapist'; instead, she leaves the initiative with him. Although she does make it clear that she'll be calling as well (afterwards). Across the board, but within her agenda, she leaves as much control with him as possible, by calmly and kindly challenging him to address his worries and come up with solutions himself; even when making small directive interventions during the conversation. This way, she supports their joint objective (*Goals*), also in the longer term.

In addition, she continues to link up with his emotions, for example, by actually mirroring them (expression, sigh), by adopting his language or by repeating short answers. These might seem to be minor details, but they are essential conversation techniques *and* evidence-based: their effectiveness has been demonstrated in research<sup>16</sup> for decades. The trick in probation is to have these details coincide in the interview with lasting clarity about the objectives and conditions of the supervision. This excerpt illustrates how this can be achieved. In this instance, control takes on the form of support and motivation. And while providing support, the specific details of the control become clear at the same time.

In his initial response, Richard speaks only of the fact that he has sufficient confidence to tell his story. He doesn't mention the obstacle ahead, 'talking to the therapist'. In our working alliance study, we discovered that clients attach great importance to sufficient *Trust* in the probation officer (and vice versa). The same probably applies to Richard.

The initial response of the PO confirms that she deliberately focused on the necessary follow-up of his signal, combined with a conscious emphasis on appreciating his openness about it. She explains that she found it difficult to talk to him about control. She recognises her emotions there and then, which allows her, perhaps precisely because of that, to perform the monitoring role clearly and respectfully: a form of successful reflection-in-action. She doesn't reflect on the successful details in the conversation; this knowledge is probably rooted so deeply that she's no longer aware of it all the time.

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<sup>16</sup> Norcross, J.C. (2011): *Psychotherapy Relations That Work: Evidence Based Responsiveness* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Oxford University Press.



## Case 3

# Community service Mario

Mario is an 18-year-old young man with mild intellectual disabilities. He has been sentenced to 180 hours of community service for vandalising street furniture (a bus shelter) in association. Mario lives with his mother. The home situation isn't stable. Mario has now completed 50 hours of his community service. He puts in a proper effort and makes a positive impression on his supervisors until suddenly, he fails to appear. The supervisors report him to the community service officer. The officer has tried several times to call him for a progress interview, but Mario doesn't answer the phone. In the end, the community service officer calls Mario's mother. She promises that Mario will start attending the probation service again. The following excerpt is part of the progress interview between Mario and the community service officer.

## Community service supervision Mario Version A

**What can we see?** - How do we reflect on that?

**PO:** in a friendly voice: Mario, I haven't seen you in a while. How are you?

| She immediately starts talking about his absence. She does that by taking a genuine interest, without judging. And enquires about his well-being by asking an open question.

**M:** I'm fine, thank you.

| He only answers her actual question and ignores anything about the absence.

**PO:** sure?

| By asking this, she implicitly asks if things are really all right, leaving room for him to say more.

**M:** yup

| He doesn't respond to this 'invitation' to provide more information and repeats his answer.

**PO:** nods kindly and says: Did you get lost on the way over? Because I've heard you skipped community service three times now, well, that's what I've been told...

| Since he didn't come up with an explanation himself, she expresses what she wants to know and what they need to be talking about. She does this with some humour and includes some perspective as well ('I've heard' and 'I've been told'). This way, she leaves him some room to confirm or further specify the information. This keeps the dialogue open and allows him to continue to experience some influence in the interaction. At the same time, she makes it known that today's conversation will be about this. She combines *Goals and Conditions* with investments in *Bond* and *Trust*. She also shows that she trusts Mario's intentions.

**M:** oh right, yeah, my phone got nicked...

Responds in the affirmative, but subsequently fails to explain why he didn't attend community service. Instead, changes the subject as to why he didn't call her. Does he want to explain his failure to call her first? Is talking about shirking work too difficult for him at the start of this conversation? Or is this just what happened most recently and this is a natural order of things?

**PO:** your phone got nicked?

Responds to his statement and enquires with interest, repeating his answer in the form of a question. She thereby makes it known that he has been heard and shows an interest (working on *Bond*). And *Trust*: she takes his statement seriously.

**M:** yeah...

Again responds briefly, doesn't provide further information.

**PO:** but .... there was no other way to call me?

Only asks an open question, enquiring about other options. She doesn't judge, but makes it known that she wants to know more. This way, she continues to work on *Bond*, conducive to *Goals and Conditions*: what happened and how can we prevent a recurrence?

**M:** well yes (annoyed), if your phone is nicked, you can't call, so...

Probably he hasn't been able to think of any other options. If you don't have your mobile, you can't make calls. It's possible that his intellectual disabilities in combination with a stress response leaves him unable to think clearly.



**PO:** indeed. But I called you through your mum. So perhaps you could've called me through your mother?

She's now asking more persistently. Starts out with an example (I called through your mother), allowing that option to register with him. And asks, still kindly, whether he could've done that as well. She adjusts her words to his abilities and remains friendly when asking questions. She continues to work on *Bond*, without losing sight of the importance of *Goals and Conditions* in the process.

**M:** yeah, maybe...

He responds to her questions, but shows ('maybe') that something about making calls via his mother might be problematic.

**PO:** maybe... Maybe it's an idea to do that next time, to remember that.

She repeats his answer first. That way, he knows she's listening. She then talks to him about his absence, but is friendly about it and with a view to the future: she suggests a possible solution if it happens again. This allows him to remain part of the conversation, without feeling uneasy about it. She doesn't respond to his reservation, which he expresses as 'maybe'.

**M:** maybe, yeah.

The reservation can again be heard again in his careful confirmation.

**PO:** well, that explains why you didn't call me. But I still don't know why you didn't show up for community service.

She lets his hesitant confirmation be for now. She completes the discussion about 'not calling' and switches to 'not showing up for community service'. She continues to give clear direction to the conversation, while maintaining a friendly voice.

**M:** well, I was... I wasn't at my mum's.

Now some explanation emerges. Shedding some light on 'maybe', when expressing his intention to call through his mother if he doesn't have a phone.

**PO:** you weren't at your mum's? How's that?

She continues to enquire in a calm fashion, repeating his own text first (this way she inserts some calm, while he knows that she's listening) and asking for an explanation thereafter. She doesn't judge or voice any other responses. She works consistently on *Bond* in combination with *Goals and Conditions*. And she keeps listening to his answers with *Trust* in his intentions.

**M:** well, a fight...

He continues to respond to her questions, but gives ultra-short answers. They do ultimately lead to a more complete picture. A fight, not at mum's, not using her phone...

**PO:** nods and asks: so, where were you if you weren't at your mum's?

No judgements, no positive or negative reactions, just keep asking questions, calm and consistent, until they both fully understand. This can even help him to better understand the situation.

**M:** at Herman's.

Continues to respond with ultra-short, yet clear answers. He doesn't show any defensive behaviour, nor does he seem to be intent on deliberately avoiding the subject of 'you weren't there'. It rather seems that he didn't know how to get out of it.

**PO:** who is Herman, do I know him?

So far, the strategy of neutral questioning is working and therefore continues along that line.

**M:** a friend of mine.

Again a short and to the point answer. No extra words, no attempts to avoid her in any other way. Short and basic replies.

**PO:** ok. And how are things between you and your mother now?

She leaves Herman be for now and focuses on the contact with his mother. Does his mother play a structural role in his life, despite the fact that the situation at home isn't stable? She tries to form a clear picture, so that they can make concrete agreements for the future. So far, she has always assumed *Trust* in his intentions and statements.

**M:** well, so so...

| Short answer, apparently contact with his mother is still not that great.

**PO:** so so... are you on speaking terms?

She repeats his answer again. And continues to enquire. She doesn't ask about their problems, but does check whether they're talking or resolving their issues. She consistently maintains this attitude (future-oriented, emphasising positive options).

**M:** sort of.

| Again a short and to the point answer.

**PO:** sort of... look, what I want to explain to you is, the thing is... I'm glad you're here...but it would be nice if we can agree on you contacting me next time you can't make it.

Again repeating his answer first. Now she stops asking questions. She carries on by explaining how she would like things to be for next time, thereby continuing to be future-oriented. She weaves her appreciation for his attendance today in her storyline. The wording 'would be nice' seems somewhat non-committal, but given the context (young, client with mild intellectual disabilities who has been cooperating well so far and who rather shows powerlessness instead of defensive behaviour), it will suffice. She combines *Goals and Conditions* with investments in *Bond*, with maximum effect, by complimenting him and by gearing language and voice towards his abilities.

**M:** yeah, but if your phone is nicked you can't make calls.

| From his answer it becomes clear that he continues to latch on to the nicked telephone and his perception that this prevents him from making calls. Apparently, the option 'through Herman or mum' didn't quite register.

**PO:** that's true, but you can also call at your mum's and maybe Herman has a telephone too.

| She isn't opposing it, but confirms his perception. With that, she quietly repeats that, from now on, he can also call through mother or Herman. Because she's friendly about it and with a view to the future (not 'you should have called through Herman' but 'next time you could call through Herman'), he's likely to hear her and understand. This supportive approach can enhance Mario's commitment.

**M:** yeah

| Now he says 'yes' instead of 'maybe'. Is it hitting home, has the hesitation gone or does he just want to be polite?

**PO:** yes, because doing your community service well is important.

| After repeating his answer once more, she now makes the point: that his community service should go well in the future. She doesn't speak of the risk of failure (as an avoidance objective), but emphasises the positive objective: 'things going well and calling if you can't make it'. By doing this, she at the same time appeals to his own wish to do well and shows *Trust* in that desire.

**M:** yes

| Continues to give short answers.

**PO:** right?? Because you want to complete it successfully.

She reinforces her message and now explicitly focuses on his own desire to complete it. That desire is not (just) the expressed wish of the probation service, but especially of himself. She asks 'right?', by which she asks him to confirm his own wish. By doing this, she explicitly works on his *Bond* to the community service and implicitly expresses her *Trust*.

