Author(s): Passmore, Jonathan

Title: Motivational Interviewing – A model for coaching psychology practice

Year of publication: 2011

Journal / Source: *The Coaching Psychologist*.

Citation: Passmore, J. (2011). Motivational Interviewing – A model for coaching psychology practice. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 7(1), 35-39.

Motivational Interviewing – a model for coaching psychology practice

Abstract

This is the first in a series of papers to look at Motivational Interviewing as an approach suitable for use with coaching clients. This paper presents a brief overview of Motivational interviewing (MI) for readers unfamiliar with MI and directs readers to other sources for a fuller account. The paper aims to set the scene from a practitioner perspective for subsequent papers in this and future issues within *The Coaching Psychologist* in the Techniques Section, rather than offer a detailed account of MI's application in coaching. Each of these subsequent papers will present a short description of a technique suitable for working with a coachee's ambivalence.

Introduction

Coachee ambivalence to change can sometimes be an issue which coaches face in their work, in health as well as organisational coaching. The coach asks is the client ready to make a change? Almost all of the coaching models, (for example GROW, Cognitive behavioural, solution focused) assume the client has mentally committed to make a change and that resistance is not a feature of the conversation. This is often the case, which is why skills in helping clients make links between their emotions, cognitions and behaviours, are useful, alongside skills in challenging irrational thoughts or developing personal action plans. However, from personal experience, I find a small proportion of clients are stuck and are unable to move forward through use of behavioural or cognitive behavioural models, two other approaches I commonly use in my own coaching. They are stuck with behaviours which they do not see as problematical, but which others do. Or they may be stuck in ruminating on a problem without a clear commitment to take action. In these cases, Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a useful evidenced based approach which can be employed by the coaching psychologist to help the individual build sufficient motivation to take action.

The development of MI

MI was developed in clinical environments by counsellors working with drug and alcohol clients. They found that change processes inside counselling mirrored natural change processes outside of the counselling room. A key predictive factor whether people would change was the way they spoke about change during their sessions with the counsellor. Clients' who made statements that signalled a high level of motivation and a strong commitment to change, were more likely to make a change, than those demonstrating resistance to making a change.

Alongside this was a recognition by counsellors that the language used by the client, could be influenced by the counsellor through the questions they asked. Specifically the counsellor could direct attention to specific aspects of behaviour through skilled reflections and summary, and encourage the client to focus on talking about these aspects of their behaviour (Miller & Rollnick, 2002).

In addition, counsellors observed that changes in the words and language used by the client were a strong predictor of a future change in behaviour. However, getting this change in language through confrontation was less effective than using open questions, active listening, reflection and summaries (OARS).

MI evolved out of these observations through the work of Bill Miller and Steve Rollnick (Miller & Rollnick, 2002). Their focus was on enhancing intrinsic (internal) motivation towards behavioural change by helping the resolution of ambivalence to change in clients and over the past decade a significant evidence base has demonstrated the efficacy of the approach for specific counselling client presenting issues. A full review of the evidence supporting MI is contained elsewhere (see Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Passmore, 2007; Passmore & Whybrow, 2007)

The theory base of MI – Transtheoretical Model

MI draws heavily on the Transtheoretical Model (Diclemente & Prochaska, 1998) of behaviour change. The model describes how people prepare to change through a series of stages from pre-contemplation, through contemplation, planning, action and how successful change is maintained, or how relapse is managed.

In this section I will briefly describe the stages of the model and the relationship between them. The model itself is summarised in Diagram 1.
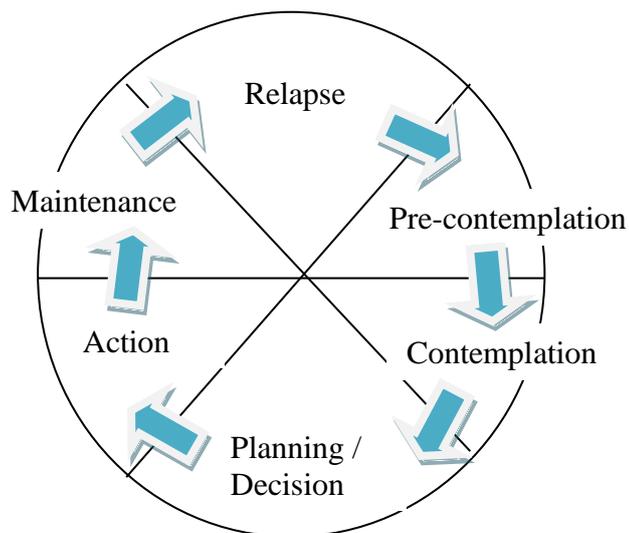
Diagram 1: Cycle of change

The model argues that people experience different thought patterns at different stages of change. This may start with consciousness raising, where a person learns new facts or ideas that highlight the existence of a problem (pre-contemplation). This leads to reflecting on the issue, the pro and cons of whether a change should or could be made (contemplation stage). This progresses to reflecting on what steps to make (planning), followed by the first steps of change (action stage) (Perz, Diclemente, & Carbonari, 1996). A fuller account of the model and its application in coaching is offered in Passmore & Whybrow (2007).

However, the movement through stages is not always a straight path from pre-contemplation to maintenance as suggested by the model. Relapse is a common problem experienced by many of us when making a change. Relapse can occur at any stage. As a result, it is common for individuals to make progress and slip back. An example is when we commit to a new health plan. As part of this we may buy membership to a fitness gym at the start of New Year. However, we find out that other priorities take over, and we slip back to our old ways. In reviewing our progress at the end of February we may find that we have stopped going to the gym and need to recommit to our fitness plan.

A key concept of MI is the importance of tailoring interventions to meet an individual's stage of change to help individuals from slipping back (Project MATCH, 1997). This includes selecting appropriate interventions including tools and techniques which are useful at specific stages of the change cycle.

