U.S. Department of Justice

National Institute of Corrections

Exercises for

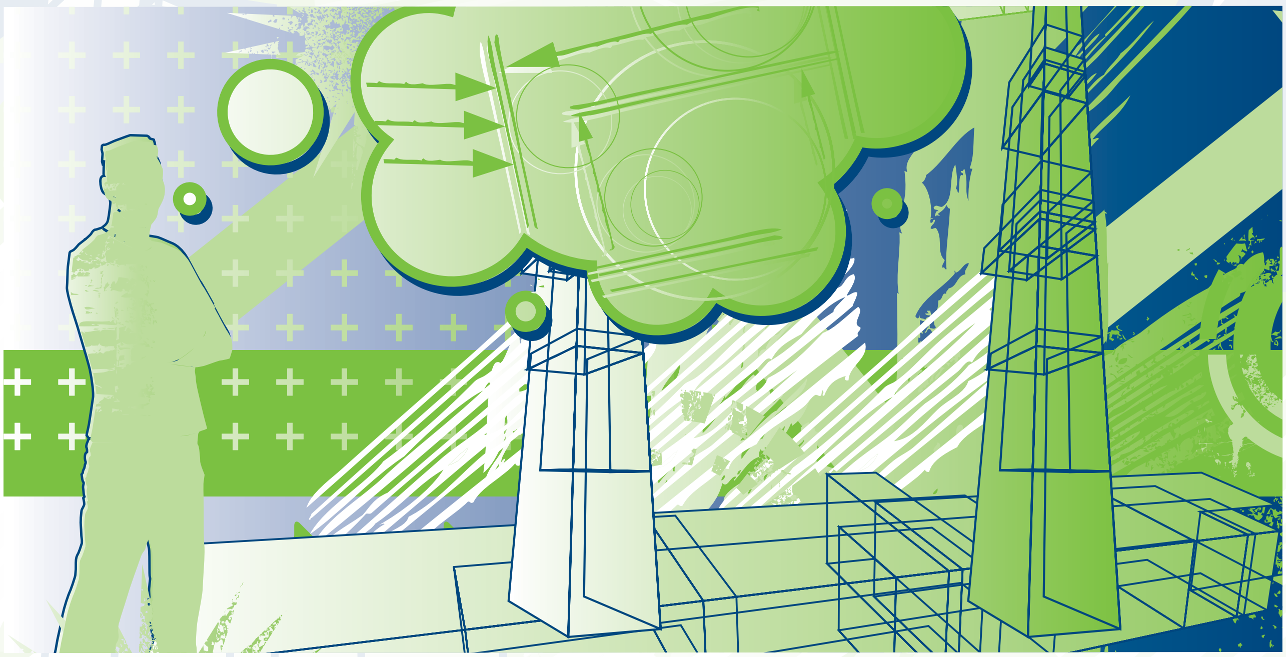
DEVELOPING MI SKILLS IN CORRECTIONS

NIC

National Institute of Corrections

Exercises for

DEVELOPING MI SKILLS IN CORRECTIONS



Bradford Bogue

Anjali Nandi

April 2012

NIC Accession Number 025557

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to recognize and express our appreciation for several sources of support and guidance that enabled us to write this book. First, the creators of motivational interviewing (MI), William Miller and Stephen Rollnick, whose work continues to illuminate and inspire us in so many ways. Second, the ongoing community of practice within the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers provided us continual practical guidance and humility; there are so many gifted people who are learning, sharing, and training MI that it is an honor to be a part of this group. We are also indebted to the staff and clients at Justice System Assessment & Training and the Center for Change in Boulder, CO, as well as the trainees who have participated in our MI workshops over the years. They have helped us learn and grow in our own MI skills and continually remind us that skill development is an ongoing process. Finally, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) and the steering group listed below provided constant support for this project. Many of these individuals reviewed innumerable draft chapters and first-cut videos to give us extremely helpful feedback at various points throughout the development of this document.

Exercises for Developing MI Skills in Corrections

NIC Steering Group

Melissa Alexander, Ph.D.

Bryan D. Bell

David Bonaiuto

Gary Christensen, Ph.D.

Brian Coco

Gene Cotter

Elizabeth Craig

Avani Gudrun Dilger

Carl Åke Farbring

Cynthia Fix

Matthew Gaskell

Ray Gingerich

Ali Hall

Lisa Hansen

Terry Marshall

William R. Miller, Ph.D.

John Morris

Michele A. Packard, Ph.D.

Alma Villalobos

Scott T. Walters, Ph.D.

Carl Wicklund

Wilburn C. (Dub) Wright

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments iii

Chapter 1: The Spirit of Motivational Interviewing 1

Principles of MI 2

Strategies and Techniques for Supervisors 4

Assessment Techniques 5

Coaching Strategies and Techniques 7

Endnotes 8

Chapter 2: Active Listening 9

Listening Skills 9

Strategies and Techniques for Supervisors 11

Assessment Techniques 11

Code Summary 12

Coaching Strategies and Techniques 17

Endnotes 19

Chapter 3: Recognizing and Reinforcing Change Talk 21

Types of Change Talk 21

Responding to Change Talk Using EARS 22

Strategies and Techniques for Supervisors 25

Assessment Techniques 26

Coaching Strategies and Techniques 27

Exercises To Help Identify and Respond to Change Talk 30

Summary 31

Endnotes 31

Chapter 4: Eliciting and Strengthening Change Talk **33**

Skills 33

Strategies and Techniques for Supervisors 37

Assessment Techniques 37

Coaching Strategies 38

Endnotes 38

Chapter 5: Responding to Resistance **39**

Sustain Talk Is Different From Resistance 40

Traps or Roadblocks That Increase Resistance 40

Skills and Strategies To Respond to Resistance 41

Assessment Techniques 44

Strategies and Techniques for Supervisors 45

Coaching Strategies and Techniques 47

Endnotes 49

Glossary **51**

CHAPTER 1 The Spirit of Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a method of helping clients become less ***ambivalent*** about changing maladaptive behavior. While there are powerful strategies and techniques that facilitate this process, there are underlying assumptions about ways of being with people that inform, guide, and provide meaning to these strategies and techniques. We can think about MI in terms of music—the words to the song (or "what" is sung) are equivalent to the skills and techniques used, the purpose of the song (or "why" the song exists) is equivalent to the principles of MI, and the music (or "how" it is sung) is equivalent to the spirit of MI.

The first step in learning MI is developing an openness to the ***spirit of MI.*** This enduring spirit is the essence of MI and comes from an understanding of human nature and the mechanisms that trigger change. Miller and Rollnick[1] have described the underlying spirit of MI as a way of being and interacting with clients that is ***collaborative, evocative,*** and conveys respect for the client's ***autonomy.***

To collaborate literally means to labor or work together. The type of relationship developed with the client is a partnership, where the agent and client are puzzling together over the change process. From this place, the agent uses the client's knowledge, perspectives, and experience to inform what might work to facilitate change. The agent is also willing to negotiate a plan with the client, supporting the client's own goals and ideas about change. Furthermore, this collaborative partnership helps foster a strong ***working alliance*** between the agent and client, which contributes significantly to a successful supervision outcome. Collaboration can be contrasted with ***confrontation,*** where rather than working together to explore and resolve ambivalence, the agent argues with, persuades, and even threatens the client to change. Research suggests that these direct persuasion methods are inefficient at eliciting change.[2]

Collaborating

Client
I've been ordered to do domestic violence (DV) classes as well as cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) classes and I don't have the money to pay for it all.

Agent
It sounds like it's a lot on your plate to take care of all at the same time. Let's talk about what the classes are about, how you think they might be helpful, and come up with a plan that feels workable to you.

Confronting

Client
I've been ordered to do DV classes as well as CBT classes and I don't have the money to pay for it all.

Agent
You had the money to pay for drugs, so I'm sure you'll figure out how to pay for these classes.

Evocation requires that the agent actively elicits and draws out the client's arguments for change or intrinsic motivation for change. The assumption is that the client has the reasons and resources for change and that the agent's work is to cultivate and draw those out. The distilling and mobilizing of the client's motivations for change can be contrasted with instilling or putting in these motivations, where it is presumed that the agent is the expert and the client is devoid of any insight about, or ability to, change.

Evoking Intrinsic Motivation

Client
My friends are coming in to town this weekend and I don't know how I'm going to manage not using with them.

Agent
You're concerned about maintaining sobriety in the face of pressure from your friends. What are some ways you have dealt with this in the past?

Instilling Ideas for Change

Client
My friends are coming in to town this weekend and I don't know how I'm going to manage not using with them.

Agent
Well, you know how important staying sober is, so just tell them you are on probation and that you can't use with them. And, if they pressure you, then leave.

Respect for the autonomy of the client conveys the idea that the responsibility for and choice to change lies solely with the client. Rather than being authoritarian and ordering clients to comply with conditions, the agent explores options with clients, discusses the consequences of the options, and supports clients in their ability to make decisions based on this information.

Respecting Autonomy

Client
I'm not sure if I really want to quit drinking, but I know I have to because I am on probation.

Agent
You could decide to continue drinking while on probation, but it is really up to you. Of course, there are consequences for whatever decisions you make. What are some of the consequences you see for continuing to drink?

Being Authoritarian

Client
I'm not sure if I really want to quit drinking, but I know I have to because I am on probation.

Agent
You don't have a choice about this. Drinking while on probation is a violation of your court order and you will not drink while you are on probation.

Openness to the spirit of MI is described by Miller and Moyers[3] as the first step in learning MI. MI is an interpersonal style of creating an atmosphere conducive to change. It is ***client centered,*** in that it focuses on understanding the client's frame of reference and collaborating on mutually agreed upon goals. It is also ***directive,*** in that it seeks out and elicits the client's internal motivations and arguments for change, all the while respecting the client's freedom of choice.

This manner of thinking about clients is different from the way in which clients usually are viewed in corrections. Often, clients are viewed as having deficits, lacking insight, being unable to make changes, needing to be told what to do, lying, being deceitful, and needing to be caught in their manipulations. The MI spirit encourages a shift in the mental model we have about clients to create a more humanistic and ***strength-based view,*** where clients are believed to have the wisdom and ability to change in a positive direction given the right support. From this paradigm, the MI practitioner is encouraged to develop a collaborative relationship with the client and is relieved from taking the false responsibility of changing the client.

Principles of MI

Exhibit 1–1 shows two lists of assumptions divided into those that are consistent with the spirit of MI ***(MI adherent)*** and those that are not. The more practitioners are open to the MI-adherent

EXHIBIT 1–1: ASSUMPTIONS

MI-Adherent Assumptions	Non-MI-Adherent Assumptions
When faced with change, we feel ambivalent about it.	People do not change.
When met with empathy, we tend to open up to change.	Ambivalence is pathological.
When persuaded or provided with arguments for change, we resist or provide arguments against change.	When people do not change, it is because they have not suffered enough.
What we say out loud about change influences whether or not we change.	When people do not want to change, someone needs to force them to change.
We begin to think about change when we find something discrepant in our behavior.	Threatening people with consequences forces them to change.
Resolving this discrepancy builds internal motivation to change.	Motivation is a client trait—some are motivated and some are not, and there is nothing anyone can do about it.
Motivation can arise from and be developed by an interpersonal interaction.	Listening to a client is a waste of time; the agent just needs to tell him/her what to do.
Answers about behavior change come from the client.	Clients do not have any insight into what will work for them; they need to be told what to do to be successful.
Clients are responsible for their own change.	Agents are responsible for making clients change.

assumptions, the easier it is to practice MI. And, interestingly enough, the more practitioners practice MI, the easier it becomes to accept these assumptions.

From these MI-adherent assumptions, the guiding principles of MI emerge, which inform the "why" behind the skills and strategies practitioners use. In the second edition of their book on MI, Miller and Rollnick[4] identify four principles of MI: ***express empathy, roll with resistance, develop discrepancy,*** and ***support self-efficacy.*** In their more recent book, *Motivational Interviewing in Health Care,* they talk about the principles in simpler terms: **r**esist the ***righting reflex,*** **u**nderstand and explore the person's own motivations, **l**isten with empathy, and **e**mpower the client**—RULE.**

Resist the Righting Reflex—Roll With Resistance

Those who are in the human service field often have a strong sense of wanting to help or to fix something that is not right. When seeing someone struggling down the wrong path, we want to reach out and do something. While inherently that is a commendable reflex, how it is displayed can actually have adverse effects. Imagine that you are thinking about becoming healthier, but are really feeling two ways about it. On the one hand, you know you could exercise more and feel better, on the other hand you have so little time and energy to put toward exercising. You are feeling really ambivalent. And you meet a friend with a strong righting reflex who says, "Great! Exercising is really good for you. It'll make you feel so much better. You really should start now." What's your reaction? Most likely, to back away and respond with statements to counteract the attempt to overtake your own process. Perhaps you begin with, "Yes, but…"

Resisting the righting reflex means resisting the urge to make arguments to change *for* the client and resisting the urge to take over the change process for the clients. When persuaded or provided with arguments for change (righting reflex), human nature tries to resist and provide arguments against change. Rather than seeing this as a result of the unhelpful skills that we, as practitioners, used, which provides us with an opportunity to respond differently, we blame it on the client and call him/her resistant.

In corrections, this righting reflex is made even stronger by how we are pressed for time in interactions with clients, and an erroneous belief that listening to the client will take too long and is a waste of time. Often agents will say, "I just tell the client what to do and get them out the door." Unfortunately, telling people what to do results in them making arguments (either inside their head or aloud to you) against what you are saying, and therefore against change. We know that what we say out loud has an influence on what we actually do, so the result of this interaction would be to strengthen the negative behavior instead of supporting change.

Understand and Explore the Person's Own Motivations—Develop Discrepancy

MI is directed at facilitating behavior change. It does not force the client to change (which is ineffective), nor does it involve passively listening to the client as he/she talks about whatever is on his/her mind. Rather, it is a directive process that helps the client explore his/her ambivalence and increase his/her understanding of the motivations not to change as well as the motivations to change. The important piece of information here is that it is the client's own motivations to change and not the agent's.

Motivation to change surfaces when there is a discrepancy between current behavior or a situation and desired goals. Agents do not develop client motivation by conveying discrepancy between the client's current behavior and where the agent thinks the client should be, as based on the agent's goals and values. The client needs to be the one perceiving this discrepancy, meaning it needs to come from his/her own perception of how his/her current behavior is inconsistent with his/her own (not the agent's) goals and values. Therefore, the agent needs to take an active part in helping the client articulate and explore his/her own reasons and desires to change, his/her goals and values, and the ***behavioral gap*** between his/her current behavior and where he/she would like to be. Agents often feel pressured by time and do not want to invest the few minutes they have in trying to understand the client's motivations for change. However, given what psychologists know about how people change, exploring and understanding the client's own motivation to change is the best way to spend a few minutes with a client if behavior change is the goal.

Listen With Empathy—Express Empathy

A core part of MI is listening and conveying empathy to the client. This is based on the belief that when a client feels accepted and understood, he/she feels safe, supported, and empowered enough to change. This attitude of wanting to understand where the client is coming from conveys respect for the client's views and helps to develop a strong working alliance. Sometimes agents will say, "But I don't agree with what my clients are saying." Listening with empathy is not the same as agreeing with the client, nor is it approving his/her behavior. It is conveying to the client that you have understood what he/she is saying, his/her feelings, and his/her perceptions.