**M:** yes

Now that she directively discusses with him how things should be better from now on, he continues to respond with a single 'yes'.

**PO:** yes, I too want you to bring that to a successful end.

Again repeat his answer first. She now reinforces her message by saying that she too wants him to bring it to a successful end. He wants it and she wants it too. Because of her voice and the calm nature in which she relays her message, he could interpret this as 'I'm not alone in this'. This way, she continues to work on *Bond* (I too am committed), providing *Goal* in the process. She shapes her monitoring role by providing backing and support. This is where supporting and supervising converge.

**M:** yes

That's all he says. Does he really hear her and is he on board? We don't know that for sure, but he does appear to follow her lead.

**PO:** yes, and that means that we need to agree on how we'll go about this in the future.

She again repeats his answer, 'yes' and continues to move forward. Now that they're in agreement, she returns to the question of 'How are we going to do that?'. Providing *Goals and Conditions*, *Bond* and *Trust* continue to converge.

**M:** yes. In case my phone is nicked again.

He again connects this to his telephone that was stolen and not to the falling out with his mother and his absence from the community service. Apparently, this is so etched into his brain that it is difficult to step away from that.

**PO:** yes. In case your phone gets nicked again and perhaps in case you have another argument with your mother.

Repeats both his 'yes' and the stolen telephone, supplementing this with 'another argument with your mother'. She clearly tries to keep to his pace.

**M:** yes, uhm...

I Again yes, but now with an introduction to more (uhm)...

**PO:** because I can help you with these things too, right. If you're having an argument.

She ignores his introduction to more and explains that she can also help him when he's having an argument. By doing this, she continues to play the role of providing support and at the same time, she optimises the chances of successful completion of the community service. She ensures that *Goals and Conditions* consistently coincide with *Bond and Trust*.

**M:** right, yes

The 'right, yes' sounds different from the previous 'yes' replies. As if he hears something new that can help him.

**PO:** so that we can make...

She seems to be saying something like "so that we can make things right again" (or words to that effect). She again focuses on the positive variant of the case: working on improved relations (instead of on arguments).

**M:** are you going to talk to my mum, then...

He interrupts her (for the first time in the conversation). He finds this interesting. He seems to get the impression that she's going to talk to his mother, to make the problems go away.

**PO:** yes, but not on my own. You'll come with me, right?

She confirms his perception, doesn't seek confrontation and adds nuance: he joins her. This is cast in the form of a question, allowing him to respond himself. In this instance too, besides Bond (she listens and wants to support), she's working on Goals and Conditions (the argument needs to be settled and he's going to work on this himself with her support).

**M:** yes

| We're back to yes again and he seems to show some relief.

**PO:** smiling: Yes.

| She echoes the relief (or she shares the emotion) and cheerfully repeats his yes.

**Initial response Mario:**

Yeah, it went well. Also the fact that she'll come and help if there's a fight. Great, all good.

During the conversation, he kept referring to the stolen telephone. In his reflection, the main thing he takes out of it is that she'll come and help him with the arguments. This is consistent with our impression that he started to react more strongly when she started talking about it (even interrupting her) with the relief at the end of the conversation. It remains to be seen whether he connects the dots between the series of events 'having a fight, not showing up, telephone stolen, not calling', although he *can* see that he'll get help when things go wrong again at home. And perhaps after this conversation, he'll have sufficient trust in the PO to confide in her if things go wrong again.

**Initial response PO:**

I feel sorry for him, because you can see that he's really struggling with it, combined with the fact that he's here regardless and that you need to hold him to account. And he has already figured out the reason why he couldn't call in and he just can't solve it, it's as clear as day. That only tells me that I need to take that extra step with him, for situations in which he simply can't make sense of it all himself.

She's well aware that it's difficult for him to keep a clear view of everything. She clearly feels involved with him. She appreciates him being here and that he has thought about things himself. You can tell by the way that she approached him that she actively took his (dis)abilities into account. She has learned from it: from now on, she'll discuss everything in advance more. She doesn't reflect on the details that work in her approach and which she probably experiences as self-evident.

## Summarising: which characteristics of the working alliance do we witness and to what effect?

In this excerpt, we witness how the probation officer manages to merge the alliance characteristics *Goals and Conditions*, *Bond* and *Trust* in such a way that it leaves no room for *Reactance* within Mario and no *Contra-reactance* within the probation officer. Furthermore, we can see that her investments in *Bond* and *Trust* are aimed at achieving clearness about *Goals and Conditions*. The entire conversation revolves around the question of how they can ensure that he continues to show up for community service in the future and that he'll call her if he's unable to. And during the conversation, she shows *Trust* in his intentions, which means that Mario can start confiding in her.

She explores what's going on by asking open questions. When the answers are incomplete, she doesn't seek confrontation. Instead, she provides food for thought. She works on *Bond* by assuming that he himself wants to complete the community service (and she explicitly checks this) and by adding that she too finds it important.

Whenever she holds him to account for what went wrong she's consistently future-oriented; everything she says revolves around 'things going well in the future'. This allows Mario to remain free from defensive behaviour (*Reactance*).



She takes his abilities into account by often repeating his own answers (this instils calm and tells him that she's listening). And she expresses herself in short and not overly complex sentences. She explains that he can also call through his mother, by explaining that she called him through his mother first. She works on *Bond* by adapting to his language and pace when explaining things. When he thinks she can solve things with his mother, she actively takes him by the hand by saying and then asking that he comes along. This way her investments in *Goals and Conditions* and *Bond* coincide. This way, she applies a purposeful approach towards the probation assignment: help a young man with mild intellectual disabilities and little support from his parents to complete his community service. She shapes the monitoring role that goes with it by investing in clarity about 'what needs to be done from this point onward' (*Goals and Conditions*), in terms of Mario's involvement in the community service (*Bond*) and by assuming positive intentions (*Trust*). In this excerpt, these characteristics always go hand in hand.

In her initial response, the probation officer confirms that she took into account his abilities and limitations and that this affects her emotionally ('feeling sorry'). As such, she confirms her own sense of *Bond* and *Trust*, which she also expressed in the conversation. She doesn't reflect on the details that work in her approach, such as repeating his answers, avoiding confrontation, continuing to ask open questions until they share a clear point of agreement, being consistently future-oriented when speaking about solutions instead of dwelling on problems.<sup>17</sup> This implicit professionalism has probably become so self-evident that she's no longer aware of it. She does say she has learned from this experience and will do things slightly differently from now on. This underlines that we're witnessing a professional at work who learns from her experiences through reflection-in-action *and* after the action.

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<sup>17</sup> The importance of working with positive targets and applying a future-oriented approach when working with offenders has been demonstrated in various studies. For example Ward, T. (2010): *The Good Lives Model of Offender Rehabilitation: Basic Assumptions, aetiological commitments and practical implications*. In: F. McNeill, P. Raynor & C. Trotter (Eds): *Offender Supervision, New Directions in theory, research and practice* (pp41-64). Cullompton: Willan.

## Community service supervision Mario Version B

**What can we see?** - How do we reflect on that?

**PO:** looking in anticipation and says: Mario. Well, let's hear it!

| Her attitude and voice make it clear that she first wants to hear an explanation before she's ready to continue conversing.

**M:** looking tense and nervous, says: What...

| He's lost for words for a while.

**PO:** where were you?

| She continues in the same way and by her tone of voice she shows that it's serious (and culpable). Immediately hammers down the *Conditions*.

**M:** uhm, uhm, I uhm, wasn't there for a while.

| He knows what she's hinting at and nervously and reluctantly comes up with half the answer: he wasn't where he should have been...

**PO:** no, well, that much is clear. So where were you?

| She continues to test him and doesn't give in. Her tone of voice remains cool. She continues hammering down on *Conditions* and is not very inviting in her attitude.

**M:** well, I was with Herman.

| He doesn't seem to resist, but continues to revert to short answers. He doesn't provide more information than that.

**PO:** who is Herman?

She enquires about the facts, maintaining the same tone. No attempts to break the ice somewhat, to give room to explain more about the underlying reasons for his absence. The *Conditions* remain leading.

**M:** a friend of mine.

A short answer, in line with the previous answers. He seems to feel little room for providing more information and longer answers.

**PO:** but we were clear in our very first conversation, right? If you can't make it to the community service, you call.

Now she expresses an explicit correction. She says 'we', but it's not clear who she's referring to. Is 'we' the probation service? Or is 'we' Mario and the PO? If she means 'Mario and the PO', then she is saying that it was a joint agreement. In his case, suffering from mild intellectual disabilities, you can't automatically assume that. How does he know what his obligations are exactly? What did he remember of all this, if anything? And was it a matter of 'we' from the outset, when setting out the conditions? Or was it a one-off and one-sided procedural explanation of it all at the time?

**M:** yeah, but.... My phone was nicked.

He goes into 'yeah, but' mode. Doesn't explicitly resist, but continues to be brief in his responses and his defensive role.

**PO:** yeah, but you can just find yourself another phone right... how difficult can it be?

She copies his 'yeah, but' mode, thereby failing to lead (*Goals*), because she allows herself to be led by him. Her point should be that community service isn't optional and that they should come up with something that allows him to continue to attend in the event of problems (*Goals and Conditions*). If she were to discuss that calmly and without making a fuss, she could use that as a stepping stone to talk about how things can be done differently. Now, she indirectly circumvents this message, making accusations and asking questions in the process. As a result, she's unable to lift the conversation to another level.

She doesn't take his intellectual disabilities into account. She assumes that he's able to consider different types of solutions to a problem. This is a fairly abstract undertaking that may be above his intellectual ability. The concluding exclamation 'how difficult can it be' is therefore quite inappropriate in this conversation.

**M:** yeah, but... you can't make calls if your phone is nicked.

He also continues to give 'yeah, but' responses. And he repeats the answer available to him: I couldn't call. In certain situations, a PO could regard this as an implicit defensive move (*Reactance*). But this is a very young person suffering from mild intellectual disabilities who may have been stressed because he was unable to call. He's showing powerlessness rather than resistance. And there's still no information about the reasons for his absence. So far, it's only about his 'failure to notify' that he couldn't attend, whereas a discussion about 'not attending' would probably yield more useful information. Why in fact was he not with his mother, but with Herman?

