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"Problems" in Employment Services

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Introduction

From a conversation analysis perspective, institutional conversations are characterised by the fact that, on the one hand, certain rules and practices of everyday conversation either do not apply, or do so only in modified form; and, on the other, that the interlocutors act as representatives of particular social categories, treating and experiencing each other as such (see e.g. Arminen, 2005; Heritage, 2013; Heritage & Clayman, 2010; Sidnell & Stivers, 2013).[1] Each interlocutor's expectations of the other vary according to the categories or category combinations in play between them (see Antaki & Widdicombe, 1998; Lepper, 2000). Category-specific expectations of this kind are expressed in such statements as "At your age one shouldn't be so aimless." The expectation expressed here is connected with the institutional duties of a job centre case manager working for the German Federal Job Agency.[2] One of these is to assess whether a client[3] is sufficiently motivated for supplementary vocational training [*überbetriebliche Ausbildung*] and whether he should be "mobilised" in this direction with a view to his integration into the job or apprenticeship market. There are thus *institution-specific* expectations and conceptions of "young people" which can sometimes vary considerably, for example when the job centre perspective is compared with that of youth welfare offices, the police, and residents' registration offices (cf. also Baker, 1984; Cicourel, 1968; Hall et al., 2006; Holstein, 1992, Wortham & Jackson 2008).

For the clients of these institutions, the chances and difficulties linked to meeting expectations, and of bringing their own conceptions and needs into the conversation and having their view of things listened to, will vary depending on which categorisations are in play (Griffiths, 2001; Juhila, 2003). This is clear firstly from how the clients of various social

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[1] We came upon this topic via a project analysing conversations in job centres with individuals under 25, which was carried out at the Institut für Organisations- und Sozialpädogogik at the University of Hildesheim and led by Ute Karl, Wolfgang Schröer, and Stephan Wolff. The project assistants were Daniela Böhringer, Bettina Holdreich, Hermann Müller, and Julia Schröder. The present investigation was prompted by the observation that the category, "youth" was employed and applied in different ways in various forms of institutional communication.

[2] In job centres a distinction is made between a "personal customer assistant" ["*Persönlicher Ansprechpartner*"] and a "case manager." Case managers are generally responsible for unemployed people with several or sizeable "placement obstacles."

[3] The term "customer" is used in job centres. We do not adopt it here. The extent to which we are dealing here with the provision of services to customers is something we do not wish to discuss. From the point of view of ethnomethodology and conversational analysis, neutral placeholder terms ought to be used here, as only the analysis itself can show whether the local identities "customer" or "client" or another category best fit in the conversational situation in question.

services organisations are able to formulate their concerns as a problem; secondly which kinds of problems are accepted by the relevant social services staff and, thirdly, whether and how these problems are modified in the course of the conversation. A relationship subjectively experienced as being difficult, for example, will not only be differently described and accentuated by those involved depending on whether the individual is speaking with a doctor, a psychologist, a social worker, or a lawyer; we can also assume that the very "problems" themselves that are elaborated in these various conversations will differ from one another in no small respect. The same will of course also be true of the solutions proposed to these interactively elaborated problems. Clients' "problems" differ depending on how they are categorised, and vice versa (Mäkitalo, 2002).

In order to test this hypothesis, in the following we shall investigate two closely related but nonetheless contrasting forms of institutional communication: career counselling conversations and conversations mediating work in job centres, which exhibit certain similarities with respect to content and the individuals and institutions involved, but differ noticeably in the way they take place.[4] In both cases we collected conversations with clients under the age of 25; a group of people who are given their own category even in these institutions themselves. The members of both groups are generally going through a transition to a new stage in their lives. They will shortly be leaving school and may be about to enter higher education or commence vocational training. Some are unemployed and are in the process of choosing what may be their first apprenticeship. Others wish to drop out of an ongoing apprenticeship and are looking for a better alternative.[5] In other words, both kinds of institutional conversation are partly, or particularly, about dealing with biographical problems.

One of the functions of any kind of counselling is to establish what the specific problem at issue is, to give a "preliminary definition of a counselling problem that can be worked through" (Bittner 1981: 104). Counselling can only be successful—we may assume—when clients go along with this institution-specific counselling problem, that is, if they already anticipate in advance or decide in the course of the conversation how to present their concern based on the "problems" available in this context, and are guided during the counselling session by corresponding category-specific expectations.[6] However, if the conversational logic, the relevant personal categorisations and the issues which can be made into a

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[4] Since 2005, responsibility for work placement and work with unemployed people in Germany has been divided between two organisations. Whether a particular citizen is assigned to one or the other organisation depends on whether he or she receives unemployment benefit [*Arbeitslosengeld – ALG*] I (ca. 60% of his or her most recent salary over a fixed-term) or unemployment benefit II (ALG II, a fixed amount per person). In accordance with SGB [*Sozialgesetzbuch* – social security statute book—trans.] III, the employment agencies of the German Federal Employment Agency are responsible for all those who are unemployed or seeking work who do not receive unemployment benefit II or basic social security according to SGB II. They are also assigned the task of career counselling. "Job centres" are responsible for those requiring assistance as defined by SGB II, including the long-term unemployed and other groups such as men and women who cannot claim ALG I because they were not previously employed (e.g. school pupils, students, and housewives). The children of those receiving ALG II also count as job centre clients when they are under 25, have no income of their own, and live with their parents. Conversations with school pupils whose parents receive ALG II thus also take place in job centres.

