



Using Client Feedback to Build a Strong Therapeutic Relationship

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Overview

- Therapeutic alliance as a key ingredient of clinical effectiveness
- Measuring alliance
- Alliance and outcomes in the real world
- Discussion

Focusing on the Therapeutic Relationship

“...decades of research consistently demonstrate that relationship factors correlate more highly with client outcome than do specialized treatment techniques... therapists need to remember that the development and maintenance of the therapeutic relationship is a primary curative component of therapy and that the relationship provides the context in which the specific techniques exert their influence.”

- Lambert & Barley (2001)
Psychotherapy, 38(4):357-361

Relationship Building as an EBP

Practitioners are encouraged to routinely monitor patients' responses to the therapy relationship and ongoing treatment. Such monitoring leads to increased opportunities to repair alliance ruptures, improve the relationship, modify technical strategies, and avoid premature termination.

- Norcross & Lambert (2006) in *Evidence-Based Practices in Mental Health*, Norcross, Beutler & Levant (Eds), p. 218

Therapeutic alliance as a key ingredient

- Large body of research on therapeutic relationship and working alliance show that it is an important factor in the outcome of psychotherapy
 - Horvath and Symonds, 1991: Meta-analysis of 24 studies attributed 26% of the difference in case outcomes to differences in alliance

Concept of Therapeutic Alliance

Three Components:

- **Tasks:** Behaviors and processes within the therapy session that constitute the actual work of therapy
- **Bonds:** The positive interpersonal attachment between therapist and client of mutual trust, confidence, and acceptance
- **Goals:** Objectives of therapy that both client and therapist endorse

Measuring Alliance: Sample Questions

“During the session I felt...

(5-point scale: Agree to Do Not Agree)

...confident that the therapist and I were working well together *(task oriented)*

...that we talked about the things that were important to me *(goal oriented)*

...like the therapist/doctor understood me
...that the therapist/doctor was honest and sincere
(bond oriented)

Alliance on the Client Feedback Form

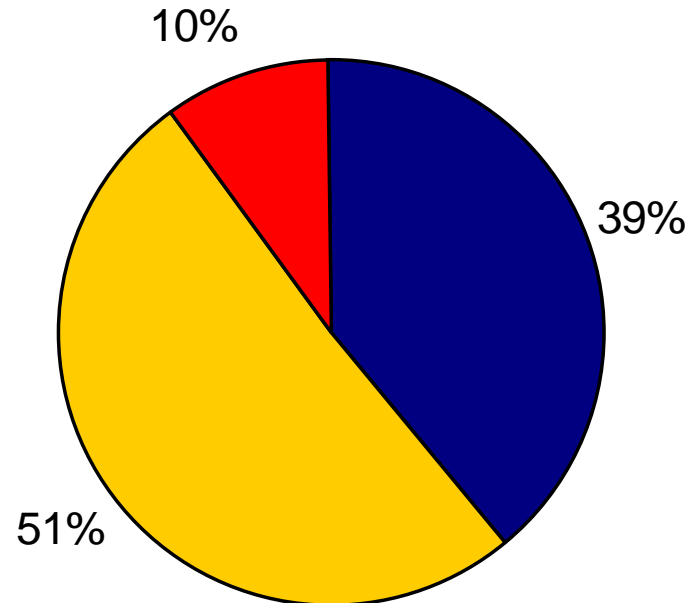
- Alliance should be measured frequently
- Duncan & Miller (“The Heroic Client” – 2000) advocate assessment at every session using a brief instrument
- ValueOptions CFF incorporates 3 key alliance questions as part of a 20-item outcomes questionnaire

Feedback on your last session: Skip 16-18 if you have not yet had a session with this counselor

	Agree	Somewhat agree	Not sure	Somewhat disagree	Do not agree
16. The Counselor and I worked well together.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. The Counselor understood me.....	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. We talked about the things that were important to me...	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Alliance Results: High praise for clinicians