**PO:** indeed. And Herman doesn't have a telephone either?

She joins him in talking about 'not calling' and continues the same line of questioning pertaining to 'weighing solutions', which proves difficult for him. Her voice remains cool and focused on 'accountability'. So far, this hasn't been accompanied by invitations to talk about possible problems that stand in the way of the community service. In other words, she continues her one-sided focus on *Conditions*. And each time, she shows that she doesn't have any *Trust* in his explanation. That is why she is, in fact, working against *Goals*, because she's starting to lose sight of the objective of this session, which is to gently remind him of the conditions and, above all, getting him back to community service.

**M:** yeah, he does...

Short answer, we don't know whether he thought of 'using Herman's phone' as an option.

**PO:** so, what's wrong with borrowing his?

She continues to drive the conversation about 'not calling', instead of exploring the underlying reasons keeping him from attending community service. And she continues the line of questioning aimed at 'weighing solutions'. She doesn't seem to understand that this strategy is a dead-end and she tends to become more rigid in attitude, tone of voice and type of questions. Her one-sidedness grows stronger.

**M:** well, it belongs to Herman.

He continues to answer very briefly and shows that he doesn't understand much about the conversation.

**PO:** yeah, but you can ask him if you could borrow it to make a call?

The PO too persists in her 'yeah, but' mode, showing that she's still not taking the lead in the conversation. She seems to assume that he made a 'conscious' decision not to, in order to temporarily escape the community service, for example (instead of him not grasping it). By doing this, she shows that she doesn't have any *Trust* in his intentions. Based on this assumption, it's difficult to establish any kind of contact as to what exactly is the real problem. She still doesn't link up at his level, his apparent powerlessness and his limitation.

**M:** mmm...

He gives up. What else can he do?

**PO:** alternatively, you could've just come to see me... You could've looked me up here, you could've gone to your community service project, but you didn't do any of that.

And she comes with three more options for solutions in a single sentence. Her voice is getting more fierce. He probably no longer understands this conversation. And she continues to enquire on the basis of her unchecked assumptions about his intentions and abilities. *Trust* and *Goals* drift away further and further.

**M:** no, because I had an argument.

| Now he's starting to react more fiercely as well. This is in response to 'didn't do any of that' and this is the first time he says something about the underlying issue: he had a quarrel. By doing that, he offers a clear lead to investigate further. What is in fact going on?

**PO:** yes, and now you're having an argument with me.

| She fails to respond to this lead. Instead, she throws his answer back in his face by saying that he's now arguing with her. Is her own irritation starting to take over the conversation? Her corrective approach becomes stricter and no longer seems to leave any room for substantive questions. During the conversation, she never checked her apparent assumption about his motives ('deliberate' attempt to wriggle out of it).

**M:** yes

| He listens and feels deflated.

**PO:** yes

| Leaving it at that.

**M:** now you're angry.

| He repeats what she says, lets it sink in. With that repetition, he turns directly to her and in his attitude, he appears to reach out to re-establish contact. He doesn't want her to be angry. He shows that he needs a sense of *Bond*.

**PO:** yes, I'm a bit angry indeed.

| Apparently, she feels this as well, consciously or otherwise, in that she slightly softens her statement by saying "a bit".

**M:** is silent, moves restlessly in his chair and then says: What should I do then?

He unlocked himself from the 'yeah, but' mode. He's engaging in conversation. Such a direct message makes a lot more sense to him than all those indirectly reproaching questions and a series of solutions that have so far been dominant in the conversation. What does he need to do to stop her from being angry? He's actually asking himself (he's not asking "what happens next", but "what do I need to do"). This is a perfect lead to move the conversation forward. Perhaps the PO could've led him to this point quicker by immediately and directly letting him know that this wasn't an option, only to start exploring together how they can ensure that he'll continue to attend from this point onward.

**PO:** well, first of all, we're going to make some agreements about how we'll deal with it in the future.

She now actually responds to his question, "what should I do"? And she explains what they're going to do. In order to conduct that conversation, she does need more information about what has been going on and what else he needs in order to continue to attend community service or to keep in touch with the PO, despite arguments, stress and chaos. At this point she can still steer the conversation in the right direction.

**M:** in case my phone is nicked again.

He remains fixated on the nicked telephone and as such on the 'not calling' issue.

**PO:** yes, because if things go wrong... truth is, you know, you've practically given me no option other than to issue a negative report on the entire community service. That you failed.

She misses the opportunity of steering into another direction. Before they start making agreements, she points out the consequences if it happens again. She persists in her fixation on *Conditions*. She does this by naming the negative variant: failure. Consequently, she puts an avoidance objective at centre stage, the effectiveness of which is questionable. It can also cause unnecessary stress, especially for an individual such as M. Although she does say 'if' things go wrong and 'practically' no other option than... This is an indirect indication to let him know that he still has a chance. This is in line with her statement that they're going to check how they can prevent this in the future. Can M. hear this chance by reading between the lines?

**M:** fiercely: What does that mean??

| He's shocked and yells. This hits a nerve.

**PO:** well, basically that it's over, you can no longer try.

| Is it his (fear-driven) question that now makes to seem her shift to 'it's over'? Does she feel his exclamation as aggression? Is this her way of making him fully understand that it can't happen again? His anxiety causes her to lose contact with him: it has already sunk in. Why so much extra emphasis on *Conditions* if it's no longer needed? Can she still switch herself? Or is her own *Contra-reactance* gaining the upper hand?

**M:** interrupting her, loud voice: No, because I told you my phone was nicked!!

| He becomes stressed, shouts again, wants to avert this danger, because he wants to continue. It appears he doesn't understand all this and repeats that he really couldn't do anything, because his phone was nicked. He seems to be calling out for *Bond*: understanding for his situation and his wish to complete the community service.

**PO:** yeah, but there are other ways of solving this.

| She escalates further and reverts back to 'yeah, but' responses and referring to solutions that he didn't consider and opt for. Is she still making conscious decisions? Or has her sense of *Contra-reactance* become leading?

**M:** loud voice: Like what??

| His powerlessness becomes tangible and he keeps yelling out 'like what'? What does he need to do, what's happening?



**PO:** not showing up is not an option!

This is the first time she expresses 'not showing up' instead of just 'call when you can't attend'. However, she still doesn't know why he wasn't there in the first place. And does she mean that a negative report is likely, possible or certain? This is, in fact, left unclear. An uncertainty that is like fuel to the fire. For both, it seems. At the same time, it shows that this conversation is progressing without *Goal*.

**M:** but I couldn't come, I couldn't call! I just told you!

He keeps yelling and keeps repeating what the problem was. This is (in all likelihood) a logical explanation for him.

**PO:** yes and I told you that you could've come to see me or you could've gone to your community service.

She keeps replying at the same level as he does: you say this, but I say another thing. Again with two options in a single sentence. She no longer provides targeted guidance to the conversation. Has she been aiming for a negative report from the start? Or is she increasingly guided by her irritation? Or has she reverted to responding from *Contra-reactance* alone, due to M's tone of voice? How does she interpret that tone? Can she hear aggression in it?

**M:** I don't want it to stop!

He continues to respond as if the decision (negative report) has already been made. He apparently didn't hear the probability contained within her words.

**PO:** well, you should have thought of that sooner...

Is she adopting his interpretation? Is she allowing herself to be guided by him now? Because now it seems that the decision has been made. Has she lost sight of her original objective? Or has she arrived at the point where she wanted to be from the outset? We can't tell. It says something about the lack of clarity (what is the *Goal*?) by which she's talking about this.

**M:** damn it...

| He can hear her say that it's over and yells out of desperation.

**Initial response Mario:**

Well, that was bad. She was mad at me. And I told her how it all happened, but she was still angry.

| He keeps repeating what matters to him most: I told her what the problem was and she's angry with me. The discussion about possible solutions was probably lost on him.

**Initial response PO:**

Well, that's just a lame excuse. It's very simple. We've been clear about that from the start. He knows the agreements, he knows the rules of the community service and he has signed them. There simply is no excuse.

| This reaction does indeed show that she's irritated. Did she interpret his responses as resistance and later on, when he started yelling, as aggression against her? And did it trigger her to develop *Contra-reactance*? In any case, she has been focusing on enforcing the rules from the start. She simply assumes that he still knows and understands the exact nature of these rules and that he made a conscious decision to commit to them ('no excuse').

## Summarising: which characteristics of the working alliance do we witness and to what effect?

This excerpt shows how a conversation can progress if the probation officer applies a one-sided focus on 'enforcing' rules and procedures. In this example, she does it in such a way that we can't refer to this as a one-sided emphasis on the alliance characteristic *Goals and Conditions*. For in her fixation on the 'Conditions' (confronting with violations), the *Goal* (successful completion of his community service) is actually drifting further away.

She fails to seize opportunities in which the conversation could have taken a different turn, by not responding to leads offered by Mario. She doesn't sense his apparent need for more *Bond* and *Trust*, or ignores it as long as he (according to her) doesn't show an understanding for what he should have done differently. In this example, she doesn't invest in *Bond* herself and she continuously shows that she doesn't have any *Trust* in his sincerity. Because she doesn't invest in these positive characteristics of the working alliance, the conversation escalates to the point of complete breakdown.

During the conversation, she fails to notice Mario's possibilities and limitations. She wants him to become fully aware of the importance of the rules. Is this her usual style? If so, we might wonder how she explained these rules at the time, to what extent she took into account his mild intellectual disabilities, and how much this generated in terms of shared Goals and Conditions. During the conversation, she seems unable to interpret Mario's responses: she apparently assumes a deliberate violation instead of inability. She fails to pick up on the positive appeal in his responses and seems to experience his fierceness as aggression and resistance. She presumes, wrongly it seems, that Mario has the cognitive ability to independently consider a series of solutions to the problem of his nicked telephone. Consequently, she doesn't show *Trust* in his intentions in this instance either<sup>18</sup>.