[5] The term 'career counselling' ['Berufsberatung'] is a term of the field. Whether it is in fact 'counselling' that is at issue here and whether the central and defining conversational theme is 'careers,' is to be determined through a (our) conversation analysis.

[6] This does not mean that the relevant rules cannot be broken on occasion, as long as their general validity is not put in question.

"problem" vary, then attempts to combine different kinds of conversation should be viewed with scepticism. This is the aim of the "employment-centred case management" which has been propagated by the German employment services as a new form of counselling (Göckler, 2006).[7] The aim of the following exposition is to test whether differences can be reconstructed (and if so, which ones), thus providing a firmer empirical basis for the discussion on whether "employment-centred case management" can or cannot have its own form of counselling.[8]

Our data consists of twelve career counselling conversations from two locations in the north of Germany, and 36 job-finding conversations with clients under the age of 25 at various job centres. In addition, one-to-one interviews were conducted with the counsellors and job-centre workers concerned, in which they were questioned about the conversations with clients. The opening sequences of all of the latter were transcribed, in order to understand how the initial subject of each conversation, and thus the problem to be dealt with was established and worked through. When relevant, later sequences were also included, whenever changes or "disruptions" occurred regarding this subject. Modifications were analysed and compared. Below we will start out by examining the careers counselling conversations more closely, looking for "possible" and "impossible" problems, and placing particular emphasis on deviant case analysis.[9] Thereafter, we will study the conversations in job centres, before finally coming to conclusions about these conversational forms based on the whole range of findings.

Careers counselling as a form of institutional communication

There are many institutional conversation configurations in which someone with a very concrete request addresses another who is responsible for dealing with this request. Someone who asks at the relevant municipal authority whether she is eligible for housing benefit will perhaps be given counsel (in the everyday sense of the term), that is, she will be given concrete advice on what she should do. Nevertheless, we would not speak of a counselling conversation if the citizen's wish were *immediately* accepted and fulfilled. In order for counselling to take place, space for the *joint reformulation of the problem* must be left or made by those involved. One way in which the counsellor can elicit such openness from the client is to ask *non-specific questions*.

Brandt_1 00:00:30 – 00:00:43

```
A:    … <<laughs> hohoho> <<smiling voice> .hh=what brings you to me
      today then ms stahl .hhh;>

C:    lots of questions.

A:    mhhm?

C:    at the moment i'm doing my abitur,[10]
```

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[7] The new counselling concept of the Federal Employment Agency (BeKo) is an attempt to diversify counselling strategy according to specific groups of "customers".

[8] We came across this topic during a project analysing conversations in job centres with under-25-year-olds. This was carried out from 2008 to 2011 at the Hildesheim University Institute of Social & Organisational Pedagogy (see Böhringer et al., 2012).

[9] For deviant case analysis see ten Have, 2007.

[10] Roughly equivalent to 'A' Levels in the UK—trans.

```
A:    mhhm?
C:    but at the community college,¹¹
A:    er=yes,
C:    .h and that's in the evening and it's not been all that much of
      a success
```

A asks an open question, thereby inviting C to a give a more detailed picture. Such open questions are the norm during the initial stages of counselling sessions. Bittner (1981: 119) speaks of the "requirement to present oneself in counselling conversations" that is thereby indirectly formulated. From the manner in which the question is formulated it is not possible to see what the matter at hand is, or what A may understand it to be. For her part, C announces that she has 'lots of questions" and then focusses on her school situation. C clearly presents non-arbitrary issues which bear exclusively on the task of delineating an appropriate career picture, choosing potentially suitable careers, and the conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to enter the latter. One appropriate counselling problem here seems to be that C aspires to career-specific training, but is not yet sure which careers may be suitable for her. In three of the cases we studied, this silent understanding seems at first glance *not* to occur.

Eilers_1 00:00:23 – 00:00:50

```
A:    so (.) what can i do for you. (---)
      what brings you to me today,
C:    i could do with a bit of help again writing job applications as
      (2) i'm out of practice to be quite honest.
A:    mhhm. (---) .h are you writing applications at the moment?
C:    uh: not exactly writing i'v' (.) i've saved it on=th computer
      an=ll just pull=it off there (--) and hand it in like that;
A:    right. (--) so what are you applying for?
C:    trade jobs like painter (-) and carpenter-
```

Here C makes a request that is *only indirectly* connected with a career or apprenticeship search, and whose fulfilment is *not part of her interlocutor's job description*: help with completing job application documents. Generally one only needs to write job applications when one already has a concrete desire for a particular career or apprenticeship. C's explicit formulation of this desire does not, however, lead to his request being acted upon. Instead, A moves the discussion on to C's applications and his experience in carpentry and painting. She also suggests keeping an eye out for alternatives, i.e. looking for *other*, potentially suitable careers. A also stresses that C should not settle on a particular career *too early*. The request for concrete help with his job applications, which is not part of the counsellor's job, does not come up again, and remains, as it were, 'excommunicated' from the conversation.'