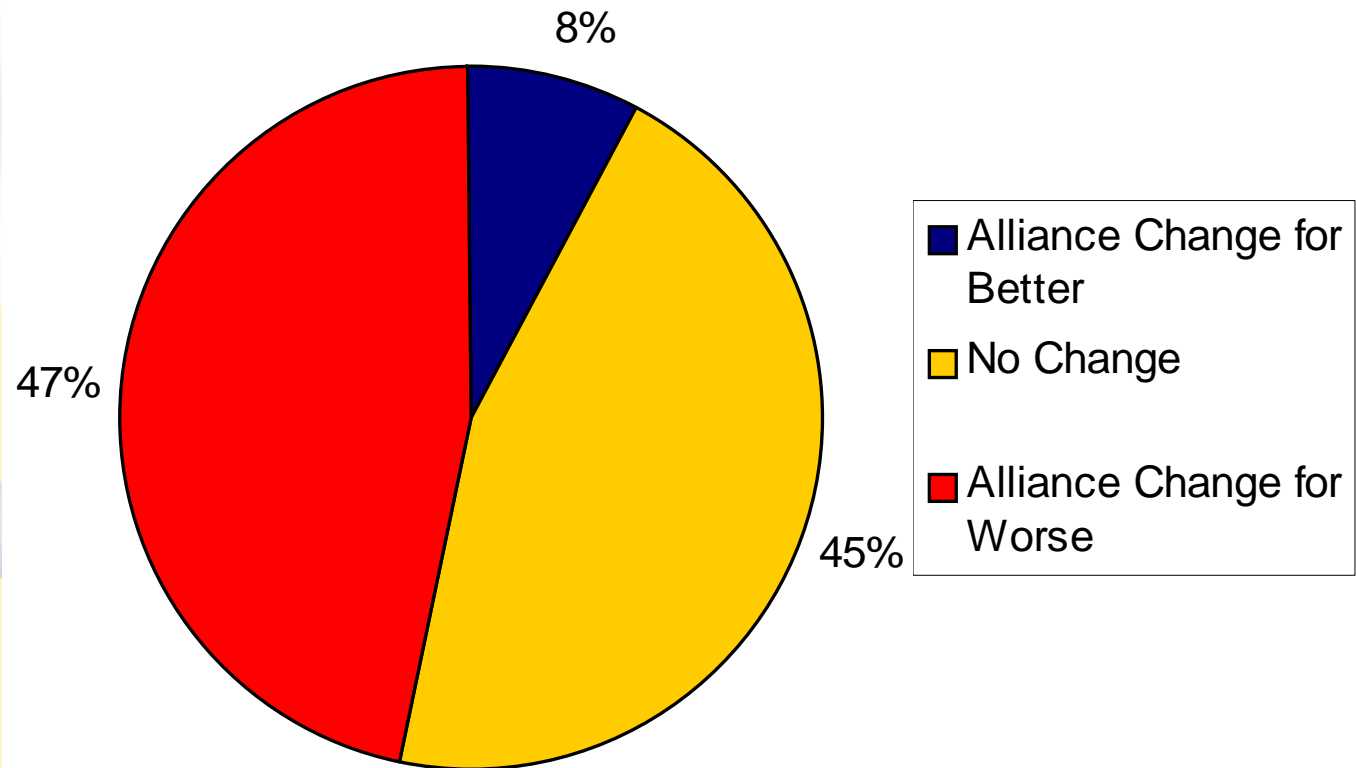
Alliance scores at start of treatment



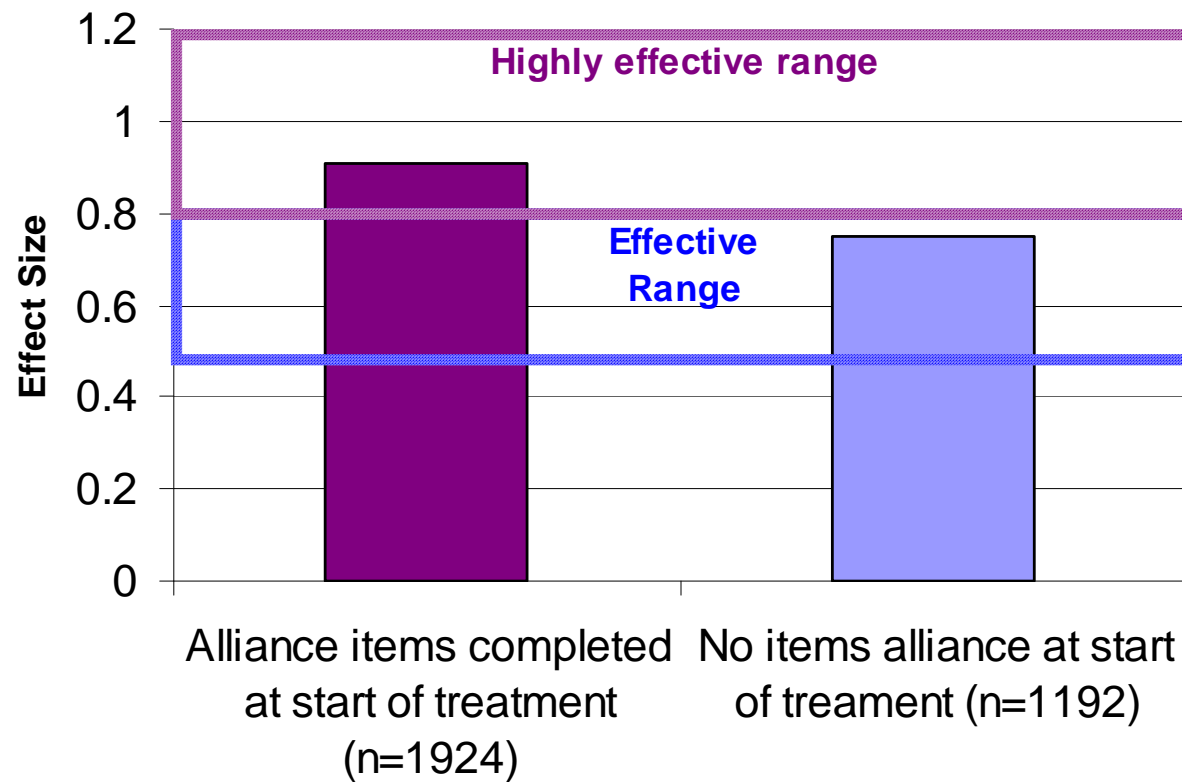
- Perfect (Alliance=0)
- Almost Perfect (Alliance<1)
- Room for improvement (Alliance=>1)