When, after the seriousness of the situation has sunk in for Mario, she again repeats that this isn't acceptable, she puts avoidance language and avoidance objectives at centre stage (risk, failure, negative report). This occurs right at the time when the conversation could've been steered into a positive, future-oriented direction. This causes Mario's anxiety levels to rise even further. At this stage, the probation officer no longer appears to be making conscious decisions. She previously failed to take the lead in the conversation (for example, joined his 'yeah, but' responses instead of guiding him out of this) but now, her own irritation (*Contra-reactance*) seems to get the better of her. It's unclear what she is after. In her interactions with Mario, her statements now shift from 'practically no other option than a negative report' to 'it's over'. In this interaction, she loses sight of the task of the probation service. That task includes ensuring that he returns to work, while taking into account his (in)abilities as a young adult (18) suffering from mild intellectual disabilities

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<sup>18</sup> In his theory of 'pro-social modelling', Trotter (2006) explains that probation officers who consistently interpret their clients' intentions and expressions as negative, who don't take into account their clients' limitations and who don't combine their confronting interventions with positive, future-oriented support, are themselves a role model for antisocial behaviour. His research further shows that positive interpretations of client expressions can be effective. Trotter, C (2006): *Working with Involuntary Clients*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

who has little support from his parents. Young adults and people with mild intellectual disabilities show a higher-than-average dropout rate in the probation service. This case study is likely to confirm that statistic, with all the associated consequences for him and for society. This example illustrates how important it is for probation officers to be well-equipped to identify mild intellectual disabilities. And that they're aware of what this entails in terms of their approach<sup>19</sup>. Version A of the conversation with Mario illustrates another, better way.

It's important for this probation officer to find out what hinders her in connecting with Mario. Does she believe that the probation service is mainly about strict enforcement of the rules? Does she feel pressure from negative publicity about incidents, causing her to take a tough stance and overruling her usual tendency to be friendly? Doesn't she understand how friendliness can be combined with control? Perhaps she doesn't dare to do this? Is she sufficiently aware of the possibilities and limitations of clients with mild intellectual disabilities? Does she have a tendency of feeling personally attacked or thinking that she's not taken seriously? The answers to these questions can't be derived from the excerpt but could be discussed during a professional consultation instead.

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<sup>19</sup> For more information, see: Vrij, P., Kaal H., and Bernard, R. (2018): *Licht Verstandelijke Beperking en de Reclassering*. Leiden University of Applied Sciences and 3 RO.





## Case 4

# Ongoing supervision Mark

Mark is 23 with a suspended sentence for assault. Special conditions have been imposed: an alcohol prohibition which is monitored for as long as the probation officer finds it necessary, combined with supervision by the probation service. Mark believes that the probation sessions and the alcohol ban are all nonsense. He experiences the supervision as an obligation and doesn't want to talk about anything. The probation officer has difficulty supervising Mark.

## Ongoing supervision Mark (one version)

**What can we see?** - How do we reflect on that?

**PO:** good morning

| Neutral, friendly start

**M:** yawns, hides in his hoodie, moves sluggishly and mumbles: mornin'.

| What does his attitude show? Is he sleepy? Does he want to avoid involvement in the conversation? Is wearing the hoodie his usual appearance within his group of friends? Should we interpret it as *reactance*, as rudeness or as age-appropriate behaviour? Or a combination of the above? We don't know.

**PO:** phew, good morning to you too... Would you mind dropping your hood please?

| She first mirrors his attitude and keeps it light. Immediately followed by a directive question about the hood. Instead, she could've opted to let him know about his appearance and what impression that makes on her, allowing him to drop his hood as part of the interaction. Does she assess that the directive approach has greater effect with him? Does she make a deliberate attempt to set a standard with the added belief that it's not up for debate? Is this an agreement made at the start of the supervision and does she now confirm this within a *Condition*? This excerpt is only a small part of the ongoing supervision, so we can't tell. It may be that this is one of her pet hates and her request is aimed at protecting herself against the development of *Contra-reactance*. She takes some risk if it turns out this norm wasn't embedded as part of agreements on this subject at the start of supervision: if he refuses, she's immediately confronted with a blockage in the subsequent conversation.

**M:** why is that?

| A counter question from which we can deduce that this hasn't been discussed before. He can't see the problem.

**PO:** well, it's like you're hiding from me... which you're not, because you're here, but I prefer talking to people with their hats off. It's just a bit more respectful.

| She explains why she made the request. Corrects herself when she says he's hiding (realising his physical attendance). She then relates it to her own desire: 'I prefer talking...'. In doing so, she abstains from judging his motives for wearing the hood. The reason 'more respectful' is more normative though.

**M:** sighs... fine, I'll take it off then.

| He complies with her request, reluctantly, but still...

**PO:** great, thanks Mark. Switches to a more active voice: Right, how was your weekend?

| She thanks him for that, her voice is sincere and kind. By doing this, she again shows him that this is in any case important for herself. It may be that, because of this, he felt the space to comply with her request: she motivated her request both verbally and non-verbally, primarily from her own wish. She now starts the conversation about how he has been doing.

**M:** yeah fine...

| A short and somewhat vague answer.

**PO:** tell me what you mean by 'fine'...

| She links up with his wording while asking to specify his answer.

**M:** well, there was, like, what's it called, like a village party. I went to that.

| He responds with an informative answer, showing some willingness to have a normal conversation with her.



**PO:** OK. Wow, a village party. When talking village parties I always immediately think of ‘yay, village party, where’s the booze’.

Responds, in a somewhat popular voice and immediately throws in the element of alcohol. ‘Where’s the booze’. She only says what she thinks herself, doesn’t ask any further, thereby allowing him room to come up with his own response. At the same time, she sets the agenda: the supervision is about the special condition ‘alcohol ban’. (*Goals and Conditions*).

**M:** yes

He confirms and leaves it at that.

**PO:** yes, so how did you deal with that?

Repeats his answer and asks a truly open question, without suggesting the consumption of alcohol.

**M:** well just like really, practically didn’t drink, so...

He answers carefully. No lying (for example, didn’t drink anything). He knows he violated his condition and therefore emphasises ‘practically didn’t’ (instead of, for example, ‘a few here and there’). Still, he comes out with it. It may be that his intention is to explore and expand the limits of supervision. It could also be that, albeit reluctantly, he shows a willingness to engage in conversation. This is a noticeable development because in the case description, the PO states that she’s experiencing difficulty with the supervision.

**PO:** practically didn’t? So how much did you or didn’t you drink?

Repeats his answer and asks to specify it. The majority of her efforts are geared towards *Goals and Conditions*. She doesn’t respond to his choice to tell her. This choice can be an indicator about his involvement (*Bond* in the supervision) and appreciation for this could strengthen their mutual *Bond* in the relationship.

**M:** well, like a few.

He still doesn't conceal the fact that he drank, but remains vague in terms of volume.

**PO:** like a few? Well, that's not very good then, is it?

Repeats his answer and states the standard: that is not acceptable. At the same time, she puts down the *Conditions*. She opts to do that here and now rather than continue her enquiry by asking 'how much and how did that happen'. In his case, the effect thereof can vary: he can avoid further judgement by giving less information, pushing them in a kind of tug-of-war interaction. Or he can talk more freely now because the threat is no longer in the air: the PO has said it now (which he saw coming) and this has defused the situation.

**M:** well it's OK to drink a few beers, isn't it...

Sticks with his acknowledgement (he did drink) and now defends himself in a different way: it's not the end of the world...

**PO:** no Mark, you can't drink a few beers.

She repeats her rejection of his behaviour (*Conditions*). Her voice is friendly but decisive. This way she tries to preserve the relationship (*Bond*) and tell him that she's not going to reject him, despite what happened.

**M:** what else can you drink then? Like, a Coke or something...

Enquires by asking (rhetorical) questions on alternatives, like what else can you drink? What he means is: you seriously can't ask me to have a Coke..., a guy like me. You do understand that, right? Although in his response, he partly goes along with her answer. He knows what's coming.

**PO:** yes

She calmly confirms his 'fear': a Coke, yes.

**M:** how can you be drinking a Coke at a village party.

He sticks with his point. They now arrive at an essential issue: what self-image (tough guy in a village community?) is preventing him from not touching alcohol?

**PO:** well, truth be told, I'm a bit shocked by the fact that you've been drinking, because we made agreements and it is, in fact, in your conditions that you're not allowed to drink. This is serious business.

She's not engaging in this particular conversation (as yet?). She continues to work on clarifying the *Goals and Direction* of supervision. Self-image or not, you can't do this. By stating this, she refers to external motivation: agreements and conditions. And (deliberately?) doesn't make a connection with possible internal sources of motivation yet, such as his own apparent wish to do things differently. It appears that she first wants to 'clarify' things before going any further. By referring to 'serious business', she makes a clear appeal to him.

**M:** yeah, I mean, I know that.

He's compliant. Her direct restriction, for now without making the connection with his own possible motives, appears to lead to some level of admission. He seems to be willing to engage in this conversation. This may indicate an increase in his *Bond* to the supervisory objectives.

**PO:** yes

| Confirms, she knows that he knows

**M:** well, I might as well not go to these parties then.

A bit annoyed. Are the consequences of the supervision starting to register with him? Or is he trying to have the PO withdraw the ban? (with the implicit appeal: 'you understand that, right?') In this response, he does in fact show that he has considered these alternatives. Anyway, so far, the conversation has remained somewhat of a tug-of-war game: she restricts, he raises counter-arguments. Yet at the same time, you can feel that his resistance is superficial. It seems to be sinking in and he's annoyed by it. How can they break out of this dynamic before it has gone on too long? Switch to asking him open questions? Responding to his willingness and internal sources of motivation, which, among other things, are evidenced by the fact that he does own up straight away and doesn't deny it?