Empower the Client—Support Self-Efficacy

So far these principles have focused on allowing and supporting clients to make the arguments for change, which means they have expressed a desire to change and their reasons to change. However, if clients do not believe they have the ability to change, then they are not likely to take any steps and will continue to be paralyzed in their ambivalence. Empowering the client means helping the client believe that he/she can actually be successful at making a change. This belief in one's ability to do something, also called self-efficacy, is a strong predictor of a successful outcome. Interestingly enough, another predictor of outcome is the agent's optimism and expectations about the client's ability and likelihood to change. Therefore, empowering clients not only means helping clients find their confidence in their ability to change, it also means conveying to clients the belief in the possibility of their being successful at change.

Strategies and Techniques for Supervisors

As a supervisor, one of the primary ways to support agents in developing congruence with the spirit of MI is to model it in your interactions with agents and clients. As mentioned earlier, the interactions that take place between the supervisor and agent will mirror the interactions that take place between the agent and client (and vice versa) in what is known as a parallel process. Modeling the spirit and principles of MI with agents will translate to agents using MI with clients.

A key place to model MI is around the agent's ambivalence with MI. The pull to fix the agent's struggles with MI will be strong, probably in proportion to the supervisor's commitment to implementing MI. All of the components of spirit and principles that apply to clients apply to agents learning a new innovation. Following are some examples of MI-adherent responses to agents' concerns or struggles with MI:

Agent
I don't know if I can really do this MI stuff.

Supervisor
What do you think will help support your learning in MI? (Give examples of collaboration and empowerment.)

Agent
I don't have the time to sit and listen to these clients complain about how they can't change.

Supervisor
It's really important to you that they actually do something about it. (Give examples of resisting righting reflex and listening with empathy.)

Agent
I've been doing this for 20 years and the only way these guys change is if I confront them and ride them hard.

Supervisor
It sounds like that has worked for you in the past, but you're beginning to wonder if that's the best method to use with the client you were just talking about. (Give examples of evocation and understanding one's own motivation.)

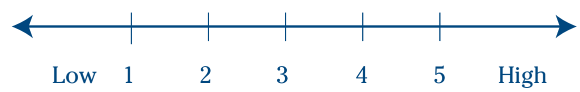
Another helpful strategy to support the exploration of the spirit of MI is to identify and reinforce agents who demonstrate a strong alignment with the MI spirit and increase the visibility of their work. This way others can learn from their modeling. Other places to experience varying levels of the MI spirit are to support agents when they are observing treatment groups that their clients attend, or attend mutual-support groups (like Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous) and watch for the demonstration of the MI spirit and principles.

Finally, the best way to find out how to support agents learning MI is to ask them. This not only gives you valuable information, but also models several components of the spirit and principles of MI.

Assessment Techniques

Assessing adherence to the spirit and principles of MI can be difficult because the dimensions of spirit and principles overlap so much. Therefore, most MI evaluation systems work to assess the overall style or global impressions of the interaction using a Likert scale. Described below are the ends of the continuum for the dimensions that are most commonly measured:

Collaboration



Score: 1–2

- Agent takes on the expert role.
- Agent is disengaged from the client.
- Agent conveys no interest in working with the client.
- Agent disregards the client's statements.
- Agent argues with the client.

Score: 3

- Agent does not consistently stay connected with the client.
- Agent educates instead of problem solving with the client.

Score: 4–5

- Agent actively seeks out the client's solutions and ideas.

- Agent matches the client's pace in solving problems.
- Agent does not argue with the client.
- Agent structures the session to convey openness to the client's opinions.
- Agent asks permission before providing suggestions.

Evocation

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Score: 1–2

- Agent provides arguments for change to the client.
- Agent tries to convince the client to change by providing reasons.
- Agent does not listen to or elicit the client's perspective.
- Agent educates the client without eliciting the client's existing understanding.

Score: 3

- Agent does not actively elicit the client's view of change, nor does the agent force his/her own view.

Score: 4–5

- Agent actively seeks out the client's own motivations to change.
- Agent reinforces the client's desires or reasons for change.
- Agent supports the client talking himself/herself into changing.
- Agent is strategic about mining for client talk supportive of change.

Respect for Autonomy

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Score: 1–2

- Agent explicitly states that the client does not have any choice.
- Agent disregards the client's reaction.
- Agent does not explore options with the client.

Score: 3

- If the client brings up the idea of choice or options, the agent discusses them in a lukewarm fashion.

Score: 4–5

- Agent actively supports the client's exploration of choices and consequences.
- Agent supports the client's perception of control and responsibility.
- Agent reinforces the client's options and exploration of choices.

Direction

Low 1 2 3 4 5 High

Score: 1–2

- Agent does not provide structure to the interaction.
- Agent allows the client to direct the conversation away from the target behavior.
- Agent is passive in the interaction.

Score: 3

- Agent provides inconsistent structure to the interaction.

Score: 4–5

- Agent actively focuses on exploring the target behavior.
- Agent clearly structures the session.
- Agent gently guides the client back to the behavior topic.

Empathy

Score: 1–2

- Agent conveys no interest in understanding the client's perspective.
- Agent focuses on facts rather than the client's worldview.
- Agent disagrees or argues with the client's understanding.

Score: 3

- Agent attempts to understand the client's perspective, but struggles.

Score: 4–5

- Agent actively seeks to convey an understanding of the client.
- Agent is able to accurately interpret the client's view.
- Agent is able to understand the depth of the client's view, beyond the words the client uses.

For a further understanding of assessing these components of the spirit of MI, the website *http://motivationalinterviewing.org* provides clips of agents and clients. Rate the clips on the scales described above and then compare your ratings with the National Institute of Corrections' ratings.

Coaching Strategies and Techniques

As a coach, part of the work will be to assess the agent in his/her adherence to the spirit of MI. The other part will be to provide feedback and support the deepening of the agent's learning. Following are some ideas about how to do this.

Modeling

In your coaching session with agents, they will learn not only how you interact with clients, but especially how you interact with the agents. Therefore, model the MI spirit in your coaching sessions with agents. The format shown below may provide some ideas about how to do that.

Elicit–Provide–Elicit

When debriefing the session that you watched as a coach, begin by eliciting the agent's views of how it went and what feedback he/she is interested in. Then provide the feedback from your observation, paying special attention to how the agent is responding. You may need to temper the feedback or pick one specific aspect to focus on based on the agent's responses. Then elicit the agent's understanding of the feedback you provided and his/her goals for future sessions based on the feedback.

Elicit: Ask open questions:

- How do you feel the session went?
- What would you like to focus on during the coaching session?

Provide: Provide feedback from observation.

Elicit: Ask more open questions:

- What do you make of this feedback?
- What would make this coaching session more useful to you?

- Where do you want to go in your MI practice from here?

Exercises

1. Role-play difficult client interactions, e.g., with the agent being coached playing the client and the coach responding in an MI-adherent style as the agent. Debrief by asking the agent about his/her reactions and what he/she can use in interactions with clients.

2. Perform a nonverbal exercise. Ask the agent to only respond nonverbally to you as you talk about a particular topic that is personal to you. The objective is for the agent to convey that he/she is listening and is interested in what you are saying. Debrief the exercise by asking the agent about his/her experience of the exercise and how he/she can use some of those nonverbal cues to convey interest and understanding with clients.

3. Watch video clips of agent/client interactions (several clips are accessible through the website *http://motivationalinterviewing.org/library*). Discuss strong and weak adherence to spirit as demonstrated in the clips.

4. Read descriptions of the spirit and principles of MI from different sources and discuss the agent's understanding of them.

5. Have a conversation about the agent's assumptions about clients, the perception of his/her role as an agent, and the process of behavior change.

Endnotes

1. W.R. Miller and S.R. Rollnick (eds.), *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change,* 2d. ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2002).

2. W.R. Miller and S.R. Rollnick, "The Atmosphere of Change," in *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People to Change Addictive Behavior* (New York: Guilford Press, 1991), pp. 3–13; W.R. Miller, R.G. Benefield, and J.S. Tonigan, "Enhancing Motivation for Change in Problem Drinking: A Controlled Comparison of Two Therapist Styles," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 61(3):455–61, 1993.

3. W.R. Miller and T.B. Moyers, "Eight Stages in Learning Motivational Interviewing," *Journal of Teaching in the Addictions* 5(1):15, 2006.

4. W.R. Miller and S.R. Rollnick (eds.), *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change,* 2d. ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2002).

CHAPTER 2 Active Listening

The next stage of learning motivational interviewing (MI) involves gaining proficiency with some basic active listening skills. As the term suggests, this is not a passive set of skills but something that involves asking, listening, and conveying understanding. Information is gathered using ***open questions,*** support and respect are conveyed using ***affirmations,*** and information is grouped in a coherent fashion using ***summaries.*** The hardest part of this stage is being able to express accurate empathy, that is, conveying—through ***reflections*** to the client—that you understood not just the words but the meaning of what he/she said. Being client-centered is more complex than just restating what the client has said. In fact, it is being able to reflect something the client is feeling or experiencing, but has not yet explicitly stated. Reflections convey empathy and can also serve other purposes, such as rolling with resistance or developing discrepancy. These skills—asking open questions (O), providing affirmations (A), ***listening reflectively*** (R), and summarizing (S) (OARS)—can be used with several goals in mind. They are helpful for building a working alliance by conveying understanding and respect, they can be useful for gathering accurate information (such as in an assessment), and they are helpful in exploring ambivalence about behavior change.

Listening Skills

Open Questions

Questions as a whole are differentiated from statements in that they have a querying tone—the inflection at the end that creates a question. ***Open questions*** are questions that seek a broad amount of information, allow for a range of possible responses, and convey interest in the client's point of view. ***Closed questions*** are those that seek specific information or can be answered with "yes" or "no." Whereas an assumption is often inherent in closed questions, open questions allow the client to expand and share his/her views. It is not that closed questions are wrong and should not be used, but care must be taken to not overuse them and, when possible, to use open questions to allow the client to share his/her perspective.

EXHIBIT 2-1: OPEN QUESTIONS VERSUS CLOSED QUESTIONS

Open Questions	Closed Questions
Begin with "What," "How," "Tell me about," "Describe," etc.	Begin with "Have/Had/Has," "Which," "How many," "Did/Do/Does," "Is/Are," "When."
What do you think will be some of the things that trip you up on parole?	**Is** not following the conditions of parole going to be hard for you?
How are you managing your cravings now?	**Have** you had any cravings?
Tell me about your experience on probation the last time.	**How** many times did you do that?
Describe your living situation.	**When** was the last time you were on probation?
	Do you like where you are living now?

Affirmations

Affirmations are statements that acknowledge and convey respect or appreciation for a client, and for his/her struggles and achievements. In corrections, agents can sometimes get so caught up in looking for what the client is doing wrong and in problem-solving, that it can be hard to find things to affirm

TERMINOLOGY

Repeat: Make a direct restatement of what the person said.

Rephrase: Say the same thing in slightly different words.

Paraphrase: Make a guess about meaning, then continue the thought or add something that was not said directly.

clients about. If you shift your perspective a little, and try and catch clients doing things right, affirmations become a lot easier.

Examples:

- “Thank you for being on time today.”
- ”I appreciate you being honest about this.”
- ”You are really working hard to be successful on probation.”
- ”Good work getting the community service hours done.”
- ”I received your progress report from treatment—well done making it to all the groups.”

Affirmations are also statements that convey an agent’s emotional response to what the client is saying about his/her feelings, experiences, or values.

Examples:

- “It must be really difficult for you to do this with so little support from your family.”
- “You really seem to value your friends and I can appreciate how hard it must be for you to even contemplate separating from them.”
- “I am touched by your concern for your children and really wanting to do this for them.”
- “That had to be tough.”

Reflections

There are primarily two characteristics of a reflection: a reflection is a statement (as opposed to a question) and a reflection is a hypothesis about what the person is trying to convey. There are several levels to a reflection. The agent ***repeats*** what the client said back to him/her; ***rephrases*** what was said by using different words but staying on the same level of depth that the client is conveying; or ***paraphrases*** what the client is saying and, in working to understand the meaning behind what he/she is saying, reflects a feeling that has not been articulated or uses a metaphor. These latter types of reflections are also called ***complex reflections,*** where a certain amount of meaning or emphasis is added to what the client is conveying. Complex reflections help move the conversation along and deepen the client’s understanding of the issues involved in changing behavior.

Summaries

Reflections grouped together form summaries. The purpose of a summary is to gather different statements the client has made to collect information, make ***links*** between a client’s statements,

EXHIBIT 2-2: SIMPLE VERSUS COMPLEX REFLECTIONS

Client Statement	Simple Reflection	Complex Reflection
I don’t really like the Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings. The people I meet there are not people I would hang out with outside of the meetings.	AA is helpful in some ways but not in others.	It is important to you to find a sober network of friends with whom to hang out.
Nobody will hire me with a felony record.	Having a felony makes finding a job difficult.	You are worried about what having a felony means for your future.
My new group is better, I guess. I tried not to fall asleep.	There is something of value in the new group but you aren’t sure yet what it is.	You are struggling to get everything you can out of the new group.

or ***transition*** from one area of exploration to the next. Summaries are directive in nature, in that agents get to be strategic about what is included in a summary. Summaries can (but do not have to) begin with a phrase that signals a summary will follow (e.g., "Let me see if I understand…") and can end with a phrase that leads the client to expound further, see how two of his/her statements are linked, or transition to the next topic.

Collecting summary. "Let me see if I understood this. You realize that you need to learn some skills to manage your anger; you also see that being unable to control your anger is probably the thing that gets you into trouble the most. And you are willing to take some steps to change this. Did I get that right?"

Linking summary. "It's interesting to me what you are saying now, because it sounds like being successful on parole is becoming more important for you. The last time we met, it seemed like parole was of lower importance, but that is changing now. What do you think about that?"

Transitioning summary. "We have talked about your family history quite a bit. You shared that your parents are deceased and that you are living with your sister and her family. And it sounds like she has a considerably positive influence in your life. Tell me a little bit about your friends and the influence they have on you."

Strategies and Techniques for Supervisors

Modeling skills and reinforcing them continues to be the primary way of supporting agents in skill development. Modeling can be done during any interactions with staff, including staff meetings, discussions about clients, or individual conversations with staff. Here are some examples of ways to use OARS with staff:

Agent

I don't know if I can really do this MI stuff.

Supervisor

Open question: What do you think will help support your learning in MI?

Affirmation: I appreciate how you are trying even though you don't know if you can do it.

Simple reflection: You are not sure if you can really use these skills.

Complex reflection: You are worried that this may be too difficult for you.

As with the spirit of MI, another helpful strategy to help agents learn OARS is to identify agents who already demonstrate use of OARS and increase the visibility of their work. This way others can learn from their modeling.

Finally, reinforce learning by providing sufficient learning and coaching opportunities to the agents actively working on increasing their skill level with MI. This could include furthering training, providing resources, meeting with a coach, or delivering inservices on MI during staff meetings.