In the second extract it can be seen, however, that even when K does not have a relatively specific, fixed desire for an apprenticeship, the careers counsellor lacks the basis.

Eilers_3 00:00:50 – 00:01:09¹²

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¹¹ *Volkshochschule*—trans.

```
A:    .h so what can i do for you today;
C:    first i've got a few questions,
A:    mh:mh,
C:    errm about apprenticeships, (---) as i don't know yet, (---)
      about community service¹³ (-) how that works (-) how it is.
A:    mhhm,
C:    how i get in <<hand falls on the table> payment> and (-) i
      couldn't find any of that out so easily on=th internet-
A:    mhm
C:    if you could tell me more about how that works
A:    you'd first like to do community service.
```

C's request initially seems appropriate to a career counselling session ("about apprenticeships"). But he then mentions his uncertainty about what awaits him in community service and what it pays. Later he touches on the subjects of unemployment registration, child benefit, and his job search. In both cases C's 'problem proposals' are neither expressly dismissed nor really acted upon; instead they are *delegated*. A explains that there is little she can say about community service and refers her interlocutor to the district recruiting office for community service [*Kreiswehrersatzamt*] and to colleagues responsible for work placement and unemployment registration.

In these two passages we can already see a clear indication of the specific character of this form of institutional communication: in the first case, C is *too fast*. He already wants to apply for jobs, and has thus already settled on a certain vocational training course, so is no longer open to counselling. By confronting C with her judgement that C made this decision *too fast*, A tries to guide the conversation back towards the institutional pattern of an open-ended search for a job. For a careers counselling conversation to take place it is not enough for C to bring a readymade problem with him. In principle, the problem can only be effectively elaborated through *interactive, face-to-face discussion*. In the last example C was mainly concerned with having more money. In this respect, whether the conversation concerned finding a career or choosing a community service placement made no difference to him. Judging by the counsellor's reaction, here the client is *too open* to different possibilities.

The third extract shows how a career counselling conversation fails by mutual agreement, even though the two people involved make it clear that they are familiar with expected institutional structures. The subject initially raised by C, '*Numerus Clausus* in a double-entry year'[14] does not really fit in with careers counselling and is thus not taken up in depth by A. Instead, A attempts to redirect the conversation towards the more appropriate subject of C's career plans.

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[12] The transcription rules are in the appendix. All names of people and places have been anonymised.

[13] *Zivildienst* – an alternative to military service—trans.

[14] In some German states, at the time of the conversation, the length of time spent at grammar school [*Gymnasium*] was shortened by a year. Two different year-groups therefore took the *Abitur* at the same time. Due to the abolition of compulsory military service, male high school graduates could enter university earlier.

Albert_1 00:01:18 – 00:02:08

```
A:   and what's next,

C:   err=in theory (.) uni.

A:   okay, (---)
     what do you mean in theory?

C:   mm because: the double entry year an:d [abolition] of military
     service,

A:                                            [mhhm,]
     Okay,

C:   i don't really fancy my chances (-) err:=h. (-) of being
     accepted straightaway i mean (-) in the first year.

A:   (3) because of the en=cee,¹⁵

C:   (2) i think (-) hav i'm not really sure if frankfurt has=n
     en=cee-

A:   mhhm,=

C:   =but

A:   sure but they'll have a selection: [procedure]

C:                                      [yeah.]

A:   mh okay, (---) what do you want to study?

C:   mh:: special needs education.

A:   (2) that's already a pretty clear idea;

C:   (2) <<laughing> yeh eh=he=h.>

A:   do you have any questions about it (.) or it sounded like:
     frankfurt does:n't have it and=h.

C:   errm.

A:   sounds like everything's resolved then, (---)
```

If C already has a clear idea of her desired career, such that the question, as A notes, is already resolved, this could mean that there is no longer a need for counselling. B might then ask why C came to the counselling session in the first place. Yet in this case, the 'standard method' for dealing with difficult clients (cf. Bittner 1981) cannot be applied. On the one hand, this is because C already hints at certain doubts, which in career counselling terms we might call 'helpful,' when she slightly hesitantly replies to the question "and what's next?" with "in theory…uni"; and on the other because, prompted by A ("what would plan B look like?"), C then agrees to discuss possible alternatives in case she is not accepted on to her desired course. But even where these alternatives are concerned, she seems to have already made up her mind.

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¹⁵ *Numerus Clausus*—trans.