**PO:** indeed. You could've opted for that.

She doesn't respond to his implicit appeal and continues to calmly confirm his fears.

**M:** makes a gesture of rejection and is silent.

He's annoyed and lost for words for a while. Apparently, he's run out of a counter-offensive.

**PO:** so uhm, what are we to do now? You have violated the conditions, something that's not acceptable... and which I do have concerns about. Given the fact that when you drink, you tend to lose control rather quickly.

His silence offers her room for a different dynamic. She asks a future-oriented question (now what?). Repeats that what happened is not acceptable. Again, bringing the formal and abstract argument first (breaching the conditions is not an option). Followed by the step towards his own behaviour, thereby (for the first time) making the connection to his own problem and possible internal source of motivation.

**M:** moves nervously; Yeah, what needs to happen next... nothing much, I guess. It is what it is.

| This is making him uncomfortable. He knows it's not OK, but keeps pushing back at the same time.

**PO:** I do have to report it though, to your therapist.

| Now that he keeps pushing back, she doesn't let go of the emphasis on the *Conditions* just yet. She's going to report it to the therapist. M. could possibly interpret that as a threat, thereby placing the therapist at a distance. Is that in the interest of his treatment? She remains in control of the report. In doing so, she opts for a separation between the monitoring role (that's what the probation service does) and the supporting, mobilising role (we do that together). This is in line with the conversation so far, in which she mainly links the monitoring role to external sources of motivation (agreements, conditions). Could she have mobilised him herself at this stage? 'You're going to tell this to your therapist, you need to start working on this'. After all, he does offer leads to a conversation about his own motivation.

**M:** aww, shit man

| He's annoyed, but he doesn't resist.

**PO:** and as far as I'm concerned, you get a pre-announcement for a warning about this.

| She lets him know again that it is 'serious': if it happens again, she'll give him a formal warning. By doing that, she formalises the limit.

**M:** great.

| He stops throwing up objections. This response can mean anything. Is it sinking in that this is no longer acceptable and is he thinking about it? Is he afraid of the consequences of a possible warning and does he allow himself to be limited by it? Is he starting to think about being less honest in the future, because his 'confession' is now being punished? Is he just annoyed in general and doesn't know what to do next?

**PO:** yes. (changes to a different, involved tone): Now what? (leans towards him): tell me what we're going to do next, because I'm a bit worried. And credit where credit's due, you did the right thing by telling me.

| She appears to be letting go of the framework-oriented conversation. She literally moves towards him. She expresses her own worries about him. And she praises him for being honest. By doing that, she's working on *Bond* and shows more *Trust*. Now she *does* address his possible motivation to control alcohol consumption and aggression. She's starting to shift the emphasis to a supportive conversation. It appears that she opts for a method in which she, in terms of time, tone and language, separates a conversation about *Goals and Conditions* from working on *Bond and Trust*. Starting with a clear definition of the frameworks, only to continue to provide support thereafter.

**M:** mmm, yeah... I did think about staying at home, because you know you're gonna be tempted, you know.

| He immediately starts showing compliant behaviour. Now he can explicitly show his (ambivalent) motivation. Is he able to do this, because she now approaches him positively? Does the clear framework she defined play a role? Or is it the sequential combination that made this possible for him? We can't tell.

**PO:** yes

| She shows that she's listening and now leaves the initiative with him.

**M:** and I was thinking of staying at home, but I don't want to be a spoilsport you know, I just didn't know what to do and...

| He's now telling what we heard before implicitly: he has indeed considered alternatives. He had good reason to firmly reject them earlier in the conversation. He finds it difficult to let go of his old behaviour. He doesn't seem to be intent on pushing the boundaries within the supervision. He actually wants to work on his drink problem, no matter how difficult it is.

**PO:** OK, so you were struggling between two thoughts then.

| She repeats his struggle and together, they reflect on his ambivalence for a while. He can tell that she's listening and that she understands (*Bond*). She leaves the initiative with him again, thereby showing *Trust* that he'll start thinking things over for himself.

**M:** yes, that wasn't easy you know, I mean, you live there and everyone knows you, so yeah...

| Now he tells her more about his dilemma. He also places it in the context of the village and his role within that community (or at least his vision of it). This provides important leads to continuing the conversation and the implementation of supervision.

**PO:** yes, and everyone also knows what you did.

| She confirms his story and extends it to the assault, which the entire village knows about. By doing this, she appeals to the motivating power which his role in this community apparently has for him. In doing so, she connects with the source of motivation he showed when outlining his dilemma. Here she combines her efforts on *Goals and Conditions* with working on *Bond*.

**M:** yes

| He's on her side now.

**PO:** so when you start drinking, it doesn't look too good for...

| This allows her to complete the circle: she makes the connection with drinking at the village party.

**M:** yes, I know.

| He continues to work with her. The conversation really starts to bear fruit now. And the themes for further supervision are becoming clearer.

**Initial response Mark:**

Yes, not a good situation to be in. You know what,... I thought she, I mean, she understood, you know, with the things she said and stuff. And she sort of let me decide on the next step. Look, I know what I did wasn't acceptable... but it doesn't make it any easier, you know. And she wasn't like shaking her finger or anything at me, you know, I hate that when people shake their finger of disapproval...

He did know that what he did was a violation and therefore seemed to accept the framework-oriented start of the conversation without too much resistance. He noticed that he was given the room to think about how to proceed. And thought that she wasn't 'shaking her finger' at him. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that she partly explicitly motivated her confronting action (hoodie, 'alcohol is a no-no') on the basis of her own wish: 'this is what I prefer', 'I'm worried'. He can experience this as involvement (*Bond* from her to him), rather than normative.

**Initial response PO:**

A tricky situation, but understandable at the same time, because people do have that struggle, him included. The fact that he clearly shows that struggle makes me a bit less worried. And I like the fact that he leaves room to tell me something about that. And the fact that I feel that I can work with him and that he takes it seriously. A bit awkward at the beginning though, with the hoodie, I wasn't intent on letting him get away with that. I think the way I approached him allowed him to open up, to express his doubts.

In her initial response, she mainly talks about her understanding of his struggle and doubts. This clarifies what she was after: she didn't want to condemn him or address him normatively. She mainly wanted to support him in his struggle. That approach is also evident from her friendly voice, even in the first part of the conversation, in which she one-sidedly focused on establishing the standard, the *Conditions*.



## Summarising: which characteristics of the working alliance do we witness and to what effect?

This excerpt illustrates an interaction in which the alliance characteristics *Goals and Conditions*, *Bond* and *Trust* can converge, but in a slightly different way than in cases described elsewhere where this happens (for example Robbert, version B and Richard, version B). The probation officer in this excerpt first concentrates (after a violation has been confessed) on clearly establishing the *Conditions* ('not permitted'). In that part of the conversation, her voice is friendly enough for Mark to remain engaged (sufficiently aware of the importance of *Bond* and *Trust*), but the formal character dominates. She occasionally motivates her framework-oriented comments based on her own wishes and care. By doing so, she prevents Mark from feeling treated too normatively, which is confirmed in Mark's reflection. Research<sup>20</sup> shows that rehabilitation clients respond positively to confronting interventions if they feel it's based on the probation officer's care for their well-being in their lives. In this part of the conversation, she mainly appeals to Mark's external sources of motivation (agreements and conditions). This reinforces the substantive emphasis on *Goals and Conditions*. She also issues him with a 'pre-announcement for a warning'. This can go either way. He can decide to be less honest from now on<sup>21</sup>, combined with the sense that he must start taking this limit, and the supervision, more seriously. At this stage, he shows some passive resistance (signs of *Reactance*), which she allows, thereby preventing aggravating the situation. She maintains control herself: she will call the therapist. In this excerpt, the monitoring role is 'owned' by the probation officer.

Only when this part of the conversation has, according to her, been completed satisfactorily (him acknowledging that he was wrong) does she switch to the more supportive part of the conversation. From this point forward, the emphasis is more on *Bond* and *Trust*, but always serving to achieve clarity about *Goals and Conditions*. From now on, she includes Mark's possible internal sources of motivation, such as his role in the village community. She shows an

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<sup>20</sup> Rex, S. (1999): Desistance from Offending: Experiences of Probationers. *The Howard Journal of Crime and Justice*, 38 (4), 266-383.

<sup>21</sup> The complications of this paradox in the probation and after-care service (confessing honestly within positive relations can have formal consequences) are described by, among others, Skeem, JL and Machak, S. (2008): Back to the Future: From Klockars' Model of Effective Supervision to Evidence-Based Practice in Probation. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 47 (3), 220-247.

understanding of his struggle with the drinking ban. This way, Mark can see that she listens and supports him (*Bond*). In line with the above, it's not until this part of the conversation that she compliments him about his decision to tell her of his violation. This way, she shows that she has *Trust* in him and confirms that apparently, he trusts her enough to tell her. Mark seems to respond well to this method. After some time, he gives up his passive resistance and after she switches to the supportive part of the conversation, he immediately engages in the conversation.

In her initial response, the probation officer talks about her understanding his struggle.

She also reflects on her own emotions, which she, so it seems, was well aware of during the conversation. She can be seen to be 'reflecting in action', for example when she corrects herself when she uses the word 'hiding' at the start. She doesn't reflect on her choice, in both time and attitude, to separate the framework-oriented part of the conversation from the supporting part of the conversation. Is this her 'standard' approach? Or did this arise naturally as part of her interaction with Mark? Nor does she mention the difficult alliance which she refers to in the case description. Did she experience this conversation as difficult too? Could the collaboration with him be sustainably improved if she were to start focusing more explicitly on his own internal sources of motivation, even when holding him to account about his special condition? And if she were to start mobilising him more when it comes to monitoring his drinking ban (for example, calling the therapist himself)? We don't know how this would work out with Mark, but she could try this.

Finally, regarding her request to drop the hood: enough was said about this in the reflection on the actual passage. But it should be noted that 'permission' to wear headgear is often discussed in a more general sense. However, this can't be a general discussion, because deciding which approach is appropriate varies greatly per client and context.