Assessment Techniques

Simply coding OARS provides a great deal of information about the agent's ability to use the different skills flexibly. Coding skills require extensive training available from several sources. This section contains information drawn from the *Tape Critiquer Manual (1.4);*[1] *Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity (MITI) Code: Version 3.0;*[2] and the *Motivational Interview Skill Code (MISC).*[3]

The following section includes a brief description that addresses coding OARS only. Unlike assessing MI spirit in the previous chapter, assessing and coding OARS focuses on the *actual skill* that the agent uses. What is important is *not* how the client responds to the interaction, but what the interaction is, based on the words and tone the agent uses. Avoid coding skills according to what the coder thinks the agent was *trying* to do. For example, if an agent wanted to reflect what the client had said, but the tone at the end of the sentence made the reflection a question, count it as a question.

Sometimes agents will convey a series of thoughts before the client has a chance to respond. Each of these thoughts may be assigned one of seven skill codes. However, each thought or skill receives only one code: the same skill may not receive more than one code. Different thoughts or skills, even if they occur in the same sentence, may each receive different codes. For example, in a longer response, if an agent reflects, then confronts, then asks a question, each action could qualify for a distinct skill code, assuming the agent uses separate thoughts or ideas. Once a skill code is assigned within the set of multiple thoughts, it is not assigned again. In this way, credit for that particular skill is only given once.

Code Summary

The following is a list of the codes used with OARS:

O	Open Question
C	Closed Question
Rs	Simple Reflection
Rc	Complex Reflection
S	Summary (3 Rs in a row)
A	Affirmation/Supporting/Emphasizing Personal Control
Ot	Other

Open Questions (O)

An open question is coded when the agent asks a question that allows a wide range of possible answers. These are questions that would be difficult to answer with one word. A resistant client could give a one-word response, but the question clearly requires the client to fill in details around a particular theme, rather than giving one detail on a specific issue. For this reason, these questions are considered more "client centered." They are especially important to use when seeking information about complicated relationships and feelings. The question may seek information, may invite the client's perspective, or may encourage self-exploration. The open question allows the option of surprise for the questioner. Examples could include:

- Describe the times that you have had contact with the law during your lifetime.
- How do you feel about where you live right now?
- Tell me about the best relationship that you have had with a teacher.
- What first led you to be on probation?
- What kinds of things do you like to do in your free time?
- What comes to mind when you think about completing this program successfully?
- How did you deal with your cravings since we last met?
- What is your take on that?

Closed Questions (C)

Closed questions seek a one-word answer, either yes or no, or a singular choice from a list of options. While talkative or open clients may offer more information no matter what an agent says, the question could really be answered in one word. Because the agent is usually responsible for the content of the question and, by suggestion, the direction of the answer, these are less client-centered and should be used as little as possible. The answer to a closed question is not likely to surprise an agent.

- Do you feel like your wife supports you? (yes/no)
- How many times have you been in jail? (seeks a number)

- Do you think you are outgoing or more introverted? (either/or)
- Who are the people in your life that support you? (asks for a specific list of names)
- You don't plan on doing that again, do you? ("no" seems like the only acceptable answer)

Rather than thinking of questions as either open or closed, you may wish to think of them along a continuum. Consider the following examples:

- You aren't going out with them, are you?" (very closed—"no" seems like the only acceptable choice)
- What subject is your favorite? (pretty closed—seeks one answer)
- What are your favorite sports? (a little closed—seeks a list of probably less than 5 sports from among a possible choice of 10–25 common sports)
- What are your grades like? (a little open—the subject is specific, but depending on the client's understanding of the question, responses could have a fairly wide range: 2 A's, 1 B, 3 C's; or "They're good"; or "Much better than last year"; or "I am happy with them, but my mom isn't," etc.)
- What experience in your life was hardest? (pretty open—even though the question is asking for one experience, an experience must be described and the question is also looking for a feeling)
- Tell me about yourself. (very open—anything could follow)

Scoring Rules for Questions

1. **"Tell me" questions.** "Tell me more" statements are coded as open questions unless the tone and context clearly indicate a Direct or Confront code. Then they are scored as Confrontations.
2. **"Can you" and "could you" questions vs. "can you tell me" and "could you tell me" questions.** "Can you/could you tell me" questions, such as "Can you tell me about your family history?" are *open,* because the majority of clients hear them that way, even though they could technically be answered, "No, I can't." However, "Can you" or "Could you" questions *without* the "tell me" are coded as *closed,* for example: "Can you ride your bike to work?" or "Could you really eat that?"
3. **Reflections that have become questions.** Statements that were "intended" as reflections, where the agent's tone goes up at the end (sounding like a question), must be coded as either open or closed questions, *not* as reflections.
4. **Repeated/interrupted questions.** If an agent asks a question and then the client says something nonrelated or asks for clarification in between so that the agent must ask the question again, the agent should receive two question scores, not one.

Simple and Complex Reflections (Rs or Rc)

This category is meant to capture reflective listening statements made by the agent in response to client statements. A reflection may introduce new meaning or material, but captures and returns something about what he/she has just said to clients. Reflections restate or rephrase no more than two ideas that the client has said at one time (three or more are counted as a summary, rather than a reflection). Reflections are the most important MI skill because they let clients know they have been heard, let them clarify misunderstandings, and suggest a direction for further information, without limiting the range of responses as questions often do. Reflections do not have to accurately repeat what the client is saying to "count," in fact, much information can be gleaned by offering somewhat inaccurate reflections and allowing the client to correct them and clarify meaning, either to the agent or internally. (If many incorrect reflections are offered, however, consider lowering the empathy score in the global measures because the client will not feel understood.)

Simple reflections (Rs) typically convey understanding or facilitate client/agent exchanges. They echo the client's statements and do not add any meaning, emphasis, or depth to what the client has said.

Client
I wish I could be more like my sister.

Agent
You'd like to be like her.

Client
I really value my husband.

Agent
He is important to you.

Client
I am just feeling tired all the time these days.

Agent
All the time.

Complex reflections (Rc) add meaning, emphasis, or depth to what the client has said. They can even serve to move the client forward in thinking about an issue. In this way, they do not echo the client's statement and they can direct a conversation by emphasizing a portion of what the client is saying to steer the conversation in that direction. The following things make a reflection complex:

- **Adding content.** The agent adds meanings or feelings that the client did not express.

  Client
  My probation officer is really hard on me.

  Agent
  You respect your probation officer and you feel like her demands are high. (added "respect")

- **Metaphor or simile.** The agent uses figurative language to describe something for which the client had used plain language.

  Client
  I feel so stuck in my job. Every day is the same, there is no way out.

  Agent
  You're a rat in a cage.

- **Amplification.** The agent uses language that is stronger in meaning or in emphasis than the client used.

  Client
  I am frustrated with my wife.

  Agent
  You are really angry with her.

  Client
  I can't do anything well.

  Agent
  You feel like a complete failure.

- **Double-sided.** The agent reflects two "opposing" sides of what the client has been saying.

  Client
  I am just so confused. I love my kids. I really do. And I really think they are the most important thing. But I keep making choices that hurt them. No matter what I do, I end up doing dumb things.

  Agent
  On the one hand you really care for your family and on the other you make choices that end up hurting them.

- **Reframing.** The agent reflects the same situation that is described, but puts it in a different light than the client had thought of previously.

  Client
  I can really hold my liquor. I can drink most guys under the table and not feel a thing.

  Agent
  You can drink to levels where your body loses the ability to tell you that something is wrong.

- **Verbalization of unspoken emotion.** The agent names the emotion that the client has implied, but never actually stated.

  Client
  My mom used to push me around when I was little. Now my husband does too.

  Agent
  You feel disrespected and hurt.

- **Emphasizing one side.** The client talks about multiple things, but the agent only chooses to emphasize one for a particular effect. The agent's choice makes this complex, even if the reflection he/she gives is simple. If the agent is just giving a brief reflection without a conscious choice, however, the reflection can stay simple.

  Client
  I hate the criminal justice system. They never did anybody any good. I mean, it's okay when they get rapists and stuff. But most of the time they never do anything.

  Agent
  You can see that some of the things the system does are good. (complex)

  Agent
  You hate the system. (simple)

The following examples help distinguish simple reflections from complex ones in the same interaction:

Client
This is her third speeding ticket in three months. Our insurance is going to go through the roof. I could just kill her. Can't she see we need that money for other things?

Agent
She is causing serious problems for you. (simple)

Agent
This is the last straw for you. (complex—agent added a metaphor and amplified the statement by implying that this is the last time)

Client
I've had the classes and treatment about my cocaine use. I have all kinds of advice about how to get better at this, but I just don't do it. I don't know why. Maybe I just have a death wish or something, you know?

Agent
You are pretty discouraged about this. (simple—agent is stating an emotion, but one the client already seems aware of with "death wish," so the emotion wasn't really unspoken)

Agent
You're worried that there is a really large part of you that does not want to make any change. (complex—adding emphasis)

Scoring Rules for Simple and Complex Reflections

1. **Simple/complex decision rule.** When you cannot tell whether a reflection is simple or complex, code the reflection as simple.
2. **Merging or unmerging related questions and reflections.** When an agent begins with a reflection, but adds a question to "check" the reliability of the reflection, code both unless the reflection is really indistinguishable from the question because the agent was just using it to introduce the question. In that case, just score the question. If you cannot decide, give both scores.
   - So you don't ever want to use heroin again. Is that right? (R, C)
   - You don't want to use heroin, right? (C—the R and C were inseparable)
   - Your boss said you can't work overtime anymore. What do you make of that? (R, O)
   - Last time you were talking about your mother. How is she? (O—the R was not really a reflection of what the client just said, it was just to introduce the question about the mother)

- I am hearing you saying you are angry and I'd like you to tell me why. (statement is unclear—code R or O)

3. **Reflections toned up become questions.** Statements that were "intended" as reflections, whose tone goes up at the end (sounding like a question), must be coded as either open or closed questions, not as reflections.

4. **Exact repeats.** When the agent repeats what the client says word for word, it is a simple reflection even if the agent changes the tone of the conversation.

5. **Delayed reflections.** If the client said something an hour ago and the agent repeats it or rephrases without adding meaning, it is still a simple reflection, even though the client said it a while ago.

6. **Delayed repeats of reflections.** If the agent is repeating a complex reflection that the *agent* made earlier, the repetition is also counted as a complex reflection. It does not become simple just because the agent said it before.

Summaries (S)

A Summary is a restatement or rephrasing of three or more concepts that the client has said for the purpose of getting the client to clarify a point or to see what he/she has said in a new way. Summaries may be short or long, but they must contain at least three ideas that the client has said; otherwise, they are reflections, not summarizations. For example:

- So let me see if I have this straight, you lived in the Bronx, but then you moved to Delaware, and now you are in Oregon. Is that correct? (summary)
- So you lived in the Bronx, but then you moved to Delaware. (reflection)
- So your finances are okay right now, but your job is still stressful and you are afraid that you won't be able to keep up with your family's spending habits. (summary)
- So your finances are okay right now, but you are afraid that you won't be able to keep up with your family's spending habits. (reflection)

Affirmations, Supporting, and Emphasizing Personal Control (A)

Affirming, supporting, and emphasizing personal control are the three kinds of interactions described below. In scoring them with an A, it is not important that you note which of the three interactions has taken place, but they will help you to determine whether an A has occurred.

1. **Affirmations** occur when the agent says something positive or complimentary to the client *about the client.* This must go beyond simply reflecting something positive the client has said about himself/herself and the statements must be about the client, as opposed to someone else the client is talking about. The agent must express personal appreciation by complimenting or commenting on the client's strengths, abilities, or efforts in any area. A simple "good" counts as an affirmation, but longer affirmations are recommended because they tend to be more effective in lowering client defensiveness. Examples include:
   - You showed a lot of courage by coming in to see me today.
   - I am really impressed by the improvement in your grades this semester.
   - That's great!
   - You must be so proud of yourself for that accomplishment.
   - Impressive!
   - It can be painful to confront someone you love, but you really did it well.

2. **Supporting the client** with statements of compassion or sympathy. For example:
   - I know this has been difficult and I appreciate how hard you have worked to get here.

- I know it's really hard to stop drinking.
- It must have been so hard for you to be misunderstood again.

3. **Emphasizing the client's control,** freedom of choice, autonomy, or ability to decide. For example:
    - Yes, you're right. It's your choice what you do from here.
    - You're the one who knows best what's going to work to keep you out of the system.
    - You've got a point there. I can see how this is confusing.

Feedback Options Following Coding

Once the agent's skills are coded, feedback could be provided on any of the following:

- The ratio of closed questions to open questions. Agents are encouraged to use more open than closed questions. The goal should be 70 percent open, 30 percent closed.
- Ratio of questions to reflections. Agents are encouraged to use at least as many reflections as questions (both open and closed combined).
- Ratio of simple reflections to complex reflections. Agents are encouraged to increase their use of complex reflections to identify where they are using at least as many complex reflections as simple reflections.
- Longest series of questions in a row. Agents are encouraged not to use more than two questions in a row.
- Amount of time an agent talks. Agents are encouraged to talk less than the client.

Coaching Strategies and Techniques

The coaching strategies described below build on the ones covered in the previous chapter. Specifically, modeling and using the Elicit-Provide-Elicit format to debrief coaching sessions continue to apply. In this section, emphasis is placed on struggles that agents often encounter when learning OARS and different ways to support their learning.

Questions: The most common struggle that agents experience with questions is not knowing how to structure questions such that they use more open questions than closed ones. This problem may be alleviated by using some of the exercises described below to increase their efficiency at forming open questions. It may also necessitate a discussion about what possible fears they have about using open questions. Perhaps the agent is concerned that if the client hears an open question, the client may talk too much or may provide information that the agent may not know how to handle.

Reflections: As mentioned before, reflections are statements where the inflection or intonation at the end of the sentence is flat or down. While the words may be the same, a questioning tone causes the client to rationally justify what he/she said. A nonquestioning tone invites the client to reflect on what was said, and to share more.

A Question or a Statement?

Agents sometimes struggle with being able to tell which way their inflection is going. There are several ways to help with this.

First, try asking the agent to distinguish between questions and reflections on a video clip or demonstration that you provide. Remember, the difference between a statement and a question is not what the client says in response, but the inflection of the statement and what it sounds like.

Then, ask the agent to practice making familiar statements (e.g., "Great game last night"; "The food in the café is terrible"; "I am really tired today"; or "This is a really hard client").

Finally, ask the agent to practice making statements with reflections that are commonly made to clients. If they struggle, go back to statements that are familiar.

Reflection Stems

Another helpful strategy to simplify the use of reflections is to offer the agent *stems* to initiate a reflection. While reflections do not have to start with these stems, agents report that it eases them in to a reflection and gives them a place to start making the reflection. Such stems include, "So…," "You feel…," "You mean…," "It sounds like…," "What you are saying is…," etc. These stems help the agent initiate a reflection and can be dropped as the agent's comfort with making reflections increases.

Simple Versus Complex Reflections

After a workshop on MI, agents report that reflections restate what the client has said, and most often demonstrate a repetitive style of reflection. While this repeating or parroting phrases back to the client is a type of simple reflection and is not wrong, it does not add any depth or emphasis to what the client is saying, and thereby does not facilitate movement in the discussion. Look at this example:

Client
I know I have to stay sober during probation, but it really is hard.

Agent
You are having a hard time staying sober. (simple reflection)

Client
Yes, it is really hard.

Client
I know I have to quit marijuana during probation, but it really is hard.

Agent
Certain aspects of staying away from drugs are particularly difficult. (complex reflection)

Client
Yes, I mean that the hardest part is not knowing how to manage my stress when I come home after work.

