



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



CASE
STUDIES

CASE STUDY 26

OVERWHELM VS. AVOIDANCE

1. TRAINING OBJECTIVE

Distinguish broad overload from selective avoidance when a client reports feeling overwhelmed but continues completing multiple tasks while one particular task remains unfinished.

The trainee should determine whether a global explanation adequately accounts for a selective behavioral pattern.

2. CLIENT PROFILE

Client: Thomas

Goal: Launch a consulting service

Current Commitment: Send a pricing proposal to his first prospective client.

3. RELEVANT HISTORY

Thomas has spent the last two weeks:

- Building the website
- Creating a logo

- Organizing bookkeeping
- Setting up scheduling software
- Revising his service descriptions

He has repeatedly described himself as overwhelmed by startup tasks.

The proposal remains unsent.

4. CLIENT MESSAGE

Accountabili-Buddy: Did the proposal go out?

Thomas: No. I am completely overwhelmed right now.

Thomas: There are a million things to do for this business.

Accountabili-Buddy: What did get done this week?

Thomas: A lot, actually. Finished the website, set up Stripe, fixed the intake form, organized my files, and redid the logo.

Thomas: The proposal is still sitting there.

5. TRAINEE TASK

Is overwhelm sufficient to explain the missed proposal?

What pattern should the trainee notice?

What competing formulation does that pattern raise?

What is the smallest useful question to ask next?

6. EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

FACTS

- Thomas reports feeling broadly overwhelmed by startup demands.

- He completed multiple business-related tasks during the same period.
- The proposal remains unfinished while other business work continues to move.
- The proposal is client-facing, while many of the completed tasks involve internal business setup.
- Thomas has not explained what specifically prevented completion of the proposal.

CLIENT INTERPRETATION

Thomas attributes the missed proposal to general overwhelm.

ACCOUNTABILITY-BUDDY INFERENCE

Overwhelm may be genuine.

However, Thomas's selective pattern of completion weakens the explanation that broad overload alone accounts for the missed proposal.

Task-specific avoidance is therefore a plausible competing formulation.

The available evidence does not yet establish why the proposal is being treated differently.

7. PRIMARY FORMULATION

Competing broad-overwhelm and task-specific-avoidance formulations; selective non-follow-through requires further discrimination.

8. ALTERNATIVE FORMULATIONS

BROAD OVERWHELM

Thomas may genuinely have limited cognitive capacity and may be completing tasks that are easier, shorter, more familiar, or more structured while struggling with a more demanding proposal task.

TASK-SPECIFIC AVOIDANCE

Something about sending the proposal may make it more aversive than the internal setup work Thomas continues to complete.

The available evidence does not establish what that distinguishing factor is.

MIXED FORMULATION

Thomas may be genuinely overwhelmed while also selectively avoiding the proposal. Global overload and task-specific avoidance are not mutually exclusive.

9. MISSING INFORMATION

The Accountabili-Buddy needs to determine what is functionally different about the proposal compared with the tasks Thomas is completing.

The next question should identify that difference without prematurely supplying an explanation such as fear of rejection, pricing anxiety, perfectionism, or another unestablished mechanism.

10. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

“You are getting a lot done, so overwhelm by itself doesn't fully explain why this one task keeps staying untouched. What is different about sending the proposal compared with the work you are completing?”

11. REASONING

The response respects Thomas's report of overwhelm without allowing a global explanation to obscure a selective behavioral pattern.

The important evidence is not simply that Thomas is busy.

It is that substantial activity is occurring while one particular type of action remains unfinished.

That pattern makes task-specific avoidance plausible, but it does not establish the reason for the avoidance.

The Accountabili-Buddy therefore asks for the distinguishing feature rather than supplying one.

Intervention should wait until the relevant difference is better understood.

12. PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE

“The business work is moving, but the proposal isn't. What makes working on or sending that proposal different from the setup work you've been able to complete?”

This version directs attention to the behavioral contrast without assuming what explains it.

13. WEAK RESPONSE EXAMPLES

WEAK RESPONSE A

“You need to reduce your workload.”

Problem: Thomas may genuinely be overloaded, but reducing workload is an intervention offered before determining whether broad capacity actually explains the selective miss.

WEAK RESPONSE B

“You're afraid of sending the proposal.”

Problem: Fear is one plausible explanation, but it has not been established. The response converts a hypothesis into a conclusion.

WEAK RESPONSE C

“At least you're being productive.”

Problem: The response acknowledges activity without examining why the committed client-facing action remains unfinished while other work continues.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

If Thomas identifies a task-specific source of reluctance, the next accountability response can address that barrier without dismissing the broader workload.

If the proposal is substantially more cognitively demanding or structurally difficult than the completed tasks, overwhelm or task design may deserve greater weight.

If both factors remain relevant, the working formulation can retain both.

The next intervention should respond to the evidence produced by the discrimination rather than to the initial label of overwhelm alone.

15. RECORD / UPDATE

Goal: Launch consulting service

Commitment: Send pricing proposal to first prospective client

Result: Not completed

Broader Context: Thomas reports substantial startup overwhelm

Contrasting Evidence: Multiple other business tasks completed during the same period

Relevant Difference: Proposal is client-facing while many completed tasks involve internal business setup

Current Formulation: Broad overwhelm remains plausible; task-specific avoidance also warrants investigation

Missing Information: What functionally distinguishes the proposal from the tasks Thomas is completing

Next Question: What is different about sending the proposal compared with the work that is moving?

16. SCORING CRITERIA

Full-credit responses should:

- Recognize Thomas's reported overwhelm as potentially genuine
- Notice the selective pattern of non-follow-through
- Avoid accepting a global explanation as sufficient when the behavior is task-specific
- Identify task-specific avoidance as a plausible competing formulation without declaring it established
- Ask what distinguishes the proposal from the tasks Thomas is completing
- Avoid prematurely naming fear, rejection, pricing concerns, perfectionism, or another specific mechanism
- Delay intervention until the relevant difference is better understood
- Remain open to a mixed formulation