

Motivational Interviewing: An Appropriate Model for Engaging Clients with Drug Abuse Problems in the Probation Service

Sheena Norton*

Summary: Motivational Interviewing (MI), initially developed to assist those with alcohol addiction issues (Miller, 1983), is also a useful strategy in probation work with offenders. A ‘problem behaviour’ as defined by the criminal justice system may not be identified as such by the offender. Nonetheless, the Probation Service may be charged with the task of changing that behaviour, and an approach such as MI, which seeks to work with the offender and not against them, is worthwhile, effective, respectful and, this paper will argue, an appropriate intervention tool and model. Following on from Loughran (2006), this paper sets out the continued relevance and practical application of this approach in guiding supervision and intervention with drug-using offenders some six years later. As a Probation Officer in current practice, the value of employing this approach on a daily basis informs this paper. MI and the Cycle of Change model are employed by Probation Officers in key tasks such as preparation of pre-sanction reports, development of case management supervision plans, contracting and agreeing goals, encouraging compliance, managing non-compliance and reducing recidivism.

Keywords: Motivational Interviewing, Cycle of Change, behaviour change, interventions, offenders, probation supervision.

Introduction

The focus of probation work has increasingly developed greater emphasis on responding to criminogenic targets in keeping with ‘what works’ principles, alongside encompassing principles of effective risk assessment and risk management. Motivational Interviewing (MI) is grounded in evidence-based practice of ‘what works’ (Clark *et al.*, 2006; Saunders

* Sheena Norton is a Probation Officer based in Dundalk, Co. Louth.
Email: stnorton@probation.ie

et al., 1995). Its popularity grew in the early 1980s as an alternative model to more traditional approaches aimed at facilitating behaviour changes (Miller, 1983, 1985).

There is undoubtedly a link between drug use and crime (McCullagh, 1996; Williams, 2004; Probation Service, 2006, 2008), and most Probation Officers' caseloads reflect this correlation. How Probation Officers engage with offenders with addiction issues can vary, according to individual practitioners and service policies. The belief that 'the resources and motivation for change reside within the individual' is consistent with the philosophy of the Probation Service in Ireland (Loughran, 2006, p. 20). The mission statement of the Probation Service includes 'Provide high quality assessments of offenders and a professional and effective management of services and supports to bring about positive change in the behaviours of offenders' (Probation Service, 2006, p. 3). Inherent in the values of the Probation Service is the belief that 'Each person has innate value, dignity and capacity for positive change' (Probation Service, 2008, p. 8). This paper seeks to explore MI and the Cycle or Wheel of Change model (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983), and their relevance and usefulness in working with court-mandated offenders with addiction issues. This approach and model is advocated as best practice with the Probation Service, and Probation Officers are encouraged and supported through in-service training to adopt this framework in interventions with clients experiencing addiction issues. Approaches such as these are also standard in addiction treatment in the United Kingdom (Velasquez *et al.*, 2001).

What is Motivational Interviewing?

MI is an extremely useful strategy in working with persons who are ambivalent about changing their addictive behaviour. Probation Service clients are rarely self-motivated, voluntary participants seeking to enter into a therapeutic counselling relationship to effect positive change in their life circumstances. The typical profile of an offender is as an involuntary client, resistant to change, obliged to attend with a Probation Officer by a court, the alternative often being a prison sentence.

The tasks of a Probation Officer are complex. The order of the court must be complied with and balanced with the need to motivate the client towards positive change while also managing potential risks to the community. The challenge of the dual role of the care versus control

dilemma for Probation Officers can be effectively handled by MI approaches, 'as it does not require clients to be motivated in the traditional sense but offers practical techniques for working with people who may feel that change is undesirable' (Harper and Hardy, 2000, p. 399).

The same perspective may not be shared by the client, the Probation Officer and the court. In using MI, 'Probation staff can examine how to impose sanctions and build helpful relationships, and with training, agents can build the skills to supervise for compliance and increase the offender's readiness for change' (Clark *et al.*, 2006, p. 25). MI is a very appropriate and worthwhile intervention tool for this task. Employing the Wheel of Change – a six-stage model of change, developed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) – as a frame of reference can help to move people forward in addressing their addiction. It is outlined in more detail later in this paper.

Deep down, the majority of Probation Service clients have some level of concern about their behaviour and this may be the starting point on which to base intervention in probation work with offenders. The task of the Probation Officer is to elicit this concern and build on it to increase motivation to change. 'Motivational Interviewing is a directive, client-centred counselling style for eliciting behaviour change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence' (Miller and Rollnick, 1995). Clearly some Probation Service clients may have ambivalence about whether or not their addiction is something that they wish to or feel ready to address. MI seeks to help people reach their own decision to change and give their personal commitment to that change.