In the first example, the discussion did not move anywhere, and the agent would probably have felt compelled to respond with a question after the client stated, "Yes, it is really hard." However, in the second example, the discussion moved on to describe what the most difficult part of abstinence was for the client. If agents report (or you as the coach observe) their conversations with clients stagnating and not really going anywhere, encourage the agents to increase their use of complex reflections. Use the exercise described in the next section to increase agents' ability to use complex reflection.

Affirmations: Two common struggles that agents report having with affirmations are not knowing what to affirm and not being genuine about making affirmations. It is a paradigm shift to ask agents to "catch the clients doing something good" because it is deeply engrained in the culture of corrections that "if I catch someone doing something bad, it makes me a good or experienced agent." It might even warrant a deeper exploration of the spirit of MI with the agent and an exploration of the agent's ambivalence to being open to some of the assumptions of MI.

Lastly, remember that what drives these skills and makes them effective is the spirit behind the skills. If you notice agents using skills bereft of any collaborative, evocative, respectful spirit, take a step back to the previous chapter and explore some exercises in that chapter. The more inclined the agent is to guide (versus follow or direct), the easier it will be for the agent to try and rely upon active listening as one of his/her roles.

Exercises

1. Role-play difficult client interactions, with the agent being coached playing the client and the coach responding using OARS. Debrief by asking the agent about his/her reactions and what he/she can use in interactions with clients.

- Discuss the skills demonstrated in the clips.
- With the agent, code the skills demonstrated in the clips. Discuss discrepancies in coding to inform deeper understanding of the nuances of the skills.

3. In a group, play a ball toss game where one person asks a closed question and throws the ball to another person who converts the **closed question into an open question.** This person then asks a closed question and throws it to someone else.
4. In a group, play a ball toss game where one person asks a closed question and throws the ball to another person who converts the **closed question into a reflection.** This person then asks a closed question and throws it to someone else.
5. Role-play scenarios where the agent being coached can only use reflections.
6. Read client statements to the agent. The agent should respond with one simple reflection followed by one complex reflection.
7. Turn on a radio talk-show and identify OARS.
8. Turn on a radio talk-show that you disagree with and practice providing reflections for the host's statements.
9. Tape an interaction between you and a colleague who is willing to discuss an actual issue he/she is struggling with and play back, stopping to provide opportunities to affirm high skill level and to suggest stronger reflections for lower skill level.

Ask agents to record a "role play." Deliberately using low skill level reflections, play back and stop the tape to brainstorm for high skill level reflections.

Endnotes

1. Justice System Assessment and Training, *J-SAT Tape Critiquer Manual (1.4)* (Boulder, CO, 2009).
2. T.B. Moyers, T. Martin, J.K. Manuel, W.R. Miller, and D. Ernst, *The Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity (MITI) Code: Version 3.0* (Albuquerque, NM: Center on Alcoholism, Substance Abuse, and Addictions, 2008).
3. W.R. Miller and T.B. Moyers, *Manual for the Motivational Interviewing Skill Code (MISC)* (Albuquerque, NM: Center on Alcoholism, Substance Abuse, and Addictions, 2008).

CHAPTER 3 Recognizing and Reinforcing Change Talk

The goal of each session of motivational interviewing (MI) is to help move clients toward positive, prosocial change. While clients may express ***ambivalence*** about change, they begin to exhibit clues or signs that convey some openness or readiness to change. These signs of readiness usually appear in a ***contemplation stage*** of change, when clients are struggling with ambivalence and are beginning to see some advantages to change. Examples of these signs of readiness are resolve, decreased resistance, questions about change, envisioning change, and talk about change.[1]

While an agent's instinct might be to jump in and provide a lot of cheerleading, suggestions, and advice, responding in such a fashion can actually reduce the likelihood of change. Research shows that what is predictive of long-term change is:

- The *frequency* of a client's statements about changing.
- The *strength* of a client's statements about change.
- Client statements that convey *commitment* to making changes.

Since this ***change talk*** predicts change and since reinforcing this change talk makes MI effective for behavior change, agents must recognize and reinforce change talk as it naturally occurs in the conversation. This recognition and reinforcement of change talk is the next stage of learning MI and the focus of this chapter.

In order to better identify whether a client is verbalizing change talk or not, it is good to know what behavior the client wants to change and in what desired direction the change should go. As you explore ambivalence about change with clients, the clients' target behavior and change goal become clear. You can also clarify the circumstances, habits, or attitudes in clients' lives that may prove to be obstacles for change. As you work through client ambivalence together, clients begin to show signs of readiness to change and begin to verbalize change talk. The kind of talk that supports the status quo or argues against change as you explore client ambivalence is called ***sustain talk.***

Types of Change Talk

While the concept of change talk has been consistent throughout the evolution of MI, the terms used to describe it have changed. Currently, change talk can be described most simply using the following categories:

Desire to change. Includes statements that convey what the client wants, for example:

- I *want* to be successful this time around.
- I *wish* I could get control of my anger.
- I'd *like* to join the program.

Ability to change. Includes statements that convey clients' perception of their skills or capacity to change, or confidence in their ability to change, for example:

- I *can* do this if I try.
- I *could* attend three groups this month.

- I'd be *able* to stay sober with some help from my sponsor.

Reasons to change. Includes statements that provide internal or external reasons to make a change that are not desires, abilities, or needs. For example:

- Quitting would let me *get my life* back.
- Avoiding those peers would help me to *get off probation.*
- Going to treatment would *keep my priorities straight.*

Need to change. Includes statements that convey importance, necessity, and urgency regarding making a change that comes from *within* the client, rather than external "shoulds" or "oughts." For example:

- I *need* to do this.
- I *have* to make some changes here; things are not working.
- I *must* start doing things differently.
- I have *got to* get my life back.

The change talk discussed so far—which includes desire, ability, reasons, and need (DARN) to change—is also called ***preparatory talk.*** While it does not necessarily trigger behavior change in itself, it increases the likelihood that the following two types of change talk will occur, which do predict long-term change.

Commitment to change. Includes statements that convey a client's determination to take action toward change. Ideally, these include immediate, concrete steps for change. For example:

- I *will* (determination) go to the job fair (concrete step) this afternoon (conveys immediacy).
- I *intend to* go to 90 meetings in 90 days, starting tomorrow.
- I *am going to* throw out the porn in my house when I return home on Friday.

Taking steps toward change. Includes statements that report that clients have taken small or big steps toward change within the past 2 weeks. For example:

- Yesterday, I *tried* communicating more assertively with my boss.
- I *started* going to treatment last week.
- I *chose* a different route home on Wednesday for the first time.

Responding to Change Talk Using EARS[2]

Clients begin to use change talk when they are contemplating change. This may be a back and forth process where clients make a few statements in support of change and then quickly follow them with statements against change. For example:

Client
I'm tired of all the garbage that comes with drugs. (reason to change)

Agent
Coke and meth haven't exactly been good friends to you. (complex reflection)

Client
No! If I added up all the money and time they have cost me it wouldn't be pretty. (reason to change)

Agent
The cost is pretty sickening. (reflection)

Client
There just isn't any good reason for me to keep using anymore. (reason to change)

Agent
So you're ready now to check out some alternatives. (reflection)

Client
Well what I need most is a job. After that I'll be able to deal with drugs. (sustain talk: reason **not** to change)

The client says he is not yet ready to work on quitting drug use, so an agent may miss or dismiss change talk. By selectively reinforcing and responding to whatever change talk that the client does provide, the agent can still make progress. The following skills help agents to respond to change talk, by highlighting it or asking the client to elaborate on it. Skills to specifically elicit change talk will be covered in the next chapter.

Elaborating questions are questions that help clients expand on the statements they make in favor of change, or that get them to consider other factors of change that have not yet been discussed. Being mindful of this simple technique for responding enables one to capitalize on the numerous opportunities for mining change talk that may have previously been overlooked. Here are some examples:

- What might be some *other reasons* to get a job?
- You mentioned one way to reach your goal, but what are some *other ways to accomplish* this goal?
- You said that several things in your life would *need to change.* Please give me some examples of what you mean by that.
- You hinted at being successful in the past. What kinds of *similar changes* have you been able to make in the past that would help you with this one?
- Could you please describe a *recent example* of that?

Affirmations are statements of appreciation for the change talk that the client has made that subtly or obviously provide support for further and stronger statements. For example:

- *I'm impressed* that you have decided to think about what your life would be like without talking to your drug friends. I remember that last week you didn't even want to think about that.
- You were able to think of some really powerful reasons to make that change. *That's great!*
- Even with your kids being sick and your husband yelling at you, and even though you relapsed, you were still able to call your sponsor. *That's hard to do.*

Reflections repeat, rephrase, or paraphrase what the client has said with changed meaning or emphasis to let the client consider the change talk that was given. For example:

Client
It would probably be good for me to start thinking about going back to school.
Agent
School is starting to feel *important* to you again. (emphasizing "important" to lead to need change talk)

Client
I'm running out of reasons not to talk to my mom again.
Agent
Calling her up seems like a *good idea* at this point. (highlighting the client's willingness to make a call as a reason to change)

Client
I was able to go to the gym once this week, though I told you I'd go every day.
Agent
You had some success this week, even though it wasn't what you had planned. (highlighting the client's successful ability to change)

Summarizations bring together and restate at least three things that the client has said to collect the change talk that the client presented, allowing the client to add more change talk or feel confident in the reasons given for change. For example:

You feel like your husband would *support* you in stopping smoking, you've been *able* to quit for a long time before, and you're even *excited* about being able to go for a run again once you can breathe better (bringing together reasons, ability, and desire to build momentum for change).

You're a bit *worried* about what inpatient treatment would do to your reputation, but you also feel like if you don't go *people will find out* about your drug use anyway, and you have just about *had it with sneaking around* all the time (acknowledging the remaining reasons not to change, but emphasizing two reasons to change).

In a perfect and predictable world, client statements about change would progress in the following stages:

1. Weak DARN statements, including qualifiers like "might" or "maybe."

2. Medium-strength DARN statements, like "I can" or "I need to."

3. Strong DARN statements, like "I definitely can" or "It is very important for me to."

4. Weak commitment statements, like "I will probably."

5. Stronger commitment statements, like "I will definitely."

6. Weak taking steps reports, like "I was able to do a little bit last week."

7. Stronger taking steps reports, like "I didn't drink at all last week."

After understanding this progression, the agent's goal is not to take clients immediately from "1" to "7," but to take them one step beyond where they are at the moment, returning to previous steps as necessary. While the client may reach the higher stages by the end of your work together, the process is more likely to be "two steps forward and one step back" than a linear progression from stage to stage.

Each of these skills can be used at any of the seven stages of change. For example, if a client gives a "weak" desire statement (stage 1) like, "I might want to start thinking about going back to school," the agent could offer any of the following to help the client move toward stronger desire (stage 2):

- What would have to be different for you to really want to go back? (Elaborating question looking for reasons to increase the client's desire.)

- I remember your telling me how hard school was for you. I'm impressed that you've even been able to think about going back. (Affirmation, prompting the client to talk more about the courage to reconsider.)

- You're not sure you want to think about going back yet. (Reflection, understating the client's interest in going back in order to elicit more reasons why the client is willing to start thinking about it.)

- In the past school was hard for you, but things are starting to change now. There are some differences in the ways you think about school and it is starting to feel like a possibility at some point. (Summarization, bringing together the client's ambivalence so that the client will feel that the past and his/her hesitance were adequately understood. This may increase the client's comfort in moving forward to talk about what is different now and the possibility of change.)

If a client gives a strong statement of commitment (stage 5), like, "I've had enough with excuses already. This is it for me. I'm going to start making child support payments from this point forward," the agent could respond with any of the following to help the client move to stage 6:

- So what is the first thing you will do this week toward making those payments? (Elaborating question looking for the first small action steps toward change.)

- You've really given this some excellent thought and I am impressed with the determination I see on your face right now. (Affirmation, prompting the client to confirm his/her determination.)
- It sounds like you are ready to move from thinking about this goal into actually doing it. (Reflection, asking the client to notice his/her readiness and talk more about beginning to make changes.)
- You've taken some time to think through your excuses and they aren't working for you anymore. You are ready to start doing what you have been planning to do for some time now. Today is the day. (Summarization, helping the client review previous stages of change to underscore the client's readiness for change and show support for his/her expressions of determination. With the past summarized, the logical response for the client would be to talk about the next stage.)

Strategies and Techniques for Supervisors

Modeling skills to reinforce their acquisition continues to be the primary way of supporting agents in their skill development. Modeling can be done during any interaction with staff, including staff meetings, discussions about clients, or individual conversations with staff. Part of the work with change talk is to recognize it as it naturally occurs in conversations with staff. When staff talk about one side of an issue, it is common for supervisors to call this "complaining" and then try to quash it or convince staff about the other side of the argument. As explained in chapter 5, listening with the spirit of MI allows staff to feel heard and to begin to talk about the positives of the change, whatever those may be. This is where supervisors must pick up on this talk and respond to it using the skills discussed above (EARS). Here are some examples of ways to use EARS with staff:

Agent
I guess there are times when using MI really does allow the client to come up with his/her own solutions, so I don't have to take on so much responsibility.

Supervisor
Give me an example or tell me more about your experience of MI working this way. (elaborating question looking for more reasons for change talk)

I'm impressed that you've been able to use MI so well that you are starting to see some good results. (affirmation)

You are beginning to see some benefit to using MI. (simple reflection)

Instead of being a chore, MI is starting to be a relief to you, and it seems to work with your clients. (complex reflection)

Identifying and reinforcing the statements that agents make in support of increasing their MI skill proficiency helps to model to agents ways in which they may demonstrate skillful recognition and response to change talk. This kind of modeling helps agents be more aware of the kind of work they are doing so that they can continue to have good skills and increase their MI proficiency.

Finally, supervisors may reinforce agents' skill acquisition by providing sufficient learning and coaching opportunities to the agents who are working on increasing their strategic reinforcement of change talk. This could include further formal training, use of resources, meetings with coaches, or the informal practice of change talk strategies during staff meetings. The firstline supervisor is ideally positioned to facilitate and translate these skill acquisition strategies into a local office community of practice.

Assessment Techniques

Coding and assessing change talk requires practitioners to keep track of what the client is saying *and* what the agent is saying. This becomes a lot of information to keep track of and often, client change talk seems to fall into several DARN–CT[3] categories at once. Thus, identifying which category of change talk is being given in a particular statement can be a challenge. Therefore, we encourage agents to take the following approach to skill identification when coding skills in this section:

For clients

1. Identify whether the statements given are change talk or sustain talk.

2. If statements are change talk, identify what type they are (DARN–CT).

For agents

1. Identify whether agents respond to change talk in a way that facilitates more change talk or in a way that misses or halts it.

2. If agents respond in a way that facilitates more change talk, identify which of the EARS they used to do so.

A helpful way to look for these two categories is to ask these questions while listening to the interaction between client and agent:

1. Are the things the client is saying *relevant to the targeted behavior* change and do they *support change?*

If yes…

Client talk. The client's talk is probably change talk. Use the word key below to discern what category of change talk the client is expressing:

- Desire to change (I want to…, I would like to…).

- Ability to change (I could…, I can…, I'm able to…).

- Reason to change (If I change then __ will be better, If I don't change __ will happen).

- Need to change (I need to…, I've got to…, I have to…, I must…).

- Commitment to change (I will…, I plan on…, I intend to…).