Albert_1 00:03:11 – 00:04:35

```
A:   in these talks i always like to talk about plan bee it's always
     smart to have a bit of an alternative in your back pocket?
C:   yeah.
A:   so what would plan bee look like for you.
C:   plan bee is=err i've (-) applied for places on speech therapy
     courses,
A:   okay-=
C:   =in frankfurt (---) and in a speech therapy school in::
     wiesbaden,
A:   mhhm?
C:   and also here in kassel for (---) nursing.
A:   (2) so there too you're (.) all sorted (.) i'm <<smiling
     voice?> impressed,>=
C:   =<<laughing> eh=h. .h>
A:   <<smiling voice> normally my experience is that (.) at this
     stage (--) most people are only just starting to think about (-
     -) er:m (---) what they can do,
C:   [yeah-]
A:   [but] (you're) already, ((hand falls on the table))
C:   i'm so worried (don't know just this er feeling) if=if i do
     STUdy then it also lasts a long time special needs [educa]tion,
A:   [mhhm-]
C:   .hh (-) that (---) if=now even more time goes by so i'm then
     way too old to still have <<laughing> a family he he=h.> .h
     <<smiling voice> that's why (-) i don't really want to lose
     even [a year]
A:       [i'll (check)] on=th computer a sec <<isolated
     keystrokes> and see if there's any hurry (one word inaudible.)
C:   <<laughs> eh=hh.>
A:   with a bachelor's you've got six semesters so three years,

C:   exactly and then i'd be nearly 27 already and only just
     starting out on a <<smiling voice> caREER
A:   (well.)
C:   <<laughs> eh=h. he he,>
```

```
A:    there=re  also  other  options  but  ok  <<laughing>  fa=h.=mi=ly
      planning counselling> is obviously (--) .h something i wouldn't
      want to get in to but even during their studies lots of people
      have (--) chil[dren] (children.)
C:                          [<<p>yeah->]
```

In this case no "plan B" needs to or can be drawn up, as C has already put her "plan B" into action by applying for *two* courses. A contrasts this with the behaviour that she "normally" experiences with her clients. "Normal" here would clearly be great indecisiveness concerning potential career choices. Although she praises C's behaviour (she does this as a private individual, as it were), she also has to laughingly admit that it has dealt with one potential counselling problem: C's concern to finish her higher education as quickly as possible significantly limits the range of potential careers to which she is open. A further obstacle on the path toward *genuine* career counselling is that C's "plan B" is only intended to bridge the gap until she can begin her university studies, which means that the speech therapy or nursing courses that she discusses with A are not really important to her. As she later explains, she would drop out of such a programme as soon as she got a university place. A then asks her again about her motivation for wanting to be a special needs teacher (C had done an internship in a special needs school), which could open the way to a counselling conversation. C then does talk about an internship there but makes it clear that during its course she realised that special needs teaching was not the right career for her. This is then accepted by A and both laughingly agree there is no need for further counselling, which in such a case would end up becoming "family planning counselling," which A "wouldn't want to get into."

The conversation then ends as an informal exchange of views and opinions on the best universities to apply to and student finance. There are also more qualified people that C can speak to about the subject of starting a family that she brings up later. As she concedes with a laugh, A comes up against her institutional limits here.

In twelve out of thirteen cases of careers counselling, the hypothesis is confirmed that the counselling process cannot come about without a current, suitable issue. Only the following case deviates from this pattern.

```
Baum_1   00:00:06 - 00:0026

A:   so. mr holz (2) we're meeting today to have another look at>
     your future career prospects;
C:   mh:hm,
A:   you already started w'=with landscape gardening,
C:   yes.
A:   and then stopped;
C:   unfortunately (.) yes.
A:   an=now you're BACK in landscape gardening <<dim> [or,]>
C:   [yes-]
A:   right. (-) .h so where do you see yourself in around (---)
     three to four years;
```

C wishes to become a landscape gardener. But that is—for now at least—not the subject of the conversation. C had dropped out of an apprenticeship in landscape gardening after experiencing mental health and drug problems. At the time of the meeting he is working again in landscape gardening as part of a so-called work 'programme' ['*Maßnahme*']. In the above excerpt the question is whether C will manage to stay "clean" for some time. C therefore first has to prove himself and demonstrate that he meets the conditions for another apprenticeship or the continuation of his old apprenticeship. As the results of this assessment are not yet available, the counselling session remains provisional, and his real request cannot (yet) be directly addressed. In light of this, the counsellor constructs an interpretative framework ("in around three to four years"), within which he and C can elaborate a new problem appropriate to the present counselling session. Although there is currently no suitable issue, projecting into the future in this way allows the conversation to take place as a careers counselling conversation.

Even when the counselling process is already underway, it is advantageous for the various options to be *kept open*, at least for a certain time. In regard to career counselling as a form of institutional conversation, this may mean that, at least at the beginning of the process, it is important and institutionally expected for the search to be *open to various results*, and that this cannot simply be leapfrogged or dismissed in passing.

After the implicit or explicit provisional agreement on the problem, the search process begins. This search process, too, plays a role in constructing the problem. The search is for occupations which fit the client's personality. This search often takes the form of A asking C *interview-style questions*.

