



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



CASE
STUDIES

CASE STUDY 37

INCONSISTENT FOLLOW-THROUGH

1. TRAINING OBJECTIVE

Distinguish changing motivation or interest from environmental structure, competing demands, and ordinary behavioral variability when performance fluctuates substantially across weeks.

The trainee should recognize that inconsistent performance can provide useful comparative evidence and that successful weeks may be as informative as unsuccessful ones when determining what influences follow-through.

2. CLIENT PROFILE

Client: Mei

Goal: Write a dissertation chapter

Current Commitment: Three 60-minute writing sessions per week.

3. RELEVANT HISTORY

Over six weeks:

- Week 1: three sessions
- Week 2: zero sessions

- Week 3: three sessions
- Week 4: one session
- Week 5: three sessions
- Week 6: zero sessions

Mei continues to say the dissertation is her highest academic priority.

4. CLIENT MESSAGE

Accountabili-Buddy: Zero sessions this week after three last week. What was different?

Mei: I honestly don't know.

Mei: Some weeks I just seem to do it and other weeks it disappears.

Mei: I still care about finishing. That part hasn't changed.

5. TRAINEE TASK

What does the fluctuating pattern establish, and what remains unresolved?

What evidence supports and weakens the strongest formulations?

What information should be compared across successful and unsuccessful weeks?

What is the smallest useful question that could begin that comparison?

What information would materially change the accountability response?

6. EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

FACTS

- Follow-through has varied substantially across six weeks.
- Mei has completed all three sessions in three of the six weeks.

- She has also completed zero sessions in two weeks and one session in another.
- Mei continues to endorse the dissertation as her highest academic priority.
- She reports that her interest in finishing has not changed.
- The same three-session commitment has produced substantially different outcomes across different weeks.

CLIENT INTERPRETATION

Mei does not know what accounts for the variation.

She reports continued goal value despite inconsistent execution.

ACCOUNTABILI-BUDDY INFERENCE

The repeated three-session weeks provide evidence that the commitment is achievable under at least some conditions.

They do not establish that three sessions are equally workable under all of Mei's circumstances or that commitment calibration is irrelevant.

The alternating outcomes make comparative analysis particularly useful.

Possible contributors include differences in environmental structure, scheduling, workload, competing demands, initiation conditions, motivation, or ordinary week-to-week behavioral variability.

The current evidence does not identify which factor best explains the pattern.

Rather than interpreting the most recent zero-session week in isolation, the Accountabili-Buddy should compare conditions associated with substantially different outcomes.

7. PRIMARY FORMULATION

Variable follow-through with the mechanism unresolved. Repeated successful weeks provide important comparative evidence for identifying conditions associated with stronger and weaker execution.

8. ALTERNATIVE FORMULATIONS

STRUCTURAL VARIABILITY

Something about Mei's schedule, environment, or execution structure may differ systematically between higher-follow-through and lower-follow-through weeks.

If a consistent structural difference appears across outcomes, this formulation gains support.

COMPETING DEMANDS

Other academic, professional, or personal demands may vary enough across weeks to affect the practical opportunity for writing.

Under this formulation, the same commitment may function differently depending on what else the week contains.

MOTIVATION VARIABILITY

Mei's willingness to initiate writing may fluctuate even though the dissertation continues to matter to her.

Continued goal value does not establish that motivation to perform the immediate behavior remains constant.

COMMITMENT CALIBRATION

Three sessions may be workable in some weeks but poorly calibrated to others if Mei's available capacity varies substantially.

The successful weeks argue against concluding that three is inherently unrealistic, but they do not establish that it is appropriate under every set of circumstances.

ORDINARY BEHAVIORAL VARIABILITY

The differences may not be explained by one stable factor.

Some fluctuation may result from changing combinations of circumstances rather than a single recurring mechanism.

MIXED FORMULATION

Different factors may dominate in different weeks.

For example, competing demands may explain one zero-session week while scheduling structure contributes to another.

A variable pattern does not require a single stable cause.

9. MISSING INFORMATION

The Accountabili-Buddy needs to compare conditions surrounding substantially different outcomes rather than examining unsuccessful weeks alone.

The first useful question should look for a meaningful difference between a recent successful week and a recent unsuccessful week.

Relevant variables may include scheduling, workload, competing deadlines, location, time of day, or how the first writing session was initiated.

These should not automatically become a checklist.

The Accountabili-Buddy should begin with the smallest useful comparison and pursue additional variables only when they could materially improve the formulation.

