



accountabili-buddy

— CLARITY. COMMITMENT. FOLLOW THROUGH. —



CASE
STUDIES

CASE STUDY 49

THE WRONG FIRST FORMULATION

1. TRAINING OBJECTIVE

Learn to revise a reasonable initial formulation when later evidence shows that the original explanation was incomplete or incorrect.

The trainee should understand that an initial formulation later shown to be wrong is not necessarily a professional failure.

The relevant question is whether the formulation was reasonable given the evidence available at the time and whether the Accountabili-Buddy updates it when new evidence requires change.

2. CLIENT PROFILE

Client: Alicia

Goal: Complete a professional licensing application

Current Task: Finish the application and submit it.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND

The application is largely complete.

Alicia has postponed submission twice.

She reports a demanding work schedule but otherwise describes the application as straightforward.

INTERACTION 1

Accountabili-Buddy: The application did not go out again. What happened?

Alicia: I just never made time for it.

Alicia: Every day got busy and I kept thinking I would do it later.

Accountabili-Buddy: Is there anything about the application itself that is stopping you?

Alicia: No. I really think I just need to schedule it properly.

4. PROVISIONAL EVIDENCE ANALYSIS

KNOWN

- Alicia has postponed submission twice.
- She reports that busy days and lack of protected time contributed to the misses.
- She reports no task-specific difficulty when directly asked.
- Alicia believes more specific scheduling would help.
- No contrary evidence is yet available.

INFERENCE

Insufficient implementation structure is the best-supported current formulation.

A task-specific barrier remains possible, but the available evidence does not yet support leading with that interpretation.

The Accountabili-Buddy should therefore treat scheduling as a working formulation rather than a settled explanation.

5. PROVISIONAL FORMULATION

Insufficient implementation structure is the best-supported current explanation.

6. INITIAL INTERVENTION

The Accountabili-Buddy helps Alicia translate her intention to submit into a specific, protected opportunity for action.

Alicia chooses and confirms the commitment:

Alicia: Tuesday at 7:00 p.m. I'll give myself thirty minutes to do the final review and submit it.

The intervention now functions as both an accountability structure and a test of the working formulation.

If lack of protected time is the primary barrier, creating a specific workable opportunity should improve execution.

INTERACTION 2

Tuesday passes.

Accountabili-Buddy: Did the 7:00 p.m. application block happen?

Alicia: Sort of.

Accountabili-Buddy: What does sort of mean?

Alicia: I opened it at 7:00 exactly.

Alicia: Then I reread the whole thing, changed two sentences, checked the requirements again, and eventually closed it.

Alicia: I still did not press submit.

7. UPDATED EVIDENCE

The scheduling intervention successfully created the planned opportunity.

Alicia:

- remembered the commitment;
- appeared at the scheduled time;
- opened the application;
- engaged with the application during the protected block;
- reviewed and edited material;
- still did not submit.

This substantially weakens insufficient scheduling as the primary explanation for the non-submission.

The intervention did what it was intended to do: it brought Alicia to the task at the planned time.

The target behavior still did not occur.

The new evidence therefore shifts attention from whether Alicia can create an opportunity to work on the application toward what happens once she reaches the point of submission.

8. REVISED FORMULATION

Submission-specific avoidance is now strongly supported, while the function of that avoidance remains unresolved.

Possible contributors include:

- concern about making an error;
- difficulty with finality;

- concern about evaluation;
- perfectionistic standards;
- another submission-specific concern.

These are hypotheses, not conclusions.

The Accountabili-Buddy should not select among them without additional evidence.

9. TRAINEE DECISION POINT

The Accountabili-Buddy should not continue solving the scheduling problem simply because scheduling was the original formulation.

The intervention generated evidence that the protected opportunity itself was not sufficient to produce submission.

The next inquiry should therefore focus on the point at which Alicia had the application open and still did not submit.

The smallest useful question asks what made submission difficult once the opportunity existed.

10. RECOMMENDED RESPONSE

“The scheduling change did what we wanted it to do. You showed up at 7:00 and opened the application. The part that still didn't happen was submission. What became difficult when you got to the point of actually pressing submit?”

INTERACTION 3

Alicia: I think I am scared there is something wrong in it.

Alicia: Once I submit it, I cannot keep fixing it.

Alicia: I know I have checked it enough. I just keep thinking maybe I missed something.

11. FINAL FORMULATION

Perfectionistic uncertainty is maintaining submission-specific avoidance.

Alicia's new report provides evidence that:

- she believes the application has already been checked sufficiently;
- she continues to worry that something may still be wrong;
- submission would end her ability to continue revising;
- repeated checking occurs instead of the intended submission.