Brandt_1 00:05:00 – 00:05:44

```
A:    (2) <<p> okay (.) good.>
      .hh YES. .h errm (--) ms schnabel (.) i'll keep your question
      in the <<laughing> back of my [mi=h.=hi=nd=h.] first i just
C:                                  [<<laughs> he he>]
A:    need still .h to get a bit a'=a'=a' (..) few more err details
      so i can answer the questions properly.> .hh
C:    okay,
A:    .hh err: uh' you said (.) i did this internship which was good
      in that er'=i already got an idea of the area (.) facility
      management- .hh
C:    mhmh,
A:    er:m: then just came upon this term and it seemed good.
      what information did you find out what (-) FAScinated you about
      the area;
C:    yeah=er' (.) the tasks i mean it=isn't just=a normal office
      job=
A:    =mhhm,=
```

```
C:     =you get out and about as well
```

C had made a concrete request. She is interested in further training in facility management and would like to know what jobs would qualify her for this. A explains why she does not immediately respond to this question. She requires "a few… more…details so I can answer the question properly." That it is not simply a matter here of gathering information, but also of *finding a potential route* into a counselling conversation is clear from her next interjection, which takes the form of a question that cannot be answered on the basis of information alone. The question, what "fascinates" C, serves to stimulate more precise personal reflection and description on C's part. The focus is now on the presentation and explanation of interests, inclinations, and emotions, rather than on simple information. But A is asking about more than just a *'simple' interest*. The reformulation of the opening question ("What information did you find out? What fascinated you about the area?") implies that C is passionate about this professional domain, and so has developed a *particular* form of interest in it. What is in the foreground here for A is not the interest or fascination in itself but the potential *new options* it may open up for the discussion of C's career choices.

This is evident in the next example:

Riegel_2 00:08:00 – 00:08:32

```
A:     maybe we should stick with (.)the police for the moment,
C:     yes.
A:     err:m because (.) you=u' just said that's really your dream
       job.
C:     yes (ah yes.)
A:     and i err: .h when someone says dream job for me as a
       counsellor it's always=a cue,
C:     yes; [<<smiles> mh>]
A:             [to uh:] to explore a bit [to]
C:                                       [mhhm,]
A:     delve a bit deeper.
```

In this scene the question is whether C should exclude one of a number of possible career paths after failing the police admission test. She could rather try again in another state or she could apply to the Federal Police. C has already begun to look for alternatives to her dream job. Although the counsellor helps with this search, he also asks C not to exclude the possibility of becoming a police officer, and suggests "delv[ing] a bit deeper."

A commonly used method which can be useful in helping clients look for a career is to ask about the employment history of parents, siblings, friends, and acquaintances. Another method is to ask clients about their internship experience, as in the Eilers_2 conversation above. C enjoyed her internship at an auto repair workshop ("very interesting"), partly because of the opportunity to "tinker" with cars and partly because there she is "sometimes just not … really a girl."

Eilers_2 00:16:28 – 00:16:55

```
C:     <<smiling voice> i've been through everything. <<laughs>
```

```
       [he]>
A:     [and was] there anything that at the TIME you ALSO found really
       excit[ing?]
C:              [yeah]being  a  vehicle  mechatronics  technician  was
       very interesting.>
A:     mhhm,
C:     an=it still seems interesting.>
A:     mm. (2) what was so (--) good [about it.]
C:                                   [err:m]  (.)  errm  (.)  yeah:
       (.) <<smiling voice> tinkering with car:s::> and sometimes just
       (2) not being (-) really=a gi=h.=rl but just one=of the guys
       who: just (.) loves cars an tin=<<len>kers around-
A:     mhhm,
```

A then asks follow-up questions about C's experience with *other* skilled trades. She does not take up what in certain other psycho-social forms of counselling might be a relevant and fruitful subject: why C wants to be "sometimes just not … really a girl"; what is important for her is only that C finds some "male careers" interesting and might include them in her reflection on possible career choices. During careers counselling the conversation and those involved can thus indeed become "personal". However, this does not lead to personality being dealt with in any further detail.

The structural problem of career counselling can now be more clearly defined: it involves searching for jobs and apprenticeships which are a good match for the client, while initially remaining open to various possibilities. This implies that clients need to make it clear that they do not yet know, or are not yet absolutely certain, which career they wish to take up, but that they do indeed wish to enter a career of some kind. If they already harbour a preference for a particular career, they need to be willing to put this up for discussion—even if only at this moment and in this situation. One can speak here of "moderate openness," for neither a definite commitment nor complete openness can be an adequate basis for this form of institutional conversation. Ideally, counselling should lead towards the problem being solved, but should not itself be a solution. (see Bergmann et al., 1988, 143).

From the counsellor's view, people who have already made a decision about 'their problem' and stick to it even when the counsellor questions that decision cannot constitute clients in a career counselling context. They do not accept this membership category and the associated expectation concerning the openness of the problem. This is also clear in the above example of the client who wishes to become a special needs teacher. She is not a suitable client because (too) much is already "resolved" for her.[16] From the counsellor's perspective, the problem proposed by the client can only be worked through when it is jointly reformulated and modified with regard to the relevant counselling context.

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[16] In a psychologically oriented form of counselling this would perhaps be interpreted as 'resistance' *and thereby* established as itself an object of counselling which is to be worked through.

The fiction of an "open future" constructed and maintained by the two protagonists is particularly relevant where *young people* are concerned. Here, counsellors consistently question the decisions of those who seem to have made up their minds, often with great intensity.