- Taking steps toward change (descriptions of actions toward change made in the past 2 weeks).

Agent response. Does the agent respond to the client's change talk in a way that gets more change talk (e.g., using EARS)? Does the agent miss the change talk and go to a different topic? Does the agent's response result in sustain talk from the client?

If no…

Client talk. The client's talk is probably neutral or sustain talk that is arguing against change.

Agent response. How does the agent respond to sustain talk? Is the response made in a way that is adherent with the spirit and principles of MI? The agent should:

- Reflect the client's concerns.

- Explore ambivalence using the ***decisional-balance matrix.***

- Gently develop discrepancies between the client's values and the client's decisions not to change.

2. Is the client *committing* to make a change in the near future or talking about *steps taken* toward change in the recent past?

If yes…

Client talk. The client is giving commitment talk or has begun taking steps.

Agent response. How does the agent respond? Does the agent join the client in planning specific steps for change and check on progress at the next meeting?

If no…

Client talk. The client may be talking about change hypothetically, or giving preparatory talk (DARN) that has not become commitment talk yet.

Agent response. How does the agent respond to continued DARN talk? The agent would want to:

- Reflect the client's concerns.
- Explore ambivalence using the decisional-balance matrix.
- Gently develop discrepancies between the client's values and the client's decisions not to change.
- Ask the client, "What would you be willing to do between now and next week to move closer to your goal?"
- Use ***skills to elicit change talk*** covered in the next chapter.

Coaching Strategies and Techniques

The coaching strategies described below build on the ones covered in the previous chapters. Specifically, using modeling and the elicit-provide-elicit format to debrief a coaching session continue to apply to coaching. This section describes struggles that agents often encounter when recognizing and responding to change talk. It provides ways to support agent learning.

Understanding the Process of Change

As a coach, you should encourage agents to broaden their understanding of and tolerance for the process of change. Following are some things that agents should keep in mind:

Change is scary. It requires support. No matter how small a change may be, people typically do not change unless staying the same is more painful than making the change. Even if the agent thinks the change seems small, the change may not be small for the client. To have the energy to sustain change, clients need to know that the agent understands that change is hard and that the agent will be there to support them. Affirmations of even small steps are a great way to show clients support.

Change is gradual. Wait for it. Few good changes happen fast. In fact, agents might be wise to harbor some internal suspicions about sudden changes. Rather than obeying the natural tendency to speed clients through the many stages of change, going from DARN to CT, challenge agents to see how slowly they can go to make sure they catch all the nuances of ambivalence and fear of change along the way. Urge agents not to skip change steps.

Developing the capacity to change is more important than making a single change. While changing a single behavior is important for a variety of reasons, including its influence on conditions placed by a court, the agent's larger goal is to help clients become aware of their own abilities to find motivation to change and then to help them do what they need to do to carry it out. The more responsibility the agent takes for getting the client to change, the less opportunity clients will have to build up their change "muscles." Thus, agents should respond to change talk by encouraging and then challenging the client to take the next step, rather than jumping in to get the behavior changed by providing reasons or means for change, instead of eliciting these from the client. Of course, clients will need some help, but agents should challenge themselves to see just how much clients can be encouraged to do for themselves in coming up with reasons for and steps toward change.

Thoughts That Block Effective Responses to Change Talk

Often, when agents begin to hear clients use change talk, there are several kinds of unhelpful thoughts that come to mind. These thoughts are listed below, followed by the unhelpful interaction styles that follow them, and a reframe (i.e., a reassessment of these unhelpful thoughts) that can be offered for each.

Thought One: "Yeah, yeah, that's what all clients say when they are trying to pull one over on us. What are the chances that they are sincere and will actually do anything?"

The fear behind this first response to client change talk is that if agents treat clients as if their motivation for change is legitimate and then clients do not follow through with change, the agents will feel foolish for having believed them. To avoid feeling foolish, the agent's temptation may be to treat the client with doubt or a "so prove it" attitude. When clients feel that their motivation is in question, they rarely have the internal strength to be able to tell themselves, "So this person doesn't believe me, but I know who I am and what I want. I will continue to move toward change even though I am angry that this person is essentially calling me a liar." More resistant, jaded clients will feel something closer to, "So you want me to change, but you don't believe that I can. Fine, then I will resist your secret hope that I will change by not changing." Even nonresistant clients will feel the energy drain that comes from not being believed in and supported. The resulting dejection will make change less likely. Research suggests that when agents are optimistic about clients, it increases the likelihood that the client will change.[4]

The reframe to this thought would be, "Sure, you might be telling me you are ready to change when you aren't ready yet. But if I encourage these small things you are saying today, and we keep talking along these lines, maybe you will gradually talk yourself into actual readiness to change. Either way, I will keep encouraging you because encouragement is empowering. As you see me believe in you, maybe you will start to believe in yourself, too." The interactions that come out of this thought will be quite different. Small bits of change talk will be affirmed, encouraging the client to provide even more change talk.

Thought Two: "That reason for change sounds pretty wimpy. I'm not buying it till my client starts actually taking some steps."

Like the first thought, this one is rooted in agents' need not to feel foolish after believing clients too soon. In many ways, this thought is understandable, as most change talk starts with lots of qualifiers like "maybe," "might," "a little," etc. The important thing to remember is that "weak" statements that fall into the DARN categories provide a foundation for building stronger motivation for change. "I might want to cut down on my drinking a little" can be followed by the question, "What would it take for you to really want to cut down on your drinking?" The conversation that follows might help talk the client into moving from "I might want" to "I probably want." Perhaps by the next session "I probably want" might have moved to "I want to, but not quite yet," and so on. Over time, weak desire can turn into strong desire and then translate into commitment. Verbal commitment can be followed by taking steps.

The reframe here is the thought, "That little reason for change is a first step. This might be a long process, but it is worth it to hang in there with this client and gradually build on these small steps until he/she is ready to start changing." As clients sense this patience in the agent, their sense of needing to subtly argue for the idea that "change needs to happen slowly" will decrease. Sensing that the agent is more patient with their pace of change than they are, they may have the chance to take the "I wish this change could happen faster" side of the "argument."

Thought Three: "All these expressions of motivation to change are about the wrong change! They keep talking about changing behaviors that are not part of our agenda here."

This thought is rooted in the assumption that the client's priorities for change should be identical to the priorities of the agent. Certainly, there will be "terms and conditions" areas of change that clients need to address because the consequences of not changing in these areas may not only mess up these areas, but all the other important parts of their lives that they are thinking about changing. As anyone who has been in a long-term relationship knows, people will never have exactly the same priorities or perspectives on things. Inevitably, there will be parts of the clients' lives that feel essential to them that do not feel as important to the agent. But because these parts loom so large in clients' minds, the agent will not be able to get clients to address other areas of their lives until clients can see how these other areas affect their priorities.

The thought reframe here is, "This area of change is important to the client. If I can relate this area of change to the other change areas within our case plan, we may be able to work on several change areas at once, or the client's motivation to address case plan change areas may not increase." When agents are guided by this reframe, they may say things to clients like, "I am so glad that you are feeling so hopeful about quitting smoking and it does sound like that program you mentioned will be helpful. I remember that you mentioned that the program costs $100. So I was wondering whether our last conversation about your finding work might be important for helping you afford that program, in addition to giving you more money to catch up on your restitution payments." This kind of response values areas of change that are important to the client, while helping to tie that motivation in to the terms and conditions that have not been top priorities for the client.

Thought Four: "Finally, the client muttered something about wanting to change. Let's move right on to planning how to do it."

This thought comes from the assumption that the change process proceeds quickly and linearly, and that the client's pace for pursuing change needs to be accelerated. The problem here is that as the interviewer tries to move the change ahead faster, the client will usually feel unprepared. Ambivalence still must be resolved. The client has not thought through all the positive and negative impacts the change will have in his/her life. Or the client may not have enough energy or time at the moment to move right into drastic change. Sensing these things, as agents push for faster change, clients will be stuck resisting, to protect themselves from what they intuitively know will be too fast a pace to sustain.

The reframe for this thought would be, "The client is starting to feel ready to talk about change. I wonder what is still in the way of moving forward that we need to work through before going on to change planning. If I slow down to look at all these angles, maybe that will help the client feel comfortable moving forward." As the client feels the agent slowing down and saying "maybe this is too fast," that allows the client to "argue" the other side of, "no, I've thought about it enough and I'm ready." If the client feels that the agent is not going to push too hard, the client will also not have to feel tempted to tell the agent what he/she senses the agent wants to hear, for fear that a slower pace and ongoing ambivalence will be displeasing. Rather, clients can be themselves and go at their actual pace of comfort, which will make eventual change more secure and lasting.

Thought Five: "The client mentioned one reason to change. I will respond by listing all the others he/she missed."

This thought comes from the concern that the client will be unable to come up with reasons to change that are sufficiently motivating. The agent may have learned the lesson well that motivation must come from the client and may have patiently waited up to this point for the client to start expressing that motivation. After this first expression occurs, the agent can be so excited that the process of "drawing out" motivation from the client worked that the agent might be tempted to return to the old model of "stuffing" additional motivation into the client to move him/her forward in the process. As the agent takes over, this puts the client back into a "passive" position of receiving motivation. Thus, the client is likely to stop actively exploring change.

The reframe here would be, "Oh good, the client can be trusted to want to change. That means the client might also be trusted to think of more reasons to change and to eventually commit to changing. I will keep doing what's working and nurture the client's self-efficacy through evocative questions." With this attitude, the agent will be more likely to say things like, "Wow, keeping your kids is a pretty powerful reason to want to stop using pot. I bet you've thought of some other reasons too. What are some other reasons?" Statements and questions like this help clients to feel supported in the steps they have made toward change and in their abilities to come up with additional reasons to change

Providing Coaching When Agents Miss Change Talk Entirely

If agents are struggling to recognize change talk, it may be because they are focusing on other things during sessions: trying to gather detailed information, trying to make their own points to clients, getting through sessions quickly, etc. Have the agent practice recognizing change talk until it becomes so familiar that he/she begins to hear it even when he/she is distracted.

Exercises To Help Identify and Respond to Change Talk

The following exercises can help with this process for groups or individuals. Coaches may want to start with the first exercise listed and then move on to the latter ones as needed.

1. **Change talk brainstorm.** Provide agents with several examples of change talk statements in each of the DARN–CT areas. Then, have them write down (individual) or brainstorm (group) at least 15 statements that would count as change talk in each of the DARN–CT areas. It may be helpful to restrict responses to those that pertain to the behavior change areas that the agents are most likely to encounter in their interactions with clients.

2. **Easy as 1–2–3.** In groups of three, conduct the following exercise:[5]

   - Have each agent write down three statements in each of the DARN–CT categories about some change they are thinking about making in the next 6 months.
   - Each trio of people should include agents acting as a client, an agent, and an observer.
   - The client first reads out one of his/her statements and the observer silently codes the category of change talk in which the client's statement would fall.
   - The agent responds with EARS, while the observer silently codes the category of EARS in which the agent's statement would fall.
   - The client then responds naturally to what the agent said while the observer silently codes whether the client's statement was change talk or not.
   - The group pauses, while the observer debriefs what he/she coded.
   - The group switches roles until everyone has had a chance to be the observer.

3. **Change talk identification circle.** During a one-on-one session or a group meeting, listen to a recording of an entire interview or parts of an interview that include change talk. Play the tape for intervals of 15 seconds, 30 seconds, or a minute, depending on the frequency of the change talk. Have the participants write down whatever change talk phrases they hear and then discuss what they are hearing. In a group, avoid letting the "stars" in the meeting dominate. Rather, have participants take turns talking about what they heard or did not hear before the others have a chance to comment about that segment of the tape as a group.

4. **Flagging change talk on the fly.** At the beginning of a staff meeting or a one-on-one meeting that is not solely focused on coaching MI skills, announce that the secondary focus will be on noticing change talk while simultaneously accomplishing other tasks. Give participants a buzzer to press or simply ask them to raise their hands (or snap their fingers) whenever anyone in the meeting gives change talk. Provide small incentives each time a person correctly identifies change talk, or a larger incentive to the person who identifies the most change talk during the meeting. Incentives might include candy, kudos, time off, permission to avoid an annoying project, etc.

5. **Logging change talk.** Identify a particular week in which agents will be listening for change talk in the activities in which they are involved. Have them keep notebooks and briefly note whenever anyone they are with uses change talk, noting the date, the person, and an approximation of the phrase uttered. All participants must record 20 (or another specified number) of instances that another person could verify. The first to complete this exercise receives an incentive. During the middle of the week, hold a meeting in which those who have completed the exercise can talk about what worked for them in eliciting change talk or in noticing it when it happened. They may encourage or help the others to complete their assignments by the end of the week.

Summary

As a client begins to show some signs of readiness to change, the use of MI becomes more directive and strategic. Research shows that we can predict whether a client is going to change by what he/she says in a session as well as how the agent responds in the session. In particular, what is predictive of long-term change is:

- The *frequency* of client statements about changing (preparatory talk conveying desire, ability, reasons, and need to change).
- The *strength* of client statements about change.
- Client statements that convey *commitment* to making changes (commitment talk).

Recognizing this change talk is the first step in being able to *strategically reinforce* and *actively elicit* more talk in support of change. Responding to change talk that naturally comes up in a discussion about ambivalence requires using skills such as:

- Asking elaborating questions.
- Affirming change talk.
- Reflecting change talk.
- Summarizing change talk.

The next chapter focuses on how to actively elicit change talk from clients.

Endnotes

1. W.R. Miller and S.R. Rollnick (eds.), *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change,* 2d. ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2002).

2. Elaborating Questions, Affirming, Reflecting, Summarizing.

3. Desire, Ability, Reasons, Need, Commitment, and Taking Steps.

4. P.C. Amrhein, W.R. Miller, C.E. Yahne, M. Palmer, and L. Fulcher, “Client Commitment Language During Motivational Interviewing Predicts Drug Use Outcomes,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 71(5):862–78, 2003.

5. Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers, *Motivational Interviewing: Training for New Trainers* (Fairfax, VA: Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers, 2008).

CHAPTER 4 Eliciting and Strengthening Change Talk

As emphasized in chapter 3, research has determined that ***eliciting change talk*** is a key causal mechanism that explains, at least in part, precisely how motivational interviewing (MI) works to produce behavior change in a wide variety of problem areas. Thus, eliciting change talk is at the heart of the MI model and in the middle of the procession of tasks for learning MI (see book I, chapter 2). Eliciting change talk also places skill demands on the agent to begin to require him/her to clearly incorporate agent or goal-directed techniques, and to be client centered.

After an agent begins to recognize change talk as it naturally occurs, he/she must learn how to intentionally draw it out. In this stage of learning, agents gain efficacy at not only eliciting change talk, but also building on it and strengthening it. Because of the link between change talk and actual behavior change, it becomes important for agents to learn to recognize fertile soil and to plow, fertilize, and plant seeds in that area. Staying with this metaphor, agents need to be able to recognize shoots that have the potential to flower and bear fruit and to distinguish them from those that are weeds. Encouraging the weeds would reduce the space and the possibility for the flowering and fruit-bearing plants to thrive. In the case of change talk, the agent learns to strategically reinforce it and to elicit and strengthen it. The agent takes care not to elicit "sustain talk," where the client makes arguments against change. Rather, agents learn to recognize signs of readiness and begin to elicit verbal movement toward change. By believing in the client's inner resources for change, and then structuring the conversation through selected active listening techniques, agents can significantly increase the probability of actual behavior change by being directive about drawing out change talk from the client.