MI is especially useful in work with those with low or no motivation to change, and can be employed successfully at different stages of treatment (Mann *et al.*, 2002). Studies have found that when heroin users attending a methadone clinic were also treated using MI, they showed more commitment to treatment goals, more compliance with treatment requirements, fewer heroin-related problems and fewer relapses than a control group who did not receive the benefits of MI alongside methadone maintenance (Gossop, 2009). In a study of drug misusers court-mandated into treatment, those who received MI were more likely to attend for and complete treatment than those who did not (Lincourt *et al.*, 2002).

MI can be effective in dealing with client resistance (Clark *et al.*, 2006; Mann *et al.*, 2002). It seeks to highlight and emphasise one's own ambivalence and discomfort about one's personal situation, thus stimulating the person's own desire for change. Harper and Hardy (2000)

tested the effectiveness of MI as an appropriate intervention tool in probation work with offenders. The study concentrated on clients with drug and alcohol abuse problems and the skills base of the supervising Probation Officers. Findings indicated that offenders who were supervised by MI-trained staff demonstrated more 'significant attitudinal changes' than those supervised by non-MI-trained staff.

MI 'is not just a collection of techniques to apply on an offender. Raising motivation levels and increasing offenders' readiness to change requires a certain climate – a helpful attitude and a supportive approach that one takes with an offender' (Clark *et al.*, 2006, p. 22).

A study by Miller *et al.* (1993) found that directive and confrontational approaches in probation work with offenders produced twice the resistance, and only half the desired positive client behaviours, in comparison with an alternative approach such as MI that was supportive and client-centred. Confrontational approaches can inhibit change and serve to encourage the person to continue with their addiction (Clark *et al.*, 2006). 'Locking horns creates a downward spiral that satisfies neither. Research finds that when we push for change, the typical offender response is to defend the problem behaviour' (Clark *et al.*, 2006, p. 39). MI can provide an alternative: 'It allows offenders to reconsider the positive and negative consequences of their behaviour more thoroughly and to relate their behaviour to their value system' (Mann *et al.*, 2002, p. 91).

Principles of Motivational Interviewing

The motivation to change should be led by the Probation Officer. The necessary skills inherent in the work of the Probation Officer arise from social work training and qualifications which are reinforced by in-service training and work environments.

Basic interviewing skills such as the use of open questions, reflective listening, summarising and '*change talk*' (Miller and Rollnick, 2002, p. 85) are employed by Probation Officers in the initial stages of the MI process. Reflective listening and summarising what has been said allows offenders to explore the meaning of their behaviour for themselves and to resolve their ambivalence or inner conflict about their drug use as something that is rewarding for them while at the same time it may be self-destructive.

The aim is to develop and widen discrepancies between the clients' expressed wishes and actual behaviours evident. Through goal setting

with the client, exploring available options to change and securing the client's own commitment to change, the desired behaviour is facilitated by the process (Loughran, 2006). The strengths of the client, epitomised by the social work 'Strengths Perspective' (Seden, 2005) may also be employed at this stage.

There are five broad principles in MI (Rollnick, 1996; Miller and Rollnick, 2002, p. 36), as follows.

1. *Roll with resistance*: Confrontation is not considered beneficial – the client is seen as the expert in developing solutions to their problems. Reframing as opposed to challenging may be more productive.
2. *Express empathy*: The task of the worker is to convey to the client that they fully comprehend their thoughts, feelings, values and meaning. The worker must understand their client's feelings and perspectives and convey this to them without judging, criticising or blaming. Mirroring the client's experience back to them may allow them to really see and experience their situation.
3. *Avoid argumentation*: Arguments are considered counterproductive and damaging, leading to defensiveness. '*Defending breeds defensiveness*' (Sciacca, 1997).
4. *Support self-efficacy*: An inherent belief is client individualisation and unique capacity to change (emulated in the Probation Service mission statement and values). The client is responsible for their own personal change.
5. *Develop discrepancies*: Discrepancies between a client's actual behaviour and goals that may be important to them can motivate change. The task of the worker is to raise doubts by eliciting the gains and losses of either staying the same or changing their behaviour; e.g. worker attempts to develop discrepancies between short-term gains of drug use and long-term goals of the individual. The challenge for the Probation Officer is 'to first identify and increase [this] ambivalence, and then try to resolve it by creating discrepancy between the actual present and the desired future' (Clark *et al.*, 2006, p. 40).

Applying the five principles outlined above requires the Probation Officer to work towards increasing ambivalences displayed by the client, identifying and elaborating discrepancies between what the client says, believes and does, enabling the client to view the reality of their situation in a non-threatening manner, and examining the causes of the client's drug use and its consequences for their significant others. For example, if a drug

user is referred to the Probation Service, under threat of prison if they do not stop using drugs but not self-motivated to address their addiction, the following MI approaches can be employed to initiate change.