Work placement conversations at the job centre
The young people and young adults with whom the job centre usually comes into contact have frequently not started training, or have dropped out of their training course. In this respect, their situation is indeed comparable with that of young clients in careers counselling. However, when the conversations at the job centre are compared with those in careers counselling, some marked differences become apparent. Instead of concentrating on one individual subject (such as finding a job) a large number of topics are covered. Among other things these include checking up on programmes which have been agreed upon at earlier sessions.

Nestinger_1 p. 2
```
P[17]:  so:: now i've monitored your hhh.=m participation in=the
        programme at the
        [last programme]
C:      [hm=m=hm:]
P:      work opportunities with supplementary wages .hhh
C:      hmmh,
P:      after all we did: agree before on what direction we WANTED to
        move in (..) so: now we're gonna talk through whether that's
        how it is .hh so i did that profiling with you then right and
        you told me everything you did at school [so]
C:                                                        [yeah.]
P:      that you=gotta=Hauptschule certificate .hhh(-) and that in
        future you'd like to: to head towards training again (.)
```
Once the conversation has got underway, the focus quickly moves to checking C's participation. *Profiling* is mentioned again here, but in contrast to the careers counselling conversations, in this institutional context this does not lead to a search for careers which might suit C in terms of her profile. Instead, it leads straight to the decision on what kind of training she should aim at ("head towards training"). C is expected to take part in the work opportunity before making any final decision about training. In contrast with the careers counselling, here it is obviously all about getting clients onto one of the programmes available, as quickly as possible. Note the stress on "we WANTED to move in". From P's point of view, C's behaviour so far has not been in line with the intention they previously formulated together. Later, P specifically talks about C's behaviour on the work opportunity not fitting in with that aim.

Nestinger_1 p. 2
```
P       But i said too that in terms of individual prerequisites .h uh:
        let's say: not ready for training just yet (.) cause certain
        things like: in the way of personal development in a positive
        sense [like
C:                       [(( loud breathing and rustling
        from changing sitting position))]
```

---

[17] The letter P refers to the official designation of the job centre worker as a "personal contact person".

```
P:    kinda self-organisation reliability punctuality] and lots more
      were still messed up and we [did]
C:    [hm]
```
P: agree that okay we'll try getting into programmes(.) on the uh secondry labour market

From P's point of view, the real problem is that C is "not ready for training", which he links to C's personal development. It is questionable as to whether he comes to an agreement on this.[18] The comment "okay we'll try" might suggest that he does, but from the conversation as a whole there is no sign that C shares this point of view. He does go along with talking about personal matters, such as his relationship with his mother, but he clearly does not see this as being about developing his personality, but as about getting his mother "off his back". Shared agreement on the topic of personal development seems to be neither necessary, nor something that is pushed through on the institutional level.[19]

In the following excerpt, again, the client speaks about the difficult relation to his mother. C's comment that his mother is also bothered by his aimlessness, though in his view without justification, gives P the chance to pick up on the subject of finding an aim. She expresses an age-specific expectation: "at your age one shouldn't be aimless any more".

Schäfer 5 , p. 12

```
C:    i'm  completely  normal  i'm  hardly  ever  at  home  so  actually
      that=er can't bother her at all. (3)
A:    <<(hmm)> maybe it does bother her (--) just like it bothers me
      a bit that you're living so AIMlessly day to day. (---) at your
      age (.) one shouldn't be aimless any more .hhh and because (.)
      the youth welfare office too and err: look the people from pee
      ess u .h see a lack of readiness (-) we've also stayed away
      from our own house.
```

The client deviates from the expectations one might have of a member of his age group. He is also characterised as lacking readiness, and reference is made to the youth welfare office, which is seen as sharing this category-related judgement ("see a lack of readiness"). This hints at an attitude we have also found in other conversations. The deviant behaviour is not traced back to a fixed personalty trait (such as "laziness", being "less gifted" or "easily led astray"). The customer is just not yet ready, but could become so, if he wanted to and made the effort, as can be expected of young people of his age.

Job centre clients are typically categorised and treated as people who are difficult to place on the labour market. This interactively leads to cases becoming difficult where this clearly does not apply, but where the case has ended up at the job centre for administrative reasons. One example of this is a young migrant woman waiting to get a place at university.

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[18] C is given the paradoxical instruction to "be mature enough to recognise your immaturity and do something about it".

[19] Unlike careers counselling, conversations at the job centre are about communicating in a forced situation. Clients have to take part, as otherwise they may be sanctioned with cuts in the money they receive.