Change happens when clients become interested in and concerned about the need to change, begin to believe that change is in their best interest, have a plan of action that is possible for them and effective at bringing about change, are committed to the plan, and begin to take steps toward the plan.[1] Change talk is elicited toward this end, with this specific focus.

Skills

Before actively eliciting change talk, be clear about what behavior you want to focus on with the client. This ***target behavior*** is clarified through a client-centered approach using the skills covered thus far. This means that the client helps guide the agent to the behaviors the session will focus on. Once the target behavior is clear, the agent should begin to focus on working to resolve ambivalence and should elicit change talk about that specific behavior. Clarifying target behaviors can be subtle. It is as important to know if the target behavior involves "cutting down" versus "quitting" as it is to know if the client has issues with "alcohol" or "cocaine." The agent and client begin to walk down different roads if both are not clear about the goal that is being talked about. A good working alliance also comes into play, because agents will learn that this process requires a tremendous amount of flexibility about a client's goals. Perhaps a question agents can ask themselves is, "Even though the change that the client wants to make is not what I had in mind, will this change contribute to the client creating a more prosocial lifestyle and reduce the risk for recidivism?"

Following is a discussion about the different ways to elicit change talk in terms of skills and strategies. Using a chess metaphor, skills are specific moves, but strategies are a set of moves with a particular aim in mind (in this case, eliciting change talk).

Eliciting Change Talk: Developing Skills

1. **Evocative open questions.** Include open questions that ask about the client's desire, ability, reason, need, and commitment to change. Evocative open questions provide the client an opportunity to make statements in support of change. Specifically, evocative questions are open questions (related to the target behavior) that elicit change talk. Following are examples of evocative open questions that elicit each category of change talk. In these examples, "this change" is used as a generic term. When you use these questions, try to be specific about which change you are talking about with the client:

Desire to change

- How would you like your situation to be different?
- What makes you want to make this change?

Ability to change

- How might you go about making this change?
- How would you deal with the obstacles that come up?
- What are some qualities that will help you make this change?
- What makes you believe you can do this?

Reasons to change

- What are the main reasons you want to make this change?
- What are some positive things that could happen as a result of this change?
- What are some negative things that are happening now that would stop when you make this change?
- What are some negative things that would happen if you did not make this change?
- What concerns you about your behavior?

Need to change

- How important is making this change?
- How much do you really need to make this change?

Commitment to change

- What is your next step?
- Where does this leave you?
- What would you be willing to try?
- Looking at the ideas we have come up with, which one are you going to choose to do?

Taking steps

- What have you done thus far to move toward this change?
- What steps have you taken in the past 2 weeks?

2. **Elaborating questions.** Include questions that ask the client to elaborate on change talk the client has made. Rather than moving on after change talk has been offered, asking for elaboration requires the client to go deeper in his/her exploration rather than broader. Such questions can ask for specifics, more information, examples, details, etc. Examples include:

- What specifically do you want to do?
- You mentioned this being a problem. In what ways has this been a problem for you?
- Could you give me an example of…?

- Tell me about the last time that happened.
- You mentioned several reasons, what other reasons are there?

Eliciting Change Talk: Strategies

1. **Using rulers.** This strategy has several steps to it and can be applied to measure the level of several different motivational dimensions, such as importance (how much value is it), confidence (how much do you believe you can), readiness (how important is it right now), and commitment (how dedicated are you to doing this).

The steps in this strategy include:

- Identify the target behavior. You do not have to overtly identify the behavior, but this is a check to ensure that you and the client are on the same page about the behavior you are referencing.
- Ask the question on the dimension chosen by using a scale:
    - "On a scale from 0 to 10, how important is it for you to quit smoking?"
    - "On a scale from 0 to 10, how confident are you that you can successfully quit drinking?"
    - "On a scale from 0 to 10, how ready are you to make this change?"
    - "On a scale from 0 to 10, how committed are you to taking this first step?"
- Ask a followup question that elicits change talk.

In some instances (importance, readiness, commitment), this means asking why the client suggests that particular number and not something lower:

- "Why did you choose a 6 and not a lower number, say a 2?"
- "What is giving you the push to be so ready, at a 7 rather than a 4?"

In other instances (confidence), it means asking what it would take to get to a higher number:

- "On the confidence scale, you said a 6. What do you need to do in order to be at a 6.5?"

2. **Asking hypothetical questions.** This strategy allows the client to imagine or envision change, even when he/she is not completely ready to make the commitment to change. Such questions include asking the client to imagine and describe the potential positive outcomes that will come with change, worst-case scenarios if the client does not change, and how life would be different if the client were to change. Questions like these usually begin with, "if you were to change…" This can free the client from feeling the pressure of change and allows him/her to imagine the possibilities. Following are some examples of these questions:
    - If you were to make this change, how would your life be different 6 months (or 5 years) from now?
    - If you were to make this change, what would be some of the best things that would happen?
    - If you do not make this change, what are some of your biggest fears that could occur?
    - If you look back on your life, how would things be different if you had made this change several years ago?
3. **Decisional balance.** Looking at the benefits and consequences of changing and unchanging behavior is an exceptionally helpful skill when a client is ambivalent and unsure about making a change. A decisional-balance exploration looks at the pros of changing, the cons of changing, the pros of staying the same, and the cons of staying the same. If you are focused on only mining for change talk, ask for the pros of changing and the cons of staying the same. It is important to facilitate this discussion with the client rather than providing it as homework. Going through a

decisional-balance exploration with a client is as powerful as creating the actual list that is generated in each quadrant.

4. **Exploring goals and/or values.** This strategy helps develop discrepancy or uncover what the client really values. In Milton Rokeach's work on values,[2] he found that certain values are universal across countries and cultures. What varies is the weight or importance that is placed on each. For MI clients, agents should know how their behavior fits or does not fit with their goals and values.

EXHIBIT 4-1: EXPLORING AMBIVALENCE EXERCISE

Benefits of Use/Behavior	Consequences of Use/Behavior
Benefits of Abstinence/Change	Consequences of Abstinence/Change

An easy way to explore values with a client is to ask him/her to do a values card sort, where the client prioritizes a list of values by those that are most important to him/her. A discussion can then ensue about how a client's behavior is consistent or is reflected in his/her values (or not), and what might need to happen to increase the congruence between a client's behavior and a client's values.

Things To Consider

1. Avoid asking questions that result in sustain talk. If the client is well on his/her way to providing preparatory talk and is gearing up to plan and commit to change, avoid asking about the other side of the ambivalence. If the client is preparing for change, such a line of questioning can be counterproductive. Sometimes the agent can do this without meaning to. For example:

   Client
   I guess I'm really ready to take the leap and quit. (change talk)

   Agent
   Before we go there, what are some fears you have about making this change?

   Client
   I guess a fear I have is that I won't be successful, and then I'll wonder why I tried to change. (sustain talk)

2. Avoid glossing over problems in a client's ability or confidence. Sometimes as agents we can get so wrapped up in the excitement of a client's new desire to change, that when the client says, "I'm not sure how" we respond with "Oh, don't worry, you'll figure it out." If a client is truly struggling with being unable to change, consider the following ideas:

   - Brainstorm solutions together.
   - Resource the past by asking about a client's past successful change efforts.
   - Use a form like "Characteristics of Successful Changers"[3] to develop self-efficacy.
   - Provide skill training with directed practice and positive feedback.

3. Be clear about the target behavior you plan to focus on. Otherwise you and the client could be headed down two different paths.

4. Respond to change talk with EARS (Elaborating, Affirming, Reflecting, Summarizing). As emphasized in chapter 3, if a client provides change talk, respond to the change talk rather than moving on to the next thing.

5. Find a balance between "going broad" (exploring different areas of change) and "going deep" (exploring a particular statement about change). Following is an example of both:

   Client
   One of the reasons I want to make this change is because I feel I owe it to my family.

   Agent
   Your family is important to you. What are some other reasons? (going broad)

   Agent
   Your family is important to you. What are some ways in which your behavior has affected them? (going deep)

6. Stay in touch with where the client is. You can easily get ahead of him/her in planning for change.

7. When using a strategy, particularly rulers, complete all steps of the strategy or you might lose the power of the strategy.

8. Do not forget to clinch the deal with commitment talk. Use questions that ask for commitment after the client has provided a fair amount of preparatory talk, so that the conversation does not neglect to help the client come up with an appropriate approach to create change:

   Client
   I really want to make this change.

   Agent
   Great. I'm happy for you. Let's schedule our next appointment.

   Instead, try:

   Client
   I really want to make this change.

   Agent
   Great. What do you think your first step should be?

Strategies and Techniques for Supervisors

Modeling skills to reinforce their acquisition continues to be the primary way of supporting agents in their skill development. Modeling can be done during any interaction with staff, including staff meetings, discussions about clients, or individual conversations with staff. In chapter 3, the emphasis was on recognizing change talk as it naturally occurs in conversations with staff. Agents should now focus on actively drawing out change talk using these skills.

Finally, supervisors may reinforce agent skill acquisition by providing learning and coaching opportunities to agents who are working on increasing their ability to strategically reinforce change talk. Agents may learn more about reinforcing change talk through formal training, acquiring resources, meeting with coaches, or informal practice of change talk strategies during staff meetings. The agent's immediate supervisor is best positioned to facilitate and translate these skill acquisition strategies into a local office's ***community of practice.***

Assessment Techniques

Assessment and coding of how an agent elicits change talk requires supervisors to keep track of what the agent is saying and how the client responds (i.e., with change talk or sustain talk). Assessing and coding client responses is very similar to the assessment techniques covered in chapter 3. Assessing how the agent purposefully elicits change talk is the focus of this chapter.

Coaching Strategies

Whether involved in peer coaching or an assigned or chosen coach, feedback on missed opportunities for eliciting change talk will be most helpful. In addition, taking turns practicing using specific strategies can build efficacy. Supervisors should work with agents to focus on evoking specific kinds of change (e.g., preparatory language: preparatory desire, preparatory ability, preparatory reason, preparatory need; and/or commitment language).

Endnotes

1. C.C. DiClemente and S.O. Hughes, "Stages of Change Profiles in Outpatient Alcoholism Treatment," *Journal of Substance Abuse* 2:217–35, 1990.

2. M. Rokeach, *The Nature of Human Values* (New York: The Free Press, 1973).

3. W.R. Miller (ed.), *Combined Behavioral Intervention Manual,* vol. 1 (Bethesda, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2004).

CHAPTER 5 Responding to Resistance

The following is a scene that plays out in corrections settings with common regularity. Every office has at least one or two agents who regularly find themselves proceeding into interactions that are progressively more polarized and adversarial in their supervision sessions. The conflict and confrontation escalate, sometimes with accompanying shouting, and generally culminate with the agent presenting some form of an ultimatum that is backed by the threat of increased sanctions. After the session is over, the agent may describe in a debriefing to a colleague that the client was "in denial" or out of touch—essentially suggesting that the client was entirely responsible for the scene. The debriefing can leave coworkers puzzled as to whether there is some special case assignment occurring for these select officers. If they determine there is not, the most likely explanation for the conflict is not the client, but the agent's style of interacting with clients and how the agent deals with emerging ***resistance.***

Resistance is a part of a communication process and can occur at any time in the agent-client relationship. In this chapter, we explore what resistance looks like, where it comes from, and what an agent can do about it.

Resistance looks like a set of client behaviors that are observable, that convey a dissonance or disconnect in the communication, and that are inversely related to behavior change.[1, 2] Examples of such client resistance include interrupting, arguing, and ignoring the agent, or ignoring what the agent is trying to focus on.

Resistance comes up as a result of a mismatch or friction in the agent-client relationship. This friction can be caused by several things:

- The agent and client having a different agenda or goals.
- Agent strategies not matching the client's readiness to change.
- The client (or agent) bringing in a high level of passivity, frustration, or anger.
- The agent responding to a client using ***roadblocks to communication.***
- Misunderstanding or a lack of clarification about roles.
- Struggle for power and/or autonomy.
- Insufficient initial role clarification[3, 4] on the part of the agent.

Resistance is a powerful message from the client that the friction or mismatch exists. Agents should strive to see the wisdom in the client's resistance—we need to understand the message it is conveying. Have we misunderstood the client? Perhaps we are underestimating what we are asking the client to do. The agent's responsibility is to recognize the resistance, understand where it is coming from, and work to resolve the dissonance and reduce resistance. Persistent resistance from a client is not a function of the client, but rather a function of the agent's skill. The feeling in the communication is adversarial and as if the two parties are working from different agendas. Dissonance in the communication will be observable both in the client and in the agent. If an agent can recognize this pattern of dissonance or conflict as it is emerging, the agent will have more immediate options than he/she will have by simply blaming the client. By understanding these options, the agent can momentarily recover a new and improved working relationship.

As agents, we are tempted to do several things to manage the dissonance. Some of us want to establish who is in control and who has the power; others get uncomfortable and try and appease the client or use humor. Sometimes what we inadvertently do is quash or ignore the resistance rather than use it as a signal that we have misunderstood the client and that, as the agent, we need to do something differently. Ignoring the resistance only makes it increase.

Consequently, a potent reframe for agents is realizing how to perceive resistance as an opportunity to more fully engage their client, rather than as simply a threat to their authority or control.

Sustain Talk Is Different From Resistance

In the previous chapters we talked about change talk (i.e., talk from the client that expresses desire, ability, reasons, need, and commitment in favor of change) and its counterpart, sustain talk (i.e., talk from the client against change). Sustain talk happens as a natural part of a conversation about change, especially when a client is expressing his/her ambivalence about change. Sometimes this talk against change is viewed as resistance, even though it is a normal part of exploring and resolving ambivalence. Therefore, resistance is broader than a client arguing against change, and can actually be a part of a client's movement toward change.

Traps or Roadblocks That Increase Resistance

Experts in communication, counseling, and psychology have established that certain skills and techniques can increase resistance or effectively roadblock a communication and reduce the likelihood of behavior change. Examples of such roadblocks include ordering, threatening, preaching, persuading, and distracting. Miller and Rollnick[5] describe these roadblocks as traps or ineffective advocacy. These roadblocks include:

- **The question-answer trap.** Because of the need for specific information, or because of anxiety, agents can fall into a pattern of asking many questions in a row to which the client offers only "yes" or "no." This can increase resistance in clients, as they feel interrogated. It can also place them in the passive role of a responder with no perceived self-efficacy in the process of change. Having clients complete surveys before the meeting or interspersing reflections between strings of questions can help with this trap.
- **The premature focus trap.** Sometimes the agent's opinion about which issue should be the client's primary focus differs from the client's opinion. Avoid struggles about the proper topic for early discussion because the client may be put off and become defensive. Starting with the issues that are the client's main concerns reduces resistance and often eventually leads back to the topic that concerns the agent.
- **The taking sides trap.** Confronting the client by taking the opposite side of the issue may produce defensiveness. By taking responsibility for the "change" side of the conflict, the agent elicits "no change" arguments from the client. Clients can then talk themselves out of change. Reflections and reframes of what the client is saying help agents avoid this trap by making the client argue both sides, rather than pitting the client against the agent.

- **The blaming or criticizing trap.** Clients are often concerned with whose fault the problem is or was. This kind of trap can waste time and energy in needless resistance. Letting the client know that the aim of counseling is not identifying fault, but seeking solutions in current situations, can redirect the client's attention away from blame.