Alliance Results: Looking at Change

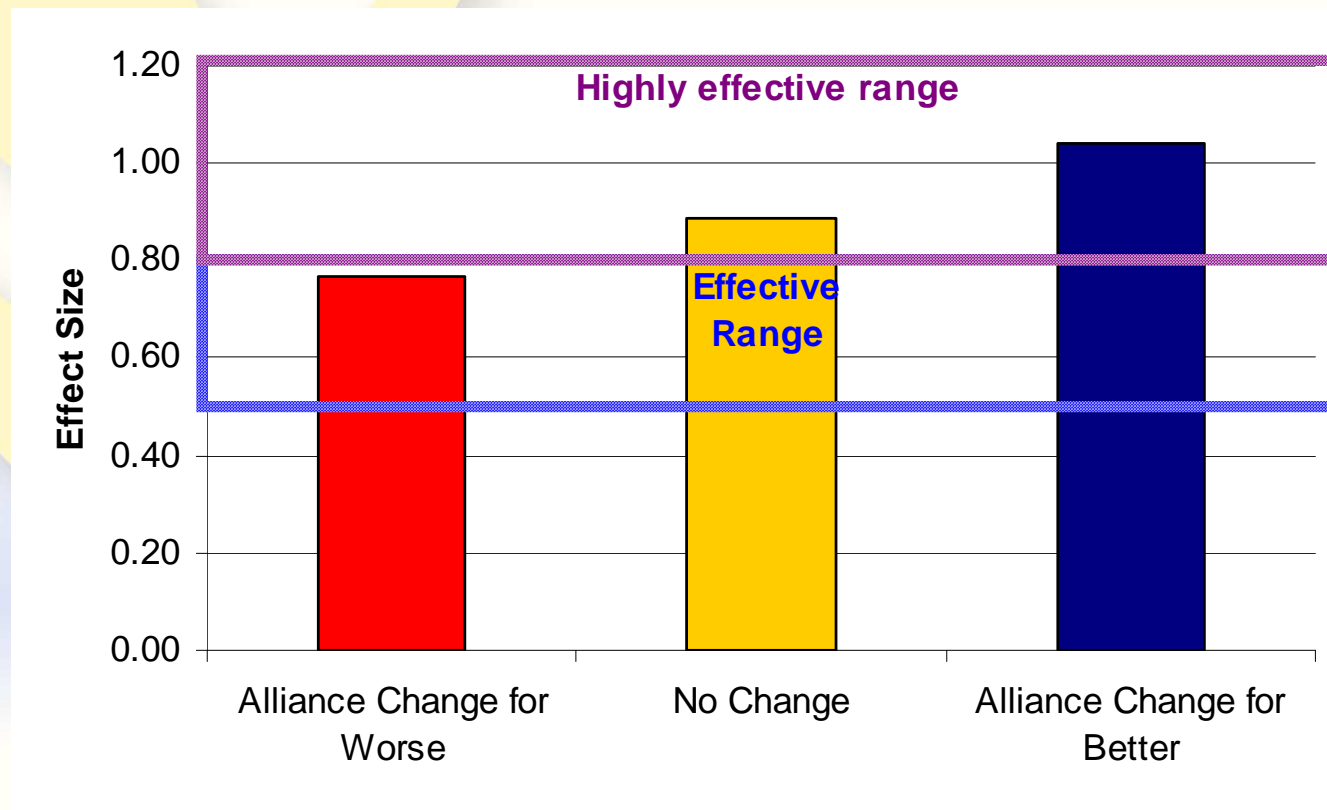
Change in Alliance Scores