- Eliciting the client's positive experiences of drugs, i.e. the 'pro' list – the benefits the client perceives to derive from their drug use. This begins the process as non-confrontational while also serving to engage the client and build rapport. For example, *What do you enjoy about using heroin? People usually take cocaine because they enjoy its effect – why do you take it?*
- Explore the client's negative experiences of drugs, i.e. the 'con' list – the negative effects the client can identify for himself. This allows them to name the adverse consequences, thus establishing possible ambivalence; for example, *What do you not like about taking heroin? What problems are caused by using drugs?* It may be appropriate to use prompts from the 4 Ls model (Roizen and Weisner, 1979): Law (correlation between drug use and conflict with law), Liver (health), Love (personal relationships), Labour (effect on work life/studies/hobbies).
- Identify the client's goals; for example, *If things were different for you, how might that be? What do you want to achieve? How does your use of drugs fit with what you want in life?*
- Encourage the client to reach their own decision to change – emphasise and highlight the client's dilemmas and ambivalence, then ask for their decisions; for example, *Have you made a decision about what you want to do? Have you decided to continue as you are or to stop using drugs?*
- Set goals with the client in order for them to make the changes. Goals should be SMART (specific, meaningful, assessable, realistic, timely); for example, *What will your first step be? When would you like to be off drugs? Who can help and support you through this?*

The Cycle of Change

A guide for the worker and client alike may be the Wheel of Change model. Prochaska and DiClemente (1983) developed a model of behaviour change to explain how people change undesirable behaviour as well as develop and maintain new behaviours. This model provides a structure for understanding where each client is at in relation to the change process. Using the Wheel of Change, the Probation Officer can match each intervention appropriately. The task of the Probation Officer

is to assess a client's readiness to change and to enhance the client's motivation through a series of techniques, depending on where the client is at. MI complements the Wheel of Change and allows for facilitating change in the early stages, even with clients who are resistant or not yet ready to change. Clients in each stage of the cycle respond to different skills and strategies, and the worker needs awareness of this. Research has shown that this model is particularly useful in matching clients with treatments based on their readiness for change (Thombs, 1999). Use of MI techniques, employing the Wheel of Change as a frame of reference, guides the worker in their intervention. In this model, change is considered as a progression through five stages (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983).

The stages of change

1. *Precontemplation*: The person is not aware, denies or refuses to acknowledge that there is in fact a problem. The person does not identify the negative consequences as outweighing the positive consequences in their circumstances. The person continues in a situation that is damaging and is not considering change.
2. *Contemplation*: The person acknowledges that they have a problem and begins to seriously consider dealing with it. It may be acknowledging the negative effects drugs have caused in their life through exploration of the 'Four Ls' model (Roizen and Weisner, 1979). Clients can spend varying lengths of time in this stage before actually making a decision to change.
3. *Preparation/Decision*: The person reaches the decision themselves to make a change. Something finally tips the balance to awareness that there are more negative consequences than positive. The person needs to plan for how they will make the changes.
4. *Action*: The person begins to take the relevant action to change their behaviour. It is still early in the change process. Immense effort is required to maintain the changes following initial action. Essential to the process are changes in attitude and thinking.
5. *Maintenance*: The person maintains the change over a significant period, often dealing with challenges and difficulties. The 'honeymoon' period may pass, elation may not always accompany the benefits, and yearning for the past may have to be overcome. It requires determination, hard work and support to stay on track.

A sixth stage, *Relapse*, has been incorporated into the 'Wheel of Change' (Prochaska and DiClemente, 1983). This recognises that relapse is part of the cycle and that people may go around the wheel more than once in their efforts to sustain long-term changes. Relapse should not be considered as a failure, but as a learning experience: it should be addressed quickly and the person returned to action as soon as possible. Relapse can enhance the possibilities of success on the next occasion.

It is important for Probation Officers to understand that clients vary in the time it takes them to go around the Wheel of Change and in the time they spend at each stage of the change process. Some clients can be motivated quickly and moved along. Others will be resistant and slower. Many clients go through the process several times. Clients need to know that they will not be judged but will be supported.

Conclusion

This paper has explored how MI can be an appropriate model for engaging clients with drug abuse problems. MI is a valuable, appropriate and legitimate technique in probation work with offenders. It is not a 'cure-all, but it is an approach that has real value in guiding the way in which we think about and attempt to work with offenders' (Mann *et al.*, 2002, p. 99).

In conjunction with the Cycle of Change or Wheel of Change, MI can engage clients with drug abuse problems towards positive change. The principles and values of MI are reflected in the mission statement and values of the Probation Service in Ireland (Probation Service, 2006, 2008) and are reinforced by the commitments to in-service training and work environment of the Probation Service.

The potential for change, for all our clients, is the fundamental building block for probation work with offenders. MI provides important skills and knowledge and is a valuable intervention approach in the Probation Service, and undoubtedly an appropriate model for engaging clients with drug problems.

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