- **The expert trap.** When an agent comes across as having all of the answers because he/she wants to help "fix" the client's problem, clients can become passive recipients and can become discouraged from the main motivational interviewing (MI) goal of exploring and resolving ambivalence for themselves. MI should involve collaborating with the client, not instilling the "solution" into him/her.

- **The labeling trap.** Often, agents want to insist that a client accepts a diagnostic label. Perhaps the agent wants control or may be judgmental. Labels can make clients feel stigmatized or cornered, evoking dissonance that can descend into side-taking and hinder progress toward change.

- **Being in a hurry.** Agents are under a lot of pressure to get things done. This pressure can result in agents conveying to the client that the client is not important or that the client's agenda is of secondary importance to the agent's. It can also result in the agent getting ahead of the client. This results in dissonance in the relationship, leading to resistance on the part of the client, which then slows the process down further. According to Monty Roberts, the horse trainer who is the subject of the movie "The Horse Whisperer," "act like you've only got 15 minutes, it'll take all day; act like you've got all day, it might take 15 minutes."

Skills and Strategies To Respond to Resistance

The skills and strategies used to respond to resistance follow the same style of MI that has been described thus far. These methods do not constitute a change in the manner of being with the client; rather, they highlight particular ways of responding to the client that most efficiently roll with the resistance the client is displaying. As mentioned before, the proof that a skill is working is in the client's response. If the client is getting increasingly resistant even after using a skill, try something different.

Methods of responding to resistance can be divided into reflective responses to resistance and strategic responses to resistance. Reflective responses to resistance include ***simple reflections*** and complex reflections. They also include two additional complex reflections—***amplified reflections*** and ***double-sided reflections.*** The thinking behind reflective responses is to respond to resistance with nonresistance. Simply acknowledging what clients say through a reflection can allow them to further explore the behavior in question, rather than the resistance to that behavior.

An amplified reflection reflects back what the person has said, but increases its intensity. Usually, the resistant element is intensified. For example, the client says, "Quitting drinking is not something I've thought about." An amplified reflection could be, "Drinking is something you will continue to do without question." Amplified reflections allow the client to argue the other side and, in this case, argue for change.

Some key elements to an amplified reflection are:

- It is a reflection (a statement).
- The resistant element is intensified, increased, or exaggerated.

Do not use sarcasm in the amplified reflection. Sarcasm will only increase a client's resistance instead of decreasing it. The intent in an amplified reflection is to present the extreme of the client's statement so that he/she will back away from the extreme and end up talking about change.

Amplified Reflection

Increasing the intensity of the resistant element

Double-Sided Reflections

A double-sided reflection reflects both sides of the client's ambivalence. This is a very helpful skill, particularly in the early stages of change when the client's talk is still steeped in ambivalence. A stem for double-sided reflections is, "On the one hand… on the other hand…" Following is an example:

Client
I don't really want to quit but I know I should. I just don't know how I'd do it.

Agent
On the one hand you see that this is becoming more important, but on the other hand you're not sure what the first step might be.

Some key elements to a double-sided reflection are:

- It is a reflection (a statement).
- It reflects both sides of the ambivalence.

In order to provide a double-sided reflection, an agent needs to hear two sides of ambivalence from the client. It is inappropriate to use a double-sided reflection if only one side of the argument is presented.

Strategic responses to resistance involve finding specific ways to reduce the dissonance the client is experiencing. ***Shifting focus*** involves bypassing the topic that the client is resisting, rather than confronting it. The intent of shifting focus is to first acknowledge what the client is resistant about, and then shift the conversation to something that is more workable. In this way the agent is not changing the subject, but shifting the frame or focus of the discussion.

Client
So, I got a hot UA. Now you're going to tell me all about what I'm doing to mess up my probation.

Agent
I can see you're worried about my response. What I actually wanted to talk about is how you are feeling about struggling with sobriety.

Client
I'm mad about the amount of things I have to do to stay in line with the courts.

Agent
All of your conditions are really overwhelming. What priorities feel most pressing to you?

In ***coming alongside,*** the agent acknowledges that the client may indeed decide not to change his/her behavior. In order to resist or oppose the agent, the client must begin to argue in favor of movement toward behavior change. This skill is not used to manipulate the client, but to honestly acknowledge the difficulty of change and the reality that a client may choose to not change.

Shifting Focus

"We've talked about what other people say about your drinking; let's now talk about what you think."

Coming Alongside

"It sounds like the pros of using still far outweigh the cons. So it may be that you decide smoking is something that you don't want to give up."

When the agent verbalizes this, it allows the client to take a step back and respond in favor of change.

Client
I just don't know if I can keep this up. The pressure of keeping a job, staying sober, and toeing the line is just too much.

Agent
It may be that all of this is just too much for you, and giving up might be the only option you see.

Reframes offer a different meaning or interpretation of what the client is saying. Reframes are particularly powerful when they show how an accepted behavior might be considered risky, or show clients that something they see as a weakness could be reframed as a strength. Reframes can change any of these four areas:

1. Framing something a client views as positive as something potentially negative.
2. Framing something a client views as negative as something potentially positive.
3. Changing the timeframe.
4. Changing the meaning of the words.

Following are some examples:

Client
I only drink when I'm out with friends. I'm not an alcoholic; I never sit and drink alone at home.

Agent
You feel that your drinking isn't causing you problems because you only drink with your friends. Yet I wonder if it is this kind of social drinking that mostly gets people into legal trouble, because they drive home after drinking or get in fights at the bar.

Client
This is my second time on probation. I just don't think I'm going to make it without problems.

Agent
Because of a past failure you're worried that you won't succeed. Yet, perhaps you know better than you did the first time around what works for you and what doesn't to stay out of trouble.

Client
I'm never going to be able to do this.

Agent
This feels impossible right now. (changing timeframe from never to right now)

Client
I can't stay in treatment for 5 years. That's just impossible.

Agent
Five years seems like an eternity. Let's break it down and set some goals for some manageable timeframes that can work for you.

Client
I'm really unmotivated to do this.

Agent
You haven't found a good enough reason to do this yet.

Client
I don't know how to do this.

Agent
You haven't learned the skills to do this yet.

Agreement with a twist is a reflection followed by a reframe (as discussed above). It begins by agreeing with what the client says and ends with a slight twist or a change in direction.

Client
You have no idea how hard it is. You've never been in my shoes.

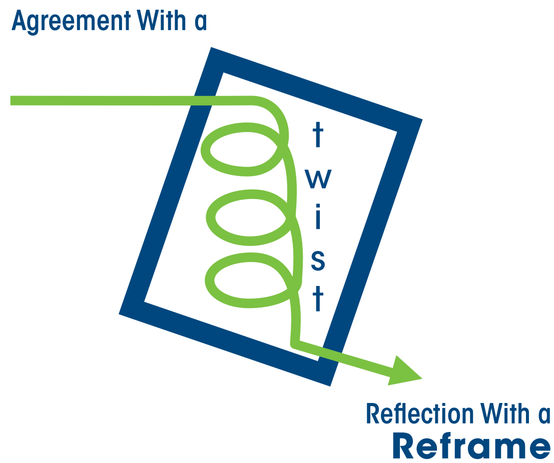
Agent
You're right. I cannot fully grasp how difficult this is, and it seems you're really ready to take the lead here and come up with some possible solutions.

Client
I don't know why there's even a restraining order. She has gone to the judge and told him to drop the case. I don't get why the state is involved. So yeah, it doesn't make sense why I shouldn't see her.

Agent
She's so important to you that you are willing to risk going to jail in order to see her in the short term.

Emphasizing personal choice/control is a skill that is particularly helpful and equally difficult in corrections. We sometimes believe that clients do not have a choice, and that they **have to** listen and do as we say. We then use ordering and threatening language (e.g., "you will do as I say") with clients. This actually makes them react more negatively, and they in turn respond by asserting their choice and freedom (e.g., "watch me"). This strategy puts the responsibility for change on the client by emphasizing that what the client does is really his/her choice. It is an empowering strategy that supports the client's self-efficacy. An agent successfully uses this skill by:

- Actively supporting the client's exploration of choices and consequences.
- Supporting the client's perception of control and responsibility.
- Reinforcing the client's options and exploration of choices.



Disclosing the interviewer's immediate feelings is an addition to the resistance skills outlined by Miller and Rollnick. When with a resistant client, sometimes simply acknowledging that, as the agent, you feel stuck because you are not sure where to go next, helps normalize the situation and creates the potential for some consonance and movement.

Assessment Techniques

Providing feedback on handling resistance helps agents. As client resistance increases, so does an agent's anxiety. Helpful feedback provides the opportunity for an agent to slow down and review what happened, including what was done well and what could have been done differently.

When reviewing a session, look for the following:

- How did you know the client was resistant?
- What was causing the client's resistance? (See the seven possibilities provided on page 39.)
- What did the agent do to manage the client's resistance?
- What did the agent do that was unhelpful and inadvertently increased the client's resistance?

Agent behaviors that increase or contribute to client resistance are usually coded as MI nonadherent skills. Some coding systems separate them by the particular trap or roadblock that was used (e.g., teaching, confrontation, advice without permission, etc.).

Strategies and Techniques for Supervisors

Modeling skills to reinforce their acquisition continues to be the primary way of supporting agents in skill development. Modeling can be done during any interaction with staff, including staff meetings, discussions about clients, or individual conversations with staff. Staff display resistance about a variety of issues. As a supervisor, using these skills to manage the resistance can be an extremely powerful learning tool for staff. Following are examples of staff comments and the corresponding supervisor responses:

Staff
I don't see why we have to do things differently when things are working right now. My clients do well and I always receive good case reviews. Why are we talking about evidence-based practices and learning new skills when things are working? Why fix what isn't broken?

Supervisor
You're confused by why we'd want to change something that is working. (simple reflection)

Things are working perfectly now and you see no room for improvement. (amplified reflection)

Being successful with your clients is really important to you, yet you're wondering if these evidence-based practices will add any real value to what you already do. (double-sided reflection)

That's a good point that you're making. Tell me about what you see working well and not so well with the way things are right now. (shifting focus)

You know, you may decide these new practices and skills just aren't your thing. (coming alongside)

Right now, learning more skills feels like it's too much for you. (reframe)

If you really believed that these evidence-based practices made a difference, you'd be all for learning them. (agreement with a twist)

You have to choose how to learn and use these skills. (emphasizing personal choice/control)

You know, as you say that, I feel overwhelmed and frustrated. I imagine that you're feeling a little bit of this too. (disclosing feelings)

Following are different resistant statements that staff make about using MI in corrections. We have provided some responses that demonstrate rolling with resistance. All statements that the agent makes should be spoken in a positive MI tone of voice.

"How am I supposed to pay back all these fines when you won't let me get a decent job?"

- You are really concerned about money right now. (reflection)
- How do you suppose we could work together to organize your finances? (shifting focus, collaboration)
- You are in a tight spot and there is a part of you that would really like to get free and find a solution. (agreement with a twist)
- Being successful is really important to you, and you can't see a way to get past your financial problems. (double-sided reflection)
- On the one hand, you have to pay all these fees, and yet probation prevents you from being able to make money. (double-sided reflection)
- You are not feeling a lot of support and you would like to work together to find a better job. (agreement with a twist)

- Getting a good job is more important than paying the fine. You want to be practical. (complex reflection)
- You need to pay for the necessities and the fines seem unfair. (complex reflection)
- You are frustrated that your probation is not supporting you. What would that support look like? (shifting focus)
- You are feeling really pressured. How did it go at your job this week? (shifting focus)
- Maybe this probation thing isn't for you. It's up to you whether you pay the fines. (coming alongside, emphasizing personal choice/control)

"Being on probation makes me want to do drugs. It stresses me out and I need to smoke just to chill out."

- Probation is stressing you out. It's your choice how you deal with the stress. (emphasizing personal choice/control)
- The court determines the conditions of your probation. What you do with those conditions is up to you. (emphasizing personal choice/control)
- You're feeling a lot of pressure to use drugs. In the final analysis, what you do is up to you. (emphasizing personal choice/control)
- Then, you are in the driver's seat. (emphasizing personal choice/control, reflection)
- The longer you are on probation, the more tempting it is to smoke. (reflection)
- Smoking pot is the only way you know to relax. (coming alongside, reframe, amplified reflection)
- So you can tell when you are getting stressed. On the other hand, you don't have too many alternatives for dealing with it. (double-sided reflection)
- Just coming in here to meet with me is probably stressful. (reflection)
- Up until now, doing probation has been stressful for you. On the one hand, you want to ease your stress with drugs. On the other hand, you want to be successful. (double-sided reflection)
- I'm getting a sinking feeling that none of this is helpful for you. (disclosing feelings)
- I'm sensing a lot of despair. (amplified reflection)

"I can't keep track of all these appointments you guys have me going to. Drug class. Counseling. Work. How am I supposed to be at all these places at once?"

- You are feeling overwhelmed with your life right now. Since you're here, how would you like to move forward?
- You are feeling overwhelmed. You've got a lot of balls in the air and it's important to you to start sorting things out.
- Keeping track of everything might be impossible.
- You have a million things going on, yet you managed to come in on time today.
- You're finding it virtually impossible to meet your obligations on probation.
- Something has to go or your head is going to explode.
- This is so important to you, and there are so many expectations that you don't know where to start.
- You keep attending classes, attending therapy, and going to work. You are wondering how much longer you can keep up this pace.
- I'm feeling like you have a lot of anxiety around this issue.

- You're scared you are going to crash and burn.

"You might as well send me back. These conditions are just a setup to make me fail. I can't do all this stuff!"

- It is your choice whether you stay in the community or not.
- As strange as this decision seems, it's up to you whether you want to go back or not.
- You might as well give up.
- This is hopeless.
- Maybe you are not ready for probation.
- Your conditions feel overwhelming and you want to go back. What's going well for you right now?
- Before we give up on what you've done so far, let's talk about your goals from last time.
- You're feeling hopeless. Yet, here you are week after week showing up for probation.
- I don't know the details of your environment. What are some places that are the hardest for you to maintain your parole conditions?
- You're worried about whether you are going to make it on probation. Deep down, a part of you really wants to succeed.
- You're so fed up that you are really ready to pack up and go back to prison.
- On the one hand, you're feeling fed up with the conditions of probation. On the other hand, going back to jail is the last thing you want to do.

"The system doesn't care about people. They just want to make money."

- What do you care about most?
- You're struggling financially. What could we talk about today that would help you work on your financial situation?
- Sometimes I feel frustrated with the way the system works too. What do you care about most?
- The system doesn't seem to care about people. What about you? What do you care about most?
- I understand how you could feel that way. What are some of the things you care about?
- The system just loves to exploit you for your money.
- All the system cares about is exploiting you for your money.
- You wonder why the system doesn't share your priority of caring about people.
- Being valued as a person is essential to successfully completing your probation.
- You're a human being. Not an ATM.

Finally, supervisors may reinforce agents' skill acquisition by providing sufficient learning and coaching opportunities so agents want to better strategically reinforce their change talk. This could include acquiring further formal training, using resources, having meetings with coaches, or practicing change talk strategies during staff meetings. The firstline supervisor is ideally positioned to facilitate and translate these skill acquisition strategies into a local office community of practice.