If a consistent difference predicts stronger or weaker follow-through across several weeks, that factor gains explanatory weight.

If no stable difference emerges, the formulation should remain appropriately uncertain.

10. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

“You’ve completed all three sessions several times, so before we conclude that three itself is the problem, I want to compare the weeks when it happens with the weeks when it doesn’t. Think about last week and this week. What was meaningfully different about the conditions around your writing?”

11. REASONING

The response uses successful performance as evidence rather than focusing exclusively on failure.

Mei’s three-session weeks demonstrate that the commitment has been achievable under some observed conditions.

That evidence makes it less appropriate to conclude from the zero-session weeks alone that the commitment is inherently unrealistic.

At the same time, successful performance does not prove that Mei has stable capacity for three sessions under all conditions.

The response therefore uses the contrast between successful and unsuccessful weeks to generate information about what may be influencing execution.

It also avoids treating inconsistency as evidence that Mei no longer values the goal when she continues to report that finishing matters to her.

The accountability task is comparative analysis, not premature explanation.

12. PLAUSIBLE ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE

“Three sessions happened last week and none happened this week. Rather than guessing from the zero, let’s use the contrast. What changed between those two weeks that might actually matter for whether the writing happened?”

This version begins with the closest available comparison and invites Mei to identify potentially meaningful differences without assuming what those differences are.

13. WEAK RESPONSE EXAMPLES

WEAK RESPONSE A

"You just need to become more consistent."

Problem: The response restates the observed problem without generating information about what contributes to the variation.

WEAK RESPONSE B

"Three sessions must be too much. Let's lower it."

Problem: Mei has repeatedly completed three sessions, which argues against concluding from the unsuccessful weeks alone that the commitment is inherently unrealistic. The Accountabili-Buddy also takes the commitment decision away from Mei.

WEAK RESPONSE C

"Maybe you don't care enough."

Problem: Mei continues to report that finishing matters to her, and repeated three-session weeks provide additional evidence inconsistent with simply assuming loss of interest. Motivation may vary, but diminished goal value has not been established.

14. WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

If comparison reveals a recurring condition associated with stronger or weaker follow-through, the Accountabili-Buddy can make that pattern visible to Mei and examine how consistently the evidence supports it.

Mei can then decide whether she wants to change anything about her commitment, environment, schedule, or approach based on what the comparison reveals.

If the suspected factor changes and performance changes with it, the formulation gains additional support.

If the suspected factor changes without affecting performance, the formulation should be weakened or revised.

If no stable difference emerges across successful and unsuccessful weeks, the Accountabili-Buddy should avoid manufacturing one. The pattern may reflect several changing contributors or ordinary behavioral variability.

Mei retains ownership of any resulting decision, commitment, or change in approach.

15. RECORD / UPDATE

Goal: Write dissertation chapter

Current Commitment: Three 60-minute writing sessions per week

Performance History: Three, zero, three, one, three, zero sessions

Goal Value: Mei continues to identify the dissertation as her highest academic priority and reports that her interest in finishing has not changed

Current Formulation: Variable follow-through; mechanism unresolved

Evidence from Successful Weeks: Three sessions have been achieved repeatedly under some conditions

Possible Contributors: Structural variability, competing demands, motivation variability, commitment calibration, ordinary behavioral variability

Missing Information: Meaningful differences between higher-follow-through and lower-follow-through weeks

Next Question: What was meaningfully different about the conditions surrounding a successful week and an unsuccessful week?

16. SCORING CRITERIA

Full-credit responses should:

- Use successful weeks as meaningful evidence rather than analyzing failure in isolation
- Recognize that repeated successful performance demonstrates achievability under some conditions without proving stable capacity under all conditions
- Avoid concluding prematurely that the commitment is miscalibrated
- Avoid assigning diminished motivation or goal value without supporting evidence
- Compare successful and unsuccessful weeks rather than analyzing each outcome independently
- Consider structural variability, competing demands, motivation, commitment calibration, and ordinary behavioral variability as plausible contributors
- Recognize that different weeks may have different contributing factors
- Begin with the smallest useful comparative question rather than conducting automatic exhaustive inquiry
- Use subsequent evidence to strengthen, weaken, or revise the working formulation
- Avoid inventing a stable cause if comparison does not reveal one
- Avoid deciding Mei's resulting commitment or course of action for her
- Preserve Mei's ownership of any resulting decision, commitment, or change in approach