## Case 5

# Starting supervision Robbert

Robbert is 34 and sentenced to a two months' suspended prison sentence, with the special condition of an outpatient treatment obligation and supervision by the probation service on account of a single assault charge while on a night out. Under the influence of alcohol, Robbert picked a fight with a random passer-by. Robbert has had two sessions with the probation officer. The general purpose of supervision was discussed in the first session; namely that Robbert learns to hold his own in society, and the special condition that he must adhere to (the mandatory treatment). The second session focused on Robbert's wish and goal of finding his own place to stay. Robbert is staying with friends but doesn't really feel welcome there. Included is an excerpt from the third session, in which the probation officer and Robbert together continue to search for achievable goals. For this session, Robbert was asked to think about goals, besides the objective of accommodation.

## Starting supervision Robbert Version A

**What can we see?** - How do we reflect on that?

**PO:** hey Robbert, good to see you again.

| Friendly welcome

**R:** well, at least I managed to find it!

| Apparently, he didn't show up or showed up late once and touches upon this with some light-heartedness.

**PO:** laughing: you sure did find it this time. Say listen, during the previous conversation, we agreed that this time around we would talk about the objectives and that you would think about it.

| She adopts the light-hearted atmosphere with a smile, thereby ensuring a relaxed start. Then comes straight to the agenda for this session. He was supposed to think about objectives. By doing this, she takes charge of the process (*Goals and Conditions*), while leaving the initiative in terms of content to him. That way, she gives him a voice in the conversation, which can affect *Bond and Trust*.

**R:** yes, well that's clear. I just need to have a house, basically a roof over my head, right. It's as simple as that.

| He has thought about it and states his objective. He makes it clear in his tone of voice and his choice of words ('basically', 'simple') that *that* is the objective.

**PO:** okay, well that's a good objective to have. Can you tell me something more about it?

| She links up with this, supports his story, values it as important and continues with an open question. This way, they can explore what is needed and possible. She wants to invest in *Bond* with this, or so it seems.

**R:** yes, well, it's quite simple. If you don't have a house, then you have to make sure you do, like get one, so yeah... that seems to be the priority here.

He repeats his vision. It's simple, this is what has to happen. Reinforces its importance in general terms ('you') without telling about his own situation.

**PO:** yes, and how would you like to achieve that? Housing?

She doesn't enquire further about his current housing arrangements and what makes this such an important objective. She steps down from her own agenda by not enquiring about other objectives, as agreed for this session (by which she could've worked on *Goals and Conditions* more). Or does she want to show him that she understands, thus investing in increased *Bond* in this way? She immediately switches to 'how to achieve this'. The 'how' question is important, but they could have talked about it in more concrete terms, if she'd explored his current situation more. The clearer this is, the greater the possibility that he can work on it.

**R:** yeah, often these things work out via a friend of a friend, so if you hear anything about a place, like somewhere in your network or something, then yeah, like how I can get a house, then I'm your man, right.

Due to the attitude displayed by the PO, who so far played along with his tune, he apparently feels the freedom to engage her personally. 'Then I'm your man': it may be something he says all the time. Yet implicitly, this communication means that he thinks (wants to think) that she's after his sympathy. He possibly hopes to maintain control in this way, of the conversation and thus of the probation programme.

**PO:** I'll think about it, but I don't know of anything off the top of my head and the probation service doesn't offer housing so...

It seems she senses that something isn't going quite right and she wants to think. She could've seized this opportunity to give more direction and to clarify the *Conditions*. For example, by determining what the probation service can and can't do in these instances. However, she's hesitant and vague here: think about it, don't know, the probation service has no houses. Doesn't she know, is this a delayed form of reflection-in-action? Or does she feel hesitant to go against him, out of fear to lose *Bond*? She also gives him the space to continue to address her personally about his housing problem.

**R:** well, I know what you can do, at every birthday party you go to or whatever other places you go to, just ask around, telling everyone that you know someone who is looking for a house.

| ...and he uses that space. He shoves the 'how are you going to do that' question right back. He has the answer: she'll do it.

**PO:** yes uhm...

| Is stuck in her hesitation. This can mean one of two things: she either knows that she has to give a clear counter-message, but she doesn't dare or is unable to, or she's convinced that she'll make progress with him if she consistently 'shows she understands'. Perhaps this way, she may want to realise more *Bond* and *Trust* on his part. In any case, she misses more and more opportunities in the conversation to clarify her role (*Goals and Conditions*) and to mobilise him towards some self-management.

**R:** and that would speed things up a bit, I think.

| He's free to continue along the same line.

**PO:** tell me, are you registered with the housing association?

| She leaves it for what it is and proceeds to ask about options to achieve the housing objective.

**R:** yes, of course, but that can takes ages, you need to get it through other channels.

| That's not his intention, the housing association, it needs to be achieved through informal channels (i.e. you).

**PO:** yeah, it can take a long time... Oh uhm, and what about alcohol consumption. Have you given that any thought?

She confirms and leaves it for what it is. And switches to the other objective, which is important to the supervision. She now provides substantive direction (*Goals and Conditions*). So far, she has been connecting to him through choice of words and tone of voice. Which can be a good way to start a conversation about a theme that is difficult for him.

**R:** yes, I've thought about that, but that's not the point. You know, it's more like the situation you end up in. That's always the point. Look, you can drink a beer but ultimately, it's about where you are. I mean, when you drink a beer in the desert, nobody will be bothered by you. But if you drink a beer when you go out, then, well yeah, you only need one clown who somehow thinks he's the better man than you, in which case I'm happy to prove him wrong.

Based on the interaction thus far, R. knows (consciously or otherwise) that he can wriggle his way out. He's eager to use the space he's given and explains in detail why it's not the alcohol that's the problem. He portrays himself righteously, as someone who's not a walkover. No surprise that something happens, the clown shouldn't be there. He does in fact now shift the subject to aggression in relation to alcohol. He ignores the efforts of the probation officer, who appears to be making a strong effort to achieve *Bond and Trust* (but not very effectively right now). He, on the other, seems to continue to be acting more strategically, hoping to achieve his (short-term) objectives: taking control, continuing to drink and keeping involvement in the supervision low.

**PO:** looking a little doubtful and says; yeah well, uhm...

She misses the opportunity to hold on to that connection between alcohol and aggression and continues to respond hesitantly. She simply doesn't know how to? Or is she convinced that 'linking up' is the best strategy? Does she feel that things aren't going quite the way she wants? Apparently, the reflection-in-action gets stuck.

**R:** it's that simple.

As he said before, everything is simple and logical in the world he paints for her. By following this pattern, he tries to keep her away from responding.



**PO:** tries to get a foot in.

| She's unable to get a foothold, she leaves him in control.

**R:** yes uhm, but that house is the key objective. I've got my priorities right.

| So no alcohol, no aggression problem, but a house. That's his objective and he knows it. He now has full control of the agenda.

**PO:** let's write that down then.

| And she conforms accordingly. She sticks with his one objective and has stopped trying to talk about other goals (*Goals and Conditions* are off the agenda for now). Is this her way of trying to gain more *Trust* in order to motivate him for other objectives in a subsequent session?

**PO:** okay, good!

| He's happy with that.

**PO:** good to hear that you're thinking about it.

| She gives him a compliment, because he's thinking about the purpose of the supervision. That is, in itself, an appropriate response. However, placed within the context of this conversation, you could ask yourself how he interprets this.

**R:** so if you can do that for me, you know, telling everyone that I'm looking for a house, it'll make a huge difference.

| Just to be sure, he reiterates: you're going to find me a house.

**PO:** I'll think about it.

| She doesn't say yes or no, but will think about it. Which he probably takes as a 'yes'.

**R:** OK, well that's great!

| So he does indeed hear 'yes'. Or he interprets it that way to push it even further that way.

**PO:** it was good talking to you.

| What did she think was good about it? Does she feel the conversation went smoothly? R. can also take this as confirmation of the relationship he has established: *she* is glad they spoke.

**R:** likewise.

| And he confirms this relationship (good, glad you enjoyed it).

**Initial response Robbert:**

Yes, I thought it went well. I had given it some proper thought and yes, the house is the most important thing. She wanted to talk about alcohol, but I was able to explain that the alcohol isn't the main issue here. And I think it's great that she'll be on the lookout to see if she can arrange something for me with a house, you know.

| He assumes that she'll be searching for him. And that she has been convinced by him that the alcohol isn't a problem. His apparent pattern in communication (I won't be pushed around and if any clown has a problem with that, he's got something coming) has turned to be leading in this conversation. He can interpret that as achieving his own (short-term) objective and thus be satisfied. But is that in his overall interest? This pattern will cause him more and more trouble and ultimately lead to new offences. The reason for supervision didn't come into focus during this session.

**Initial response PO:**

Well, I think it's very important that I link up with the client. So I really try to find out what he needs. And respond to that need accordingly.

| Apparently, her conviction about 'linking up' and making the connection was leading. During the conversation, she in fact showed that she doubted whether these consistent attempts to link up were appropriate here. She doesn't reflect on that doubt or her need to think. Is she aware that he's taken full control? That's not clear from this excerpt.

## Summarising: which characteristics of the working alliance do we witness and to what effect?

In this conversation, we can see a probation officer who, for whatever reason, aims to place a strong and increasingly one-sided emphasis on the alliance characteristic *Bond*, hoping to win *Trust* bit by bit. On two occasions, she attempts to interweave more *Goals and Conditions* in the conversation. At the beginning ('we're going to talk about goals') and again a while later (actively addressing the theme of alcohol). However, she immediately allows herself to be thrown off this course. Did she feel she was counter-moving too soon? And does she expect him to come up with it by himself further down the supervision, if she loosens the reins first? A deliberate choice for such a course of action can sometimes be appropriate, provided there are no misunderstandings about the nature of the supervision.

