Author(s): Passmore, Jonathan

Title: Motivational Interviewing Techniques: Agenda Mapping

Year of publication: 2013

Journal / Source: *The Coaching Psychologist*.

Citation: Passmore, J. (2013). MI techniques: Agenda Mapping. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 9(1), 32-35.

Coaching Psychology Techniques section

Motivational Interviewing Techniques: Agenda Mapping

Abstract

This article is the fifth in a series for The Coaching Psychologist which is drawn from the Motivational Interviewing (MI) approach. In the previous papers I have summarized briefly the principles of Motivational Interviewing (Passmore, 2011a). In four further papers for the techniques section I have offered a perspective on the application of 'reflective listening' (Passmore 2011b), 'the balance sheet technique (Passmore, 2011c), a 'Typical day' (Passmore, 2012a) and 'Recognizing change talk' (Passmore 2012b). In this paper I will briefly review a 'technique' which is at the start of the MI process and while not formalized in much of the coaching literature is a common practice among coaching psychologists when using Cognitive Behavioural Coaching (CBC) and behavioural based approaches such as GROW. This technique, Agenda Mapping, aims to help the coach and coachee to agree the focus for the coaching conversation.

Introduction

In previous articles I have explored techniques from MI which could be used by coaching psychologists within their own practice. Some may argue that these techniques, such as recognising and working with change talk require a high level of sophistication in the skills of the coaching psychologist. This is true. But not all of the concepts used by MI are as complex or require such a high level of competence. Some of the methods used within MI share strong similarities with traditional coaching. What makes MI distinctive is that it offers a fresh way to conceptualise these approaches and a language to discuss them. Further, extensive research by practitioners has demonstrated that MI is a highly effective intervention. One example which has much in common with existing coaching practice is 'Agenda Mapping'. The approach itself is often used by coaching psychologists without detailed consideration. By highlighting these aspects, I hope the paper will provide useful insights for both novice coaches in the development of their skill and for experienced practitioners reflecting on their own practice in more detail.

MI Principles

As noted in other papers (Anstiss & Passmore, 2011 & 2013) Motivational Interviewing is a set of principles as opposed to a set of techniques. The key aspect of MI is to keep to the core principles rather than mechanically follow this or another technique. When the MI principles are followed by the coach, an effective relationship will be built with the coachee.

Further, the coach is making effective use of the OARS; open questions, affirming statements, reflections and summaries, as part of this relationship building and helping the coachee to explore their issue. When engaged, the coachee will be talking openly about their issue and the challenges they face in making a change. The coaching psychologist will be actively and empathetically listening to the content of what is being said, and what is unsaid by the coachee, summarising and reflecting to demonstrate listening and understanding, as well as providing the opportunity for reflection and thus deepening self awareness for the coachee.

Early in the process, the coach will want to help the coachee to focus their discussion towards what the coachee would find most useful to focus on during the meeting. From personal experience I have found coachees may have one of three common responses to the question '*So what should be the focus of our conversation (today)*?'

Firstly, coachees may have a clear agenda which they wish to discuss. Secondly, coachees may have no clear plan or have not had time to think about the session and how they wish to use the coaching relationship (or individual session). Thirdly, they may have some idea but this has not been crystallized into a clearly articulated plan with priorities. It is in this third scenario that 'Agenda Mapping' can offer a useful tool. The approach helps the coachee to plan the session, identifying and prioritising their issues and thus providing a clear focus to the conversation for the individual session.

Where the coachee has a clear agenda the coach is able to check this and confirm a joint understanding with the coachee before moving to the next stage; evoking change. Where the coachee has no plan or has not thought about the issue, the coach should continue to engage and seek to elicit the coachee's goal – '*How would you like the future to be different from today*'?

As readers of the technique section may recall MI offers a four-part process (as reconfigured by Miller & Rollnick, 2011; Miller & Rollnick, 2012). This is summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Four stages of MI process:

Engaging	The relational foundations
Focusing	The strategic focus
Evoking	Exploring collaboratively ambivalence
Planning	Developing a personal plan

(adapted from Miller & Rollnick, 2011)

Passmore, J. (2013). MI techniques: Agenda Mapping. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 9(1), 32-35.

As Miller and Rollnick (2013, p106) note; "in essence 'Agenda Mapping' is a metaconversation" – a conversation about the conversation. The technique is one used at the focusing stage, with the aim of helping the coachee to establish a key focus of the session or series of coaching sessions. When done well it helps those feeling stuck to see that there is a route map for travelling forward and exploring the challenges they face.