The earlier scheduling formulation is no longer sufficient.

The difficulty is not currently best explained by failure to create an opportunity for action.

The evidence now supports difficulty tolerating residual uncertainty at the point of final submission.

The formulation should remain behavioral and functional.

The Accountabili-Buddy does not need to determine why Alicia experiences this uncertainty psychologically or explore deeper origins outside the accountability role.

12. RECOMMENDED NEXT INTERVENTION

“Then another review probably isn't addressing the barrier we're seeing. You already believe you've checked it enough, but the remaining uncertainty keeps pulling you back into more checking instead of submission. If you still want to submit the application, do you want your next commitment to be submitting it without another full review?”

The Accountabili-Buddy can recommend that the next commitment address the behavior now supported by the evidence.

Alicia retains ownership of whether she accepts that commitment.

13. WHY THE INITIAL FORMULATION WAS REASONABLE

At Interaction 1, Alicia's report and the available behavioral evidence supported insufficient implementation structure.

She described busy days, lack of protected time, and repeated intentions to act later.

When directly asked whether something about the application itself was stopping her, she said no.

The Accountabili-Buddy therefore had reasonable evidence for testing a scheduling formulation.

The later result does not make that earlier judgment professionally unsound.

Instead, the intervention generated new evidence.

Alicia successfully created and used the planned opportunity but still did not perform the target behavior.

That outcome substantially weakened scheduling as the primary explanation and revealed a submission-specific barrier requiring further discrimination.

Interaction 3 then provided stronger evidence about the function of that barrier.

Professionalism does not require the first formulation to be permanently correct.

It requires the Accountabili-Buddy to maintain a working formulation and revise it when better evidence becomes available.

14. WEAK ACCOUNTABILI-BUDDY RESPONSES

WEAK RESPONSE A

"Let's schedule another submission block."

Problem: The response repeats the original intervention after the first test showed that Alicia can create and use a protected opportunity while still failing to submit.

WEAK RESPONSE B

"I knew you were avoiding it all along."

Problem: The response rewrites earlier uncertainty as though the later evidence had always been available. Avoidance was possible at Interaction 1, but it was not yet the best-supported formulation.

WEAK RESPONSE C

"Check it one more time so you feel confident."

Problem: Alicia already reports believing that she has checked the application enough. Additional checking risks reinforcing the behavior currently associated with continued non-submission.

WEAK RESPONSE D

"The scheduling strategy failed, so scheduling was never part of the problem."

Problem: The intervention successfully created the protected opportunity Alicia previously lacked. The new evidence shows that scheduling was not sufficient to explain the non-submission. It does not establish that implementation structure was irrelevant earlier.

15. RECORD / UPDATE

Goal: Complete professional licensing application

Initial Evidence: Two postponed submissions; busy schedule; client reports lack of protected time and no task-specific barrier

Initial Formulation: Insufficient implementation structure

Initial Intervention: Alicia selects a specific protected submission block

Intervention Outcome: Alicia remembers, appears at the scheduled time, opens the application, reviews and edits, but does not submit

Evidence Update: Scheduling intervention successfully creates opportunity; non-submission persists

Revised Formulation: Submission-specific avoidance; function unresolved

Additional Evidence: Alicia reports concern that something may still be wrong, continued checking despite believing she has checked enough, and difficulty ending revision through submission

Final Formulation: Perfectionistic uncertainty maintaining submission-specific avoidance

Next Accountability Target: If Alicia continues to endorse submission, consider a client-owned commitment to submit without another full review

16. SCORING CRITERIA

Full-credit responses should:

- Judge the initial formulation based on the evidence available at Interaction 1
- Recognize insufficient implementation structure as a reasonable provisional formulation
- Treat the initial intervention as a test that generates new evidence
- Recognize that the scheduling intervention successfully created the intended opportunity
- Use Alicia's behavior during the protected block to substantially weaken scheduling as the primary explanation
- Shift attention toward the point of submission rather than repeating the same scheduling intervention
- Distinguish submission-specific avoidance from its still-unknown function after Interaction 2
- Use Interaction 3 to update the formulation further

- Recognize perfectionistic uncertainty as supported by Alicia's continued checking despite believing the application has been checked enough
- Avoid hindsight certainty
- Avoid treating an updated formulation as proof that the original formulation was professionally unreasonable
- Avoid becoming attached to the initial explanation after contradictory evidence appears
- Match the next intervention to the updated formulation
- Preserve Alicia's ownership of the next commitment
- Maintain the boundary between accountability formulation and deeper psychological interpretation