Nagel 3 00:25:48 – 00:27:07

```
A:    if you (-) so (.) here it's like this (.) i'm required_h (---)
      to place (.)> people who> need our assistance: in work as soon
      as possible ok?
C:    mhm–
A:    .hhh for a while i can just see how you're doing: (-) err or
      wait and see (.) how the applications go=
      =i see that you're applying for things?
      but if i see (-) errm that it's not working, (---) then i've
      got to we=we talked about that last year i've got to integrate
      you somewhere right;
C:    mhm–
A:    into some kind of programme .hh
      or into=a (-) one euro job or something ok. (---) so that'll
      (.) happen as and when .hh so for now let's say if in=f=,h (--)
      i'll see you in about four weeks again;
C:    mhm,
A:    if nothing happens before then (---) i can well imagine (.)
      placing you in a work opportunity, right? (2) that does cost
      the job centre more money though,
C:    mhm,
A:    but you will then be (---) integrated as it were for now (--)
      and here that's (.) also important right; (---) .hh an=then (.)
      <<clicking> obviously (.)> it'll be hard (.) to find a work
      opportunity for you (--) cause in a way (.) you're different
      from some people getting help here you know (--) you've got
      your abitur (-)   you've got=a very different manner and
      personality .hh what we could of course do is errm (--) ida
      (2.0) ida <<ringing> some kinda business> (---)<<speaks away
      from the microphone> i've just got to get that cause they were
      earlier they=were=there
      ((speaks on the telephone))>
```

In A's view, placing C in a work opportunity seems to require some justification. She notes ("though") that this intervention will cost more money, but C will then be integrated "for now." The contrast with the job centre's other clients is made clear, with her "Abitur" and her "very different manner" and "personality" seeming to be relevant criteria in distinguishing her

from the other "normal" clients. C is waiting to begin her university studies in the next autumn semester, but "for now" she is to be integrated into a work opportunity. This integration will only be temporary, to be followed by C's university studies. Before she starts her course, the young lady would like to earn money, which does not appear possible to the extent she had hoped if she takes up one of the work opportunities.[20] To make up for this somewhat, B says that she will at least see to it that C gets a challenging position (some kinda business...) which corresponds with C being categorised as an exceptional client. C's case is thus seen as deviating from the norm, though at the same time it implicitly refers us to the 'normal' categorisation of those requiring assistance.

In job-centre conversations, when clients leave open the question of what vocation they want to take up, this automatically leads to a problem, whereas in careers counselling it is an important prerequisite for the conversation's success, at least at the beginning. In the following case, the customer's attempts to find an apprenticeship have thus far been unsuccessful.

Hartmann_1 00:11:26 – 00:13:06

```
A:   what now then? (3.0) don't know? (-)

C:   mm yeah it'd be good if i could find an apprenticeship cause
     that's: (-) <laughing> yeah i don't know

A:   i don't know either (--) you know i'm really fond of you as
     i've always said but i've no idea anymore what i can (-) come
     on you've already (-) had a load of uh (-) placement
     suggestions

C:   mh:

A:   hey you're (-) are you still interested in hairdressing

C:   yeah

A:   yeah? (--) if it doesn't work out with the (---) apprenticeship

C:   mhm

A:   would you (mm be difficult?) would you think about
     supplementary vocational training? (--) that means

C:   (        ) done it goes through the employment office[21]

A:   for hairdressing there's (-) still a place left (.)

C:   mhmh (5.0)

A:   it kind of depends on you though is it your (-) dream job

C:                                   yeah sure main thing is
```

---

[20] A work opportunity [*Arbeitsgelegenheit*] (also called a "one-euro job") is intended as an opportunity for the long-term unemployed to be reintegrated into the working world. The worker is paid a small "supplementary wage" (of around one euro per hour).

[21] Arbeitsamt—trans.

```
A:    main thing is you have something yeah a bit difficult er
      (telephone conversation) karin it's me
```

"What now then?" seems to be less a question than a way of opening up a topic and an invitation to C to present her view. A seems to know that C cannot answer the question ("don't know?"). What follows is the prelude to a proposal. If C shows interest, the proposal can be made. The suggestion is made very carefully here, which would make it easier for C to turn it down. The two are in agreement that hairdressing would not in fact be C's dream job, but is better than nothing considering the situation ("main thing is you have something"). However, if neither the situation nor the sparse range of available apprenticeships can be blamed, and the client is not displaying any initiative or willingness to compromise, then C's indecisiveness can be blamed instead.

Schäfer_5 4:45 – 5:40 p.4

```
P:    you know when the register=ration period for the vocational
      college²² ended? (--) .h on 30ᵗʰ january-
C:    (since when should) (5-6 words inaudible)
P:    for which area?
C:    <<p> i don't know exactly yet- (-)> i=want i don't know yet if
      i'll do it again but i think unlikely cause- (---)
P:    the first of august is coming round soon,
C:    yeah i know (--) three months four months-
P:    you've got to (.) quickly (.) get in step and find a GOAL,
      (3.0)
C:    yeah- (2.0)
P:    either one or the other or something else .hh but you've DONE
      NOTHING concrete for it (--) your application documents are at
      HOME (--) .h [(you've)]
C:                 [yea=eh] ((sent off already) (.)) (.) rejections.
P:    you haven't READ the job information yet (-) .h you surely
      haven't yet enquired at the vocational college-
C:    (---) yeah true.
```

In this job centre conversation C is confronted with his indecisiveness. The young client is expected to take various steps to find an apprenticeship, but does not act accordingly, causing him to be characterised as "aimless". He had been reflecting on whether he should continue his schooling, but missed the registration deadline. He would like to do an apprenticeship but his application documents are sitting unsent at home. He is also weighing up the possibility of undertaking supplementary vocational training but has not even started reading the leaflets the case manager gave him at their last meeting. His lack of a clear goal ("get in step and find a GOAL"), which would be a precondition for career counselling, prevents a suitable definition

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²² Berufsschule—trans.

of and solution to the problem. Finding a goal here is primarily the task of the customer, not a task to be jointly undertaken, as in the counselling conversation. There it is those clients who have already found their goal or significantly reduced the range of options, that are rather the "problem", as no suitable problem can be found for them.