Table 1 summarises each of the stages of change and highlights similarities with other approaches, such as humanistic and behavioural. It also suggests useful

Passmore, J. (2011). Motivational Interviewing – A model for coaching psychology practice. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 7(1), 35-39.

intentions which the coach could draw on at each stage to help the coachee move forward to the next step in the change cycle.

Table 1: Using MI and other interventions within a Model of Change

Change Stage	Intervention model	Most useful interventions
Pre-contemplation	Humanistic / Motivational Interviewing	Create relationship through empathy & rapport Use reflective listening If reluctant to change – encourage gathering of evidence / feedback If lack of belief that can change – offer belief encourage hope If giving reasons for not changing- explore wider values, beliefs and impact of behaviour on others.
Contemplation	Motivational Interviewing/ Cognitive behavioural	Explore the reasons not to change and reasons to change Explore the 'problem' Explore the coachee's most important aspects / goals of their life Reflect back discrepancy between goals / values and current behaviour Explore confidence to change Explore barriers to change Reflect back desire to change & confidence statements
Planning	Motivational Interviewing / Behavioural (GROW) / Cognitive behavioural	Check for congruence in change communications Explore confidence to change Clarify and refine goals Review options & select chosen options Identify allies to support coachee Use visualisation to build confidence
Action	Motivational Interviewing & Behavioural (GROW)	Monitor & affirm small steps Explore next steps

Passmore, J. (2011). Motivational Interviewing – A model for coaching psychology practice. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 7(1), 35-39.

		Explore barriers being encountered
		Plan actions to overcome barriers
Maintenance	Motivational Interviewing & Behavioural	Provide positive feedback on success
		Plan for coping if slip back
		Reinforce long term goals fit with values
		Encourage use of allies to continue positive progress
Relapse		Empathise & normalise
		Explore reasons for relapse
		Plan to prevent next time
		Explore successes & affirm
		Reflect back positive statements of desire for change
		Return to contemplation actions

A common feature, and reason for drawing on MI, is that the coachee demonstrates ambivalence. Ambivalence is when the coachee asks *what's the point of changing?* It is this which can often keep the coachee stuck with old habits and not able to move forward.

A typical response to ambivalence is to offer advice, education or options of action (Rollnick, 1998). Such interventions from the coach are likely to result in resistance from the individual, rather than change. Coachees have usually had advice and instructions of what to do a hundred times before. Repeating these is likely to gets the same result – no change.

To generate change the coaching psychologist needs to recognise and understand ambivalence as a natural part of the change process and to work with it (Passmore, Anstiss & Ward, 2009). In line with MI, a starting point is to recognise which stage of change the individual is at. One way of doing this is to ask the coachee to rate their perceived readiness to change on a scale of 0 – 10, with 10 being that they have already made change, and 0 being not at all interested in changing. A second is to listen closely to what the coachee has to say – do they know they have a problem, have they considered different options for what to do, do they have a plan, has the plan worked?

In MI the coaching psychologist uses their understanding of the stage of the change where the coachee is, to match their interventions (see Table 1). In successes

Passmore, J. (2011). Motivational Interviewing – A model for coaching psychology practice. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 7(1), 35-39.

techniques papers I will explore different techniques and tools which the coach can use to enhance the motivation to change.

Conclusion

One source of hope for coachees' from the MI approach, is that there is no "right way" to change, and if one given plan for change does not work, a coachee is only limited by their creativity as to the number of other approaches that may be tried.

To accompany this hope described in the paragraph above, a word of caution. Human behaviour is difficult to change. The desire to change our behaviour and an actual change are two different things. To succeed the coach needs to be persistent, as does the coachee. However, if the coach is too persistent there is the danger they either become unethical in being overly manipulative in moving their coachee towards a predetermined outcome, or they move into persuasion which in turn leads to resistance. As coaching psychologists, we need to understand our role is limited to one of encouraging personal responsibility and developing self awareness.

References

Diclemente, C. C., & Prochaska, J. O. (1998). Toward a comprehensive, transtheoretical model of change: Stages of change and addictive behaviours. In W. R. Miller & N. Heather (Eds.), *Treating addictive behaviours* (2nd ed., pp. 3-24). New York: Plenum Press.

Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2002). *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing people for change*. (2nd Ed). New York: Guilford Press.

Passmore, J. (2007). Addressing deficit performance through coaching: using motivational interviewing for performance improvement in coaching. *International Coaching Psychology Review* 2(3), 265-279.

Passmore, J., Anstiss, T., & Ward, G. (2009) This way out: Motivational Interviewing. *Coaching at Work*. March. 4(2), pp38-41.

Passmore, J. & Whybrow, A. (2007). 'Motivational interviewing: A specific approach for coaching psychologists' pp160-173. In S. Palmer and A. Whybrow (Eds). *The Handbook of Coaching Psychology*, London: Brunner-Routledge.

Perz, C. A., Diclemente, C. C., & Carbonari, J. P. (1996). Doing the right thing at the right time? The interaction of stages and processes of change in successful smoking cessation. *Health Psychology*, 15, 462-468.

Passmore, J. (2011). Motivational Interviewing – A model for coaching psychology practice. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 7(1), 35-39.

Project MATCH Research Group. (1997). Matching alcoholism treatments to client heterogeneity: Project MATCH post-treatment drinking outcomes. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 58, 7-29.

Rollnick, S. (1998). Readiness and confidence: Critical conditions of change in treatment. In *Treating Addictive Behaviours*. (2nd ed). Miller, W. R. & Heather, N. (eds). Plenum: New York.

Passmore, J. (2011). Motivational Interviewing – A model for coaching psychology practice. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 7(1), 35-39.