But how appropriate is it in this conversation? Here, while loosening the reins, she leaves a lot of room for misunderstanding, which needs repairing later on in the process, which will take quite a bit of energy. Misunderstandings about the necessary topics of conversation, about the possibilities of the probation service, about the framework in which both work and about their mutual relationship. *Goals and Conditions* are out of focus. This room for misunderstanding arises not only due to her consistently loosening the reins, but also as a result of her palpable hesitation about her own strategy. Robbert probably sensed this hesitation and, as a result, he starts taking control of the conversation, step by step. Hesitations by a professional during a conversation are normal (and positive, given the importance of reflection-in-action), but they'll start working against you if they become leading to the extent that you no longer reach active decisions within the session. This appears to be the case here on more than one occasion. Perhaps the hesitation is a sign that she realises that her approach literally has its limits. Is she afraid to confront him because she'll be confronted with relational resistance, temporarily or otherwise? Would she, as part of a professional consultation, be able to think about her own needs (harmony? appreciation?) in the relationship with her clients? Perhaps she dares to counter-move better when her colleagues show how a more directive approach, one with more *Goals and Conditions*, combines well with *Bond and Trust*. If she continues the method displayed in this excerpt, chances are that after some time, she'll start experiencing *Contra-reactance*: a loss of control in the relationship, irritation about it, blaming this on the client's demotivation and pushing him away.

After this conversation, Robbert may well think that he owns the supervision and that aggression and alcohol won't become something he needs to worry about. As such, he may well have achieved his short-term objective, but the probation service is in fact failing him to achieve the objective that can help him stay out of trouble and crime in the longer term. In the long run, he may well experience it as such. After all, the communication pattern that is causing him problems remains a factor in his relationship with the probation service. Breaking out of this deeper pattern is the primary task of the therapist. Yet the probation officer has a task in this as well, by showing him that a different way of communicating can ultimately yield him more.

## Starting supervision Robbert Version B

**What can we see?** - How do we reflect on that?

**PO:** hey Robbert, good to see you again.

| Friendly welcome

**R:** yes, well I can find my way now so...

| Apparently, he arrived late on a previous occasion, because he was lost and refers to that with some humour.

**PO:** you can indeed and right on time (smiling). Right, what I want to talk about this time are the objectives. Last time, we discussed that your objective is housing. You feel that is an important goal.

| First, she goes along with his humour, both verbally and non-verbally, and immediately sets out the agenda for the conversation. At the same time, she reminds him of what he thinks is important. She links up with him and naturally takes the lead in that same motion. This way, she only needs a few sentences to work on *Goals and Conditions*, as well as *Bond*.

**R:** yes, super important.

| He confirms the importance thereof and immediately knows that he has been heard. He only responds to this message of the PO (you've been heard) and as such, he implicitly accepts the agenda for this session.

**PO:** yes, and you want to start working on that. In this session, I want to talk to you about what objective we, from the probation service's perspective, think is important to prevent you from getting into trouble with the law again.

She first connects by repeating what he thinks is important, after which she takes some distance: she clarifies that there are other objectives to be achieved as part of the probation sessions; objectives not named by him. By doing so, she continues to work on *Goals and Conditions*. She doesn't open up a discussion about the objectives, she outlines them equally next to one another (keeps an eye on the importance of *Bond*). One may wonder whether she could have reduced the difference between 'what you want' and 'what the probation service wants' by naming his housing objective as a joint objective (the probation service wants this too).

**R:** in anticipation; Yes?

I He continues to accept that she steers the conversation in a different direction.

**PO:** well, I read your report, what you told the presentence reporter about what you think happened and why you got into trouble with the law.

She calmly introduces her idea about a second objective, from the probation service, and at the same time, she shows him that she has fully read up about him. She names him as the source of the information she has ('what you told'). This way, she lets him know that she works on the basis of his own information. This can have a positive effect on his *Trust*. Nor can he distance himself from that as easily as information from others. This too can enhance his involvement in *Goals and Conditions*.

**R:** yes...

I He continues to go along with her in anticipation.

**PO:** and which had to do with alcohol consumption.

And there is the real news, without beating around the bush. In a calm and low voice, without using any more words. She is working on *Goals and Conditions*, while maintaining a respecting and supportive tone.

**R:** yes, alcohol consumption, well it's more about what happens then, like the situation you end up in.

That response was to be expected. Recognising alcohol abuse is difficult for many people. He wants to divert the conversation about his own alcohol consumption to the situation that's outside of him.

**PO:** right, I see, so tell me what happened?

She doesn't enter into the discussion, as that would only harden him in his side of the story. She asks an open question to clarify what he thought happened.

**R:** right, well, so you want to go in and then there's this guy, like, who thinks he owns the world or something in his three-piece ironed suit, who seems to be intent on ruining my evening. Well that doesn't work with me, I can tell you that much.

He appears to express it exactly as he senses it. And portrays himself (righteously) as a tough guy, who won't be bullied. In doing so, he enhances the view for himself that it's not about the alcohol. And he probably hopes that the PO will join him in this view.

**PO:** right, okay... and what happened next?

She doesn't take his side, nor does she enter into the discussion. She continues to ask open questions. Probably looking for a point they can agree on together, as a basis for a new objective in which they share maximum common ground. She's searching for *Communality in Goals and Conditions*, thereby working on *Bond* at the same time.

**R:** well, that's when I hit him, or twice actually.

He continues to explain and arrives at the actual offence. It's striking to see that he corrects himself after presenting it too lightly. With that, he shows, possibly unaware, that he full well knows that something went wrong here. And that he can talk openly about that.

**PO:** right, yes and that's when he reported it to the police.

| She engages with his story and makes the step to the police report and therefore also to the probation session.

**R:** yes

| He continues to confirm.

**PO:** and the court sentenced you and, in consultation with you, the judge decided that you would benefit from treatment aimed at your alcohol consumption.

| She reconstructs what happened next and what his special conditions stipulate, again linking up to his own story ('decided in consultation with you'). In this way, she steers the conversation back to her own agenda again: alcohol. She holds on to *Goals and Conditions*, and always shows that she works on the basis of his own information (*Trust*).

**R:** yeah, but you know, that is in fact not right. Look, it's been decided and all, I know that yeah...

| He starts throwing up objections again. At the same time, he shows that he understands the situation he has ended up in: it's been decided...

**PO:** (calmly) oh, so what part of it is wrong then?

| Again, she doesn't enter into a discussion but enquires. Now more specifically, with the emphasis on 'part'. By which she actually says that some things are *not* wrong. He retains space and influence in the conversation, but within the context defined by her.

**R:** well, like I said, it's more like the situation that you're in. You know, stuck with that clown who thinks he's the one deciding how and what, well, he's not.

| He repeats his image of the situation. 'The situation' was the problem and he won't be bullied.



**PO:** about that evening Robbert, so you said you were angry and that you hit him.

Again she doesn't enter into a discussion, leaves his image for what it is and deduces from it that he was angry. And she still names him as the source of the information available to her. The conversation has side-stepped away from the alcohol.

**R:** nods in agreement. Yeah

| This way, he can agree with it.

**PO:** and the court ruled that you were guilty of this and that's why you're now here with us. Well, we've already talked about what happened. Suppose we're going to cast that into an objective. Just to prevent you from getting into trouble with the law again. Can you come up with an idea of what that objective could be?

She summarises the picture. Now they've arrived at a joint issue: being angry and lashing out at people. They can use this to look for a common objective. While discussing this, they can touch upon the alcohol consumption again, for example as a trigger for violence when feeling angry. Hence she leaves it as it is. She remains consistent in her approach: she doesn't step away from her own agenda (*Goals and Conditions*) and remains respectful and informative when talking to him. Allows him to think about new objectives, within the agenda.

**R:** well, like not going out anymore I guess, laughs...

| He accepts the joint issue and starts thinking about an objective. Starts off with the one that's most far-reaching.

**PO:** laughs: well, that's one option, but that would be pretty drastic I think, as an objective.

| This will inject some light-heartedness into the conversation, as she too thinks it is far-reaching.

**R:** well, yeah!

And it's reassuring for him that she feels the same. So no worst-case scenario. This will perhaps encourage him to think along about a more serious joint objective. This small moment feels like a first confirmation of communality.

**PO:** yes... pauses.

This is intended as a more explicit attempt to leave the thinking to him. By clearly leaving it to him, she invests in the development of *Trust* (not being overruled). Trust in her and in his own competence to make changes in his life.

**R:** I can't come up with anything...

He doesn't know, he's probably not used to thinking in that way.

**PO:** no? From what you told me and also about the report, I understand you were angry.

She's not going to think for him, she's simply repeating their joint issue (you were angry) hoping to get him to think about things.

**R:** right yes, I was very angry.

He engages and feels free to state it stronger than she made it out to be (very angry). These small statements show his increasing involvement in the conversation.

**PO:** yes, and you also explained that when you've been drinking, you think less about things and are more likely to do something you regret later on. That's what you explained back then.

Now she comes full circle and back to the drinking again, while consistently referring to him as the source of the information ('you explained'). In this way, she connects the dots between angry, lashing out and alcohol, between that image and his own story. This way, she practically allows *Goals and Conditions* to coincide with *Bond and Trust*.

**R:** yes, in hindsight, I shouldn't have done it, but...

This way, he can concur. Previously, it had become clear that he realised that what he did was wrong. This 'confession' demonstrates that his involvement (*Bond*) in this conversation is increasing.

**PO:** yes... yes, exactly. So what could you've done differently?

He gives her a lead to move forward further. She reformulates 'objective' to 'differently'. She still isn't filling in the blanks for him. She consistently steers towards self-management when it comes to controlling his risk. And with that towards *Trust* in himself and in her.

**R:** well, phew, pauses. Uhm, go somewhere else, I guess.

He's struggling with it, but he's thinking now. And he comes up with a possibility. He's now actively thinking along.

**PO:** yes, thinks for a while, and then asks: and going somewhere else is that like walking away from the situation?

She enquires further about that possibility. She remains in keeping with his language and his view that it was 'the situation' that more or less forced him to lash out. In that instance, walking away from the situation appears to be a logical objective. As such, she leaves his view intact, while at the same time enticing him away from it.