The technique

Miller and Rollnick (2013) suggest the approach is like inviting the coachee to look at a map, seeing the places they might travel and planning a route for the next stage of their journey. 'Agenda Mapping' offers an opportunity to help the coachee to establish for themselves the focus of the conversation and thus explain to themselves and the coach what they want to achieve from coaching. By offering a sequence of stages from generating alternative options to evaluating these choices to agreeing the focus, it offers a number of clear steps.

Where coachees' are unable to establish a clear agenda, after using the approach, the coach may ask themselves (and the coachee) whether the coachee is ready to engage in coaching. The approach can thus also act as a tool to help inform the decision whether coaching is a helpful and useful approach for the coachee and whether they are ready to engage in coaching.

'Agenda Mapping' usually takes the form of a series of question. The first is to gain agreement to move into a metaconversation. "*Is it ok if we spend a few minutes exploring what you want to get from our meeting today?*" or for those in mid-session, "*can we stop for a few moments so we can take stock of where we are?*"

The second element is to help identify the objectives of the coachee. Once identified the coach can help the coachee to prioritise these objectives and settle on a specific focus. Finally, the coach can help the coachee to refine and clarify the objective. As an example, I have included further possible questions which could be used in Table 2.

From personal experience it is not uncommon for the coachee to have a number of goals which they wish to achieve during the coaching assignment. In this case 'Agenda Mapping' becomes a task of helping the coachee to prioritise which of the multiple goals they wish to focus on first. In many cases, particularly with more junior managers, long term goals and short-term goals may be mixed up; '*I want to become a better leader of my team*' alongside '*I want to get my managers job when they move next year*'. In this instance the coach might help the coachee to focus on immediate short-term goals, working gradually towards long term goals as the coaching assignment continues and shorter term goals are achieved.

Table 2: Examples of useful agenda setting interventions

- *What change shall we talk about?*

- *Why are we talking about x, and not y?*

- *I wonder about z, but what about you?*

- *Should we shift direction?*

During agenda mapping it is important not to disappear into too much detail. The aim is instead to remain at a high level and move across a number of different issues before settling on the most important to the coachee.

So, what are the outcomes that the coach should expect (seek) from 'Agenda Mapping'? Firstly, and most importantly the coachee should have a clear goal, which is understood and agreed with the coach Secondly, they have a series of sub-goals. These may be short term or intermediate goals (milestones), which effectively enable the coachee to track their progress towards the longer-term goal. For each of these, both the long and intermediate goals, the coachee knows what success looks like at each stage. With an agreed set of goals the coach also helps the coachee to prioritise these goals, with one or more goal being the focus for each session.

The more clearly defined and personally held the goal, the more likely the coachee will be able to move forward to and achieve the goal.

Conclusion

Miller and Rollnick's 'Agenda Mapping' approach captures what many skilled coaching psychologists do, but describes this in a useful way for coaching psychologists, as well as MI practitioners. It offers a handy heuristic to help the coaching psychologist in both recognising the importance of goal setting and thinking through when a conversation to clarify and refine goals is required.

Passmore, J. (2013). MI techniques: Agenda Mapping. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 9(1), 32-35.

References

Anstiss, T. & Passmore, J. (2011). Motivational Interview. In M. Neenan & S. Palmer (Eds.). *Cognitive behavioural coaching.* London: Routledge.

Anstiss, T. & Passmore, J. (2013). Motivational Interview approach (pp 339-364). In J. Passmore, D. Peterson, D. & T. Freire, (eds.). The *Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Coaching and Mentoring.* Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.

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

Miller, W. & Rollnick, S. (2011). Motivational Interviewing - Masterclass. Cardiff, UK.

Miller, W. & Rollnick, S. (2013). *Motivational Interviewing: Helping people change* (3rd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

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

Passmore. J. (2011b). MI techniques – Reflective listening. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 7(1), 49-52.

Passmore, J. (2011). MI techniques – Balance sheet. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 7(2), 151-153.

Passmore, J. (2012a). MI techniques - Typical day. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 8(1), 50-52.

Passmore, J. (2012b). MI techniques - Recognizing change talk. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 8(2).

Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1983). Stages and processes of self-change of smoking: Toward an integrative model of change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 51, 390-395.

Passmore, J. (2013). MI techniques: Agenda Mapping. *The Coaching Psychologist*. 9(1), 32-35.