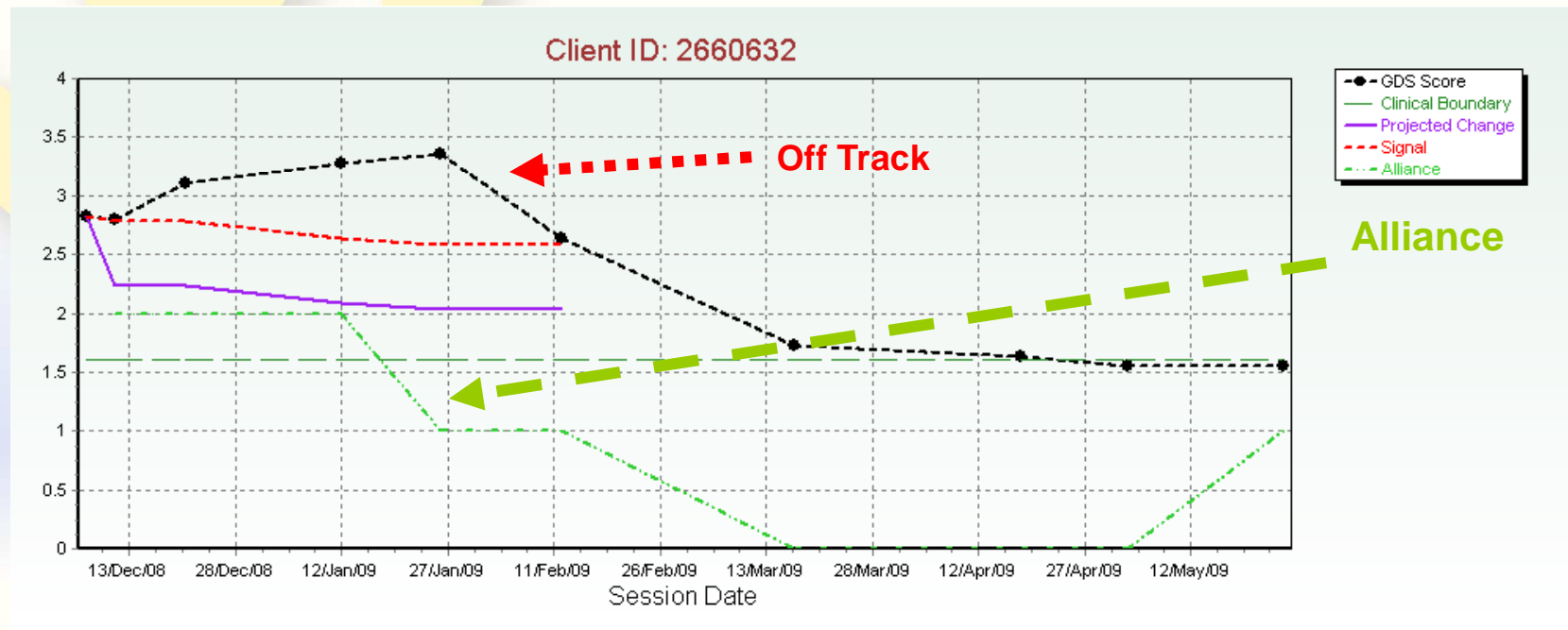
Alliance Results: Measuring Makes A Difference