**R:** yes, that's how you could put it, I guess, like, going someplace else, that's basically what it is, yeah... they pause and nod at each other.

He doesn't copy her reformulation, but does confirm it. The non-verbal signs show consent is growing.

**PO:** because it's the anger that made you lash out, that's what you explained last time.

| She now places 'the situation' with him: his anger was the situation.

**R:** yeah, I was furious.

| He goes along with her redefinition of 'the situation'. It was his anger.

**PO:** what objective could you link to that? What would you like to see differently, so that you no longer get into trouble with the law?

| Now she can specify more, in the form of an objective.

**R:** right uhm, well, have a better way with words or something... ?? I'm the kind of guy who solves things, like, in a different way, so to say...

| He now comes up with something specific. Acknowledges that he solves things differently ('the situation' as the culprit has disappeared) and that he can possibly learn something else. A collective picture of direction (Goals and Conditions) is emerging. And of the respectful way they talk to each other.

**PO:** pauses and nods.

| She confirms non-verbally and leaves him space to think further. The more he becomes mobilised, the less directive correction is needed.

**R:** yeah, that may be it.

| He leaves it at that.

**PO:** so summarising, what you would like is that when you're angry, you want to learn to solve that with words,

| She's not filling in the blanks and again summarises what he has come up with so far.

**R:** yeah, something like that...

| He confirms.

**PO:** without immediately... pauses, that you learn to think before you act.

| Now, for the first time, she comes with an additional option in keeping with what he said himself.

**R:** yeah uhm, like put a delay on things... I don't know, yeah.

| He understands what she's saying and repeats it in his own words.

**PO:** nods

| Non-verbal confirmation. The conversation about objectives proposed by the probation service can now continue. And appears to have the potential of leading to a serious joint goal, in which alcohol plays a role. Joint *Goals* have been achieved, while *Bond* and *Trust* have increased at the same time. Probably within both. Thanks to this successful interaction, the probation officer too remains free from any *Contra-reactance*.

**Initial response Robbert:**

I found it a bit tricky, because I myself was intent on getting a house, well, accommodation. And then you have to think about something else, that you need to get out of trouble and because I can't think of the answer right away, you really need to concentrate, that was tricky.

| His response is in line with his attitude in the conversation. The switch to something other than what he had in mind was noticeably difficult for him. He can tell that this was difficult. That is an important step: admitting 'not being able to' is probably more difficult for him than pretending to 'not want to'. His successful interaction with the PO means that he's not stuck in his initial defensive behaviour.

**Initial response PO:**

Well, something inside me wants to help him, but I want him to find his own answers, so that we can define a joint objective. But I also notice that I want to go faster than him, so sometimes I need to pause and think about the question I'm going to ask in order for him to find his own answer.

The PO's response is also in line with what we witnessed. Throughout the conversation, her aim was for him to come up with his own answers. The question is whether she really did outpace him; during the conversation, she only actively made a suggestion twice. She doesn't reflect on the details in the conversation. For example, the way in which she, by asking questions and summarising, helped him formulate that 'the situation' wasn't outside him but within himself. She's probably no longer aware of this, not all of the time.

## Summarising: which characteristics of the working alliance do we witness and to what effect?

In this excerpt, we see how the three positive characteristics of the working alliance, *Goals and Conditions*, *Bond* and *Trust*, can be combined in harmony. The initial signs of *Reactance* within Robbert gradually disappeared. And the probation officer didn't show any signs of *Contra-reactance*.

At this stage, the probation officer is mainly looking for communality when formulating objectives. She herself always remains clear about the context of the supervision and what it should be focused on (*Goals and Conditions*). She leaves him ample room to think of what he wants, needs and can do within this framework. She works on *Bond* by listening to him carefully and showing that she does. By leaving the room to think of solutions with him, she at the same time works on *Trust*, of Robbert in her and vice versa.

How does she do that? When he steps away from the agenda, she doesn't engage in debate. She leads him back to the agenda in various ways (at all times keeping an eye on the direction). She leaves his vision intact and adds an alternative. Or she repeats exactly that aspect from his vision that helps them find a common denominator ('what is right about it? 'you were angry').<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> This approach is in accordance with Miller, WR & Rollnick, S. (2002). *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New York: The Guilford Press.

In addition, she consistently prevents him from feeling overruled, because she always links the information she has about him to his own account, in the report and from previous conversations. This way, his *Trust* can grow. She calmly adjusts as long as necessary (relating his story to alcohol) and steps back again once he becomes more active himself. This way, we see his initial resistance change into doubt, his doubt change into acceptance of the collective vision, allowing him to become more specific about future objectives.

In this excerpt, we see the three positive alliance characteristics coincide completely. Giving direction and setting conditions are given shape in support and motivation. And motivating and supporting (impacting on *Bond and Trust*) serve as a vehicle in the joint quest for *Goals* and of Robbert's acceptance of the *Conditions*. This leads to open communication in which the PO too can develop sufficient *Trust*, pushing *Contra-reactance* into the background.

In her initial response, the probation officer talks about her own actions and dilemmas she experienced there and then. In doing so, she shows that she actively reflects on these dilemmas while considering the next step. That is also reflected in the conversation, when at times she pauses to think before she responds.

This is evidence of successful reflection-in-action. In her initial response, she doesn't reflect on the successful conversation techniques she applies. This experiential knowledge is probably rooted so deeply that she's no longer aware of this.

## Final word

Chapter 1 summarises what research teaches us about the characteristics of a working alliance within a mandatory framework. Chapter 2 uses nine illustrations to show what these characteristics can look like in practice. We witness how four probation officers do this in different ways with five clients.

These excerpts show that experienced probation officers often act on the basis of implicit knowledge, which they are often no longer aware of. It is important that we find reliable ways of making this implicit knowledge more visible, thereby ensuring that it becomes transferable and that it can be linked to explicit scientific knowledge. The interview excerpts are intended as an introduction to this. As stated earlier, the excerpts can also be analysed from frames of reference other than the working alliance. For example, motivational interviewing, working with the RNR model, goal formulation, communication theory, or self-management as part of risk control or combining monitoring and guidance. We encourage probation officers and trainers to do so. And to collect new (preferably also spontaneous) excerpts that can serve as examples for education and training purposes.

Two excerpts show a possible course if the probation officer is convinced that *Bond* and *Trust* must be established first before you can give direction and define *Goals and Conditions*. In one of the two excerpts that show that course, a client takes full control, as a result of which he can also feel strengthened in the communication pattern that got him into trouble in the first place (Robbert, version A). And in the other excerpt, the client, who is concerned about his near-recidivism, is left to deal with his struggle by himself, because the probation officer is shocked by his confession. Consequently, she puts the situation and risk into perspective and deems it less serious than the client himself (Richard, version A).

Two other excerpts illustrate what can happen if the probation worker is one-sidedly focused on 'maintaining' *Conditions* and agreements made. This can cause the officer to lose the connection with a client's own possibilities and thereby in fact cause him/her to drop out. One of these excerpts shows a one-sided emphasis on *Conditions* converge with *Contra-reactance* by the probation officer. We witness how a new client does not get a chance to reduce his tension, because the probation officer experiences his intensity as aggression. Ultimately, the probation officer is led by her own irritation and sends him away (Vincent, version B). In another excerpt, we see how the probation officer holds a young man with mild intellectual disabilities to



account for not showing up for community service. She does this in a way that does not match his abilities and the motivation shown by him previously. This too results in an unsuccessful ending, not because the client 'deserves' this, but because the probation officer completely misses the connection with him (Mario, version B).

Five excerpts show how to work on the positive characteristics of the working alliance (*Goals and Conditions*, *Bond and Trust*) to ensure that *Reactance* or *Contra-reactance* cannot arise or that any *Reactance* is reduced.

In one of these five excerpts, we can see the probation officer putting a distinct emphasis on *Goals and Conditions* first: formally setting the framework. Only to switch to accentuating *Bond and Trust*: warm and empathic support (Mark), once the first part has been achieved to her satisfaction. We witness that this leads to a slight form of *Reactance* with the client first, followed by positive cooperation.

In the other four excerpts (Vincent, version A; Richard, version B; Mario, version B and Robbert, version B), we can see how the probation officer aims to keep the positive characteristics progressing in unison. In these excerpts, working on *Goals* and setting *Conditions* integrate seamlessly with working on *Bond* and *Trust*. In these excerpts, we witness how probation officers remain clear and, where necessary, steadfast, in terms of giving direction and setting limits. All this while providing maximum support and, where necessary, showing empathy at the same time. They use conversation techniques that allow the client to experience that they aren't being overruled in the interview, despite the probation officer setting the agenda. These probation officers do not interpret explicit and fierce protest or implicit and passive resistance as aggression or disrespect aimed at them. They recognise this as a logical and, in the given context, often a healthy response from their client. This allows them to respond professionally, combined with a specific interaction.

It is tempting to view these excerpts in which the positive alliance characteristics so clearly converge as a state-of-the-art achievement by the probation. We realise that this is not possible or necessary in all contexts, with all clients and at all times within the process. In some situations, for example at the end of a successful programme, objectives and obligations play a smaller role during the sessions. And in some situations, for example, if a negative report cannot be avoided, they can become more pivotal.

In the excerpts in which the positive alliance characteristics converge seamlessly in ways that differ depending on the client, we see a probation officer exercising his or her supreme professionalism. It seems like a form of

art; and an art that can only be practised by inspired professionals who dare to reflect openly and specifically on their own actions and results and who are able to establish positive relations with many different types of people. Professionals, who are open to innovations in their profession, who take new knowledge on board and who try out how it works in practice.

This leads us back to the implicit experiential knowledge present within so many probation officers. We hope that our method, in which experiential knowledge is linked to knowledge from science, will be reproduced, as this is how researchers and professionals do justice to the two-way traffic between these two types of knowledge and which allows probation officers to continue to develop their profession.

# About the author and contributors

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