From work-based to worker-based case management?
There is no fundamental difference between the young clients at the job centre and those at careers counselling. What is different, however, is the processes by which clients are created and categorised. In job-centre conversations the aim of the discussion is typically not to guide the clients towards new ways of looking at and solving the problem. The key aspect to what is defined as a problem in job-centre conversations is in fact the legal status of the client in question, and what programmes the job centre currently has in its portfolio. In none of the 36 job-centre conversations does the subject come up of which of several occupations might personally suit a client. In careers counselling, by contrast, the problem that is seen as processable is developed interactively in the moment, taking into account the practical circumstances. This includes, among other things, agreeing on what problem the counselling is dealing with. The client needs to have a wish to enter into training, but not already to have decided on a certain occupation or subject to study. This "moderate openness" is not always found at the start of the conversation. It became clear that, in such cases, there are attempts to create (or recreate) this moderate openness.

Similarly to marriage counselling, debt advice, genetic counselling or consumer advice, careers counselling counts among the category of counselling institutions which, though they examine a specific counselling problem, are relatively similar in their basic communicative structures (see Bergmann et al., 1998). This is not the case in job-centre conversations. These are institutional conversations during which, though there are episodes which are similar to counselling, there are also numerous interaction patterns and conversational rules which do not fit into counselling. A new institution appears to have arisen, with a mixture of administrative communication, advice and "activation". Counselling calls for advice-seekers to be relatively free in the decisions they can make. This does not fit in well with clients being subject to sanctions if they do, or do not do, certain things, or with advice-seekers' behaviour being "monitored".

There is thus a sharp contrast between the career counselling conversations and the job centre conversations. In the job centres it is not so much a case of finding a career to suit the client; the more appropriate goals here include ending the customer's dependence on assistance and improving his or her employability. The "moderate openness" appropriate to career counselling is not found here. Whereas career counselling conversations are about *opening up* the process, job centre talks are about *excluding* such a weighing up process. The aim of job centre conversations is to limit the range of options, whereas career counselling is also concerned with increasing complexity and the contingency of people's view of their own situation.

The incorporation of both forms of conversation within *one administrative authority* has facilitated the institutionalisation of two opposing logics behind managing labour market processes: logic of variation (careers counselling) and logic of selection (job placement). Labour market politics consist in no small measure of balancing the relative significance of these two logics, though traditionally with an asymmetry in favour of work placement.

In view of this, recent attempts to increasingly integrate counselling (e.g. careers counselling) into job centre conversations, focusing on employment-based case management (see Göckler, 2006) are weighed down from the start with the structural contradiction of having to be both *work*- and *worker*-based. For this reason alone, a focus on work, i.e. specifically fast integration into the labour market, should thus be prioritised in case of doubt (see Ludwig-Mayerhofer et al., 2009), as job centre staff themselves are subject to certain pressures and have to follow orders, e.g. when it comes to filling a qualification programme currently on offer with appropriate "customers". Job centre case managers do not really have to bend to the individual wishes and peculiarities of their clients, as clients themselves are forced to cooperate (as a result of Sections 2, 15 and 31 of the German Social Security Code (SGB II) and they do not in fact have any exit option. It is no doubt true that there is at least an attempt at persuasion and co-production, using gentle pressure, but in the end it makes no difference whether customers *really* agree, whether they *really* work on their attitude or they *really* agree with their placement officer's construct of reality. As a result, the term "co-production" so popularly used in the research into services and in the Federal Employment Agency's reports is misleading.[23]

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[23] The Federal Employment Agency defines case managers as specially trained job placement officers, usually with an educational background in social pedagogy, who must be able to prove that they are certified by the DGCC (German Society for Care and Case Management). They process "customers" facing multiple barriers in their search for a job, who require extensive support for their re-integration into the labour market (see Kolbe & Reis, 2008).

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Transcription Conventions

The conversations were transcribed using the Gesprächsanalytischen Transkriptionssystem für Basistranskripte (GAT) (SELTING 1998)

GAT (Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem) Transcription Notation

(cf. Selting 1998):

[ ]	overlapping and simultaneous speech
=	latched speech
(.)	pause, also given in seconds
:, ::	elongated speech, according to length
((laughs))	indication of laughter
akZENT	primary or main stress
?	sharply rising intonation
,	moderately rising
-	no change in intonation
;	moderately falling
.	sharply falling
((coughs))	contextual information describing para or extra-linguistic actions and events
<<coughing>>	extended para or extra-linguistic actions and events accompanying speech
.h, **.**hh	audible inhalation according to length
h, hh	audible exhalation according to length

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