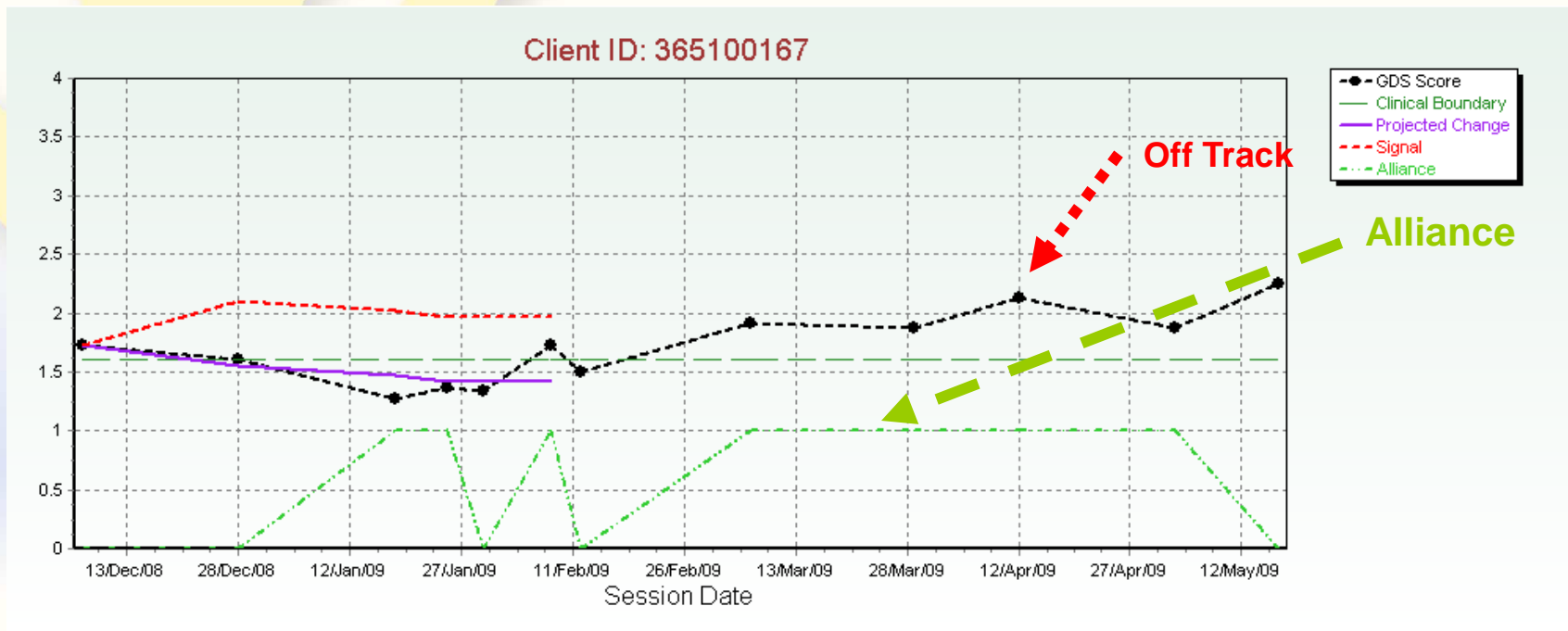
Alliance Results: Improvement Related to Effectiveness



Tracking Alliance in the Clinician's Toolkit



Tracking Alliance in the Clinician's Toolkit



Discussion: What Can Clinicians Do?

- Encourage honest feedback
 - Empower the client: “I need to know if I’m doing something that isn’t working for you.”
 - Beware “condemnation with faint praise”
- Review questionnaire results with clients
 - Elicit more detail on when alliance items are less than perfect
 - Failure to complete alliance items is often clinically meaningful... ask “Why?”
- Be adaptable in your approach
- Other experiences?