Coaching Strategies and Techniques

The coaching strategies described in all of the previous chapters can help coach agents to manage resistance. Skills to manage resistance may be called for in heated situations, so increasing efficacy in these skills requires a lot of practice, coaching, and role play. In the same way that we help clients to develop good skills to manage high-risk situations, agents need support and practice to use these skills effectively in emotional situations with clients.

Following are some ideas/exercises for coaching resistance skills:

- **Viewing tapes.** Watch video examples from recored interviews. The purpose of this is to recognize resistance in the client (or agent), watch what the agent does in response to this resistance, and brainstorm alternative ways of responding to the client.
- **Structured real plays.** Divide the group into triads that are composed of one person playing the client, one playing the interviewer, and one rater who rates the interviewer's skills (emphasizing ways of handling resistance). After the raters rate about 20 skills demonstrated by the interviewer, the group debriefs and provides feedback to the interviewer. The participants then switch roles in the group until each person has had a chance to play each role.
- **Wimbledon triples.** Form groups of six. Create two three-person teams in each group, and sit so opposing teams face one another. One team begins by throwing out resistant client statements to which the other team responds with a short simple reflection or an amplified or double-sided reflection. The teams then switch roles.
- **Threesome tag.** Set up a role play in which one person portrays a client role and several (often three) agents play a single agent. Give clear structure and instructions for what each person is to do. For example, each agent picks certain resistance skills he/she wants to practice and uses them in this exercise. Also ask the listeners to focus on resistance, watching for client resistance and what the agent did in response.
- **Roadblocks exercise.** This exercise provides agents firsthand experience of what happens when agents do not follow MI and take a contrary approach. It allows agents to experience the resistance and psychological distancing that clients experience when there is dissonance in the communication. The format for the exercise is to form pairs, with one person playing a client and the other playing an agent. Ask the client to identify a change that he/she is *considering,* something he/she is *thinking about changing* but has not definitely decided to change. He/she will then tell the agent about the change being considered. The agent's task is to use as many roadblocks and traps as possible while trying to help this person make the change they want. (This is *not* a motivational interviewing exercise.) Fit in as many common roadblocks as you can in the time allotted. Then ask the two participants to switch roles.

  Debrief the exercise, starting with the client role first and then the agent role. Use a flipchart sheet divided into two columns, as shown in exhibit 5–1. Use the following questions to facilitate the debriefing: What was it like for the client trying to talk about changing the behavior? How did the client feel? What are the underlying messages conveyed by roadblocks? (For example, "Listen to me, I know the answer." "What you have to say doesn't matter.")

EXHIBIT 5–1: ROADBLOCKS EXERCISE

Client	Agent
List things like: • Powerless • Not important • Angry	List things like: • Powerful • All about me • Talking more than the client
Bottom-line message: Don't want to share	Bottom-line message: This is about me

Resistance or Sustain Talk

Here the author provides a list of resistance statements and sustain talk from a client. Your challenge is to determine whether a statement is sustain talk or whether it is resistance.

Target behavior: marijuana use. Keep in mind that **sustain talk** is about the target behavior. If it contains the problem behavior, it is probably sustain talk. **Resistance** is interpersonal. If it contains "you," it is probably resistance.

1. "Smoking weed relaxes me."
2. "You people are just here for the money."
3. "You don't really care about me."
4. "Who are you to tell me what to do?"
5. "Marijuana is a lot less harmful than alcohol."
6. "I can be more creative when I smoke."
7. "Have you ever smoked marijuana?"
8. "I already quit cocaine. I don't want to give up pot, too."
9. "I'm not going to quit!"
10. "I can smoke marijuana without any problems."
11. "You're not listening to me!"
12. "What do I have to do to quit?"
13. "I don't think I can quit."
14. "When can I leave this session?"
15. "Yeah, whatever."
16. "I'm probably going to keep on smoking."
17. "But I really love pot!"
18. "Screw you!"
19. "I just can't cope without pot."
20. "There's no way I can quit smoking."
21. "I really have to smoke pot."
22. "This program sucks."
23. "Pot isn't something that will cause you trouble. I know."
24. "Stop repeating everything that I say!"

1. Sustain Talk–Reason, 2. Resistance, 3. Resistance, 4. Resistance, 5. Sustain Talk–(No) Need, 6. Sustain Talk–Reason, 7. Resistance, 8. Sustain Talk–Desire, 9. Sustain Talk–Commitment, 10. Sustain Talk–(No) Need, 11. Resistance, 12. Resistance, 13. Sustain Talk–(In)Ability, 14. Resistance, 15. Resistance, 16. Sustain Talk–Commitment, 17. Sustain Talk–Desire, 18. Resistance, 19. Sustain Talk–Reason, 20. Sustain Talk–Ability, 21. Sustain Talk–Need, 22. Resistance, 23. Sustain Talk–Need, 24. Resistance.

Common Struggles When Managing Client Resistance

Apart from the traps and roadblocks mentioned previously, agents can face other barriers when managing resistance. An agent can **fail to recognize** resistance in the client and continue the conversation, while the client's resistance increases. Similarly, the client's resistance also gets louder if the agent believes that **ignoring** the resistance will make it go away. Sometimes a client's resistance can make the agent respond in an **antagonistic** or **defensive** way. The agent proceeds to clarify for the client who is in charge and who has the power. While this feels empowering for the agent, it only increases the resistance in the client and becomes a lose-lose situation that might have a negative impact on the agent-client relationship as a whole. Finally, in an attempt to use skills to manage resistance, the agent may become **sarcastic,** thereby engendering defensiveness in the client.

Endnotes

1. P. Chamberlain, G. Patterson, J. Reid, K. Kavanagh, and M. Forgatch, "Observation of Client Resistance," *Behavior Therapy* 15(2):144–55, 1984.

2. W.R. Miller, R.G. Benefield, and J.S. Tonigan, "Enhancing Motivation for Change in Problem Drinking: A Controlled Comparison of Two Therapist Styles," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 61(3):455–61, 1993.

3. C.J. Trotter, “The Supervision of Offenders–What Works?” in L. Noaks, M. Maguire, and M. Levi (eds.), *Contemporary Issues in Criminology* (Cardiff, UK: University of Wales Press, 1995) pp. 236–50.

4. C. Trotter, *Working With Involuntary Clients* (London, England: SAGE Publications, 1999).

5. W.R. Miller and S. Rollnick, *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People to Change,* 2d ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2002).

Glossary

Affirmations	Affirmations are statements that acknowledge and convey respect or appreciation for a client, his/her struggles, and his/her achievements.
Agreement with a twist	A strategy used to respond to resistance, agreement with a twist is a reflection followed by a reframe.
Ambivalence	The coexistence of opposite and conflicting feelings about a given subject, especially as applied to a potential target behavior.
Ambivalent	The state of mind in which an individual experiences some significant and very different feelings about something.
Amplified reflection	A skill used to respond to resistance, amplified reflection reflects back what the person has said, but increases its intensity.
Autonomy	The condition of self-government or independence; the right of everyone to determine his/her own attitude and perspective about a given subject.
Behavioral gap	An area in the client's life where discrepancy exists between his/her current experience and his/her values or ideal experience.
Change talk	Self-motivating statements people make that reinforce movement toward a behavior change. Change talk is invariably in relationship to some potential target behavior or problem. There are two stages to change talk: preparatory change talk and mobilizing change talk, which includes commitment language at stronger levels and taking steps, for client speech that refers to new behavior that has recently taken place. There are four subcategories to preparatory change talk that include client statements about: (1) desire for change, (2) ability to change, (3) reasons for change, and (4) need for change. The acronym DARN is used to refer to these different aspects.
Client centered	A nondirective orientation in which the agent's role is to listen to and then reflect or paraphrase (without judgment) the words of the client, based on the assumption that the client has the internal resources to improve and is in the best position to resolve his/her own behaviors.
Closed questions	Any questions that can be readily answered with a minimal response.

Collaborative	This refers to the agent cooperating with the client for change. Collaboration is apparent when agents negotiate with the client and avoid an authoritarian stance.
Coming alongside	A strategy used to respond to resistance, coming alongside allows the agent to acknowledge that the client may indeed decide not to change his/her behavior.
Community of practice	A formal or informal group that promotes mutual engagement in a joint enterprise with a shared repertoire of skills, tools, and language. A motivational interviewing (MI) community of practice is a group of practitioners that periodically meets together to practice and support each other in their MI skill acquisition.
Complex reflections	Complex reflections typically add substantial meaning or emphasis to what the client has said. These reflections serve the purpose of conveying a deeper or more complex picture of what the client has said.
Confrontation	Any statement the agent makes that is sarcastic or a put-down, or that expresses incredulity or negatively labels the client.
Contemplation stage	During this stage, people become more aware of the potential benefits of making a change, but the costs tend to stand out even more. This conflict creates a strong sense of ambivalence about changing.
Decisional-balance matrix	The process of examining the pros and cons for changing a behavior, and the pros and cons for not changing a behavior, in order to become more aware and resolve some of the related ambivalence.
Develop discrepancy	The principle of developing discrepancy recognizes the value of a client's discovering the discrepancy between his/her current behavior pattern and another more preferred pattern. The key to developing discrepancy is trusting and supporting the client in doing his/her own discovery, rather than pointing out and advising him/her on how to discover something that could be meaningful.
Directive	Guiding and providing direction through subtle reinforcements of what the client is saying in a manner that keeps the conversation moving in a direction that helps the client resolve his/her ambivalence to enter into and maintain a change in behavior. Examples of selectively reinforcing client statements are choosing what client content to include in a summary, or deliberately reflecting one side of the client's expressed ambivalence.
Disclosing the interviewer's immediate feelings	Prudent and deliberate self-disclosure of feelings on the part of the agent to better engage the client.

Double-sided reflection	A skill used to respond to resistance, double-sided reflection reflects both sides of the ambivalence.
Eliciting change talk	One of the guiding principles of motivational interviewing is to have the client, rather than the agent, voice the arguments for change. Change talk refers to client statements that indicate a desire, ability, reason, or need for change. The agent can either listen for gratuitous change talk and reinforce it (e.g., ask for elaboration, reflect it, or affirm it) or deliberately elicit it with one of the strategies for eliciting change talk.
Emphasizing personal choice/control	A strategy used to respond to resistance, emphasizing personal choice/control puts the responsibility for change on the client by emphasizing that what the client does is really his/her choice.
Evocative	A strategy or an open question that deliberately draws a response from the client in a particular direction or on a particular topic.
Express empathy	Expressing empathy is a core principle in motivational interviewing that involves the use of reflective listening skills such as reflections, summaries, open questions, and affirmations, which support a client-centered orientation. Accurate empathy—truly understanding where the other person is coming from moment to moment—is largely a function of expressing empathy.
Links	Linkages formed between what a client says in a previous session—or earlier in the current session—to something he/she is currently talking about.
Listening reflectively	When an agent listens reflectively, he/she emphasizes the use of open questions, affirmations, different kinds of reflections (e.g., simple, double-sided, amplified, and other complex reflections), and summaries. This set of client-centered active or reflective listening skills is sometimes referred to by the acronym OARS.
MI adherent	MI adherent describes particular agent behaviors that are consistent with a motivational interviewing approach.
Open questions	Open questions are questions that seek a broad amount of information, allow for a range of possible responses, and convey interest in the client's point of view.
Paraphrases	Paraphrases involve making a guess about meaning, then continuing the thought or adding something that was not said directly.
Preparatory talk	This is early stage change talk—usually in the form of desire, ability, reasons, and need for change around a target behavior—that has not reached the intensity of commitment language.

Reflections	A reflection is a statement of our hypothesis about what the client is saying. There are three levels to a reflection—repeat, rephrase, paraphrase.
Reframes	A strategy used to respond to resistance, reframes offer a different meaning or interpretation of what the client is saying.
Repeats	Making a direct restatement of what the client said.
Rephrases	Saying the same thing the client has said in slightly different words.
Resistance	Resistance is any observable client behavior that signals the client is becoming uncomfortable with how the conversation is or is not unfolding. Interview styles that confront, challenge, and generally put pressure on the client's ambivalence around changing a behavior frequently result in demonstrations of client resistance.
Righting reflex	The righting reflex is a very natural temptation practitioners experience to set a client right or "fix" him/her in some way that the client is fundamentally capable of doing on his/her own. When agents succumb too much to their "righting reflex," they may be inadvertently causing their clients to react negatively (because the client senses that his/her prerogatives are being displaced or diminished). The righting reflex is one of the core principles of motivational interviewing captured in the acronym RULE (resist the righting reflex, understand and explore the person's own motivations, listen with empathy, and empower the client). A strong righting reflex keeps an agent from rolling with resistance, which is another way of stating the same principle.
Roadblocks to communication	There are 12 roadblocks that are listener styles or tactics that interfere with the other person's experience of feeling truly heard.
Roll with resistance	Rolling with resistance describes the ability to avoid getting "hooked" or caught up in a client's demonstration of resistance, regardless of the form it takes (e.g., rebellious, rationalizing, reluctant, resigned). Rolling with resistance implies taking the client's manifestation of resistance seriously as a signal for changing tactics, but not taking it personally.
Shifting focus	A strategy used to respond to resistance, shifting focus involves bypassing the topic that the client is resisting, rather than confronting it.
Simple reflections	Simple reflections typically convey understanding or facilitate client/agent exchanges. These reflections add little or no meaning (or emphasis) to what clients have said.
Skills to elicit change talk	These skills involve techniques such as importance ruler, query extremes, looking back/ahead, evocative questions, decisional balance, goals and value exploration, and elaboration.

Spirit of MI The spirit of MI (motivational interviewing) is the nontechnical, more adaptive component of MI. There are three components or dimensions to the MI spirit: (1) respect for the other person's autonomy—his/her right to be self-governing and independent of others, (2) interest in evocative methods that empower the client to discover his/her own solutions, and (3) commitment to collaboration with the client as completely as possible. Improvement or growth along these three dimensions implies changing oneself and it is in that sense that the MI spirit is adaptive rather than technical.

Strength-based view This is a perspective that brings to the forefront the client's strengths, protective factors, and resiliency when making any important case decisions.

Summaries A summary is a group of reflections that bring together different aspects of what the client is saying.

Support self-efficacy Supporting self-efficacy is a core principle of motivational interviewing captured in the last letter of the acronym DERS (developing discrepancy, expressing empathy, rolling with resistance, supporting self-efficacy). Supporting self-efficacy means to be willing to pay close attention and either create or use available opportunities for reinforcing the client's sense of capacity or confidence for achieving (prosocial) goals. This principle is also portrayed using the term empower in another acronym (RULE—resist the righting reflex, understand and explore the person's own motivations, listen with empathy, and empower the client) that depicts the same four principles.

Sustain talk Sustain talk is the language or way that clients talk about a target behavior when they are not really interested in changing it. This disinterest in change is often expressed as desires for status quo, abilities to function with the behavior, reasons that status quo is preferred, and needs for keeping things as they are.

Target behavior Target behaviors are genuinely and mutually identified by the agent and the client as the behavior change goals that are most important for the client to immediately examine and work on.

Transition Transition points occur when the agent subtly changes direction or changes the topic in a conversation with the client.

Working alliance The working alliance consists of the shared tasks, goals, and bonds between the client and his/her counselor.

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Corrections

Washington, DC 20534

www.nicic.gov
National Institute of Corrections • 320 First Street, NW • Washington, DC 20534 • 800–995–6423