MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

INNOVATION MEANS PRISONS AND COMMUNITIES TOGETHER
Does it have a use in the Criminal Justice System?

One of the objectives of the Criminal Justice System is to help change offenders behaviour that contributes to, and supports, their criminal lifestyle with the aim of reducing re-offending. For offenders to engage in any process which may lead to change they need to be motivated.

According to Miller and Rollnick (2002) the culture within prison establishments has traditionally been adversarial and thus not conducive to the collaborative spirit of motivational interviewing. They argue that the techniques used in motivational interviewing has the potential to provide people working with offenders skills that will increase the effectiveness of interactions with offenders and other staff.

Before discussing what Motivational Interviewing is, it is necessary to define the term ‘motivation’.

What is motivation?

Motivation is the reason why people do the things they do, or do not do things.

There are many definitions of motivation but effectively it is:

- A process which cannot be forced upon or given to others
- It is about the choices we make (this may include the choice to do nothing)
- It is variable, it changes at different times and in different situations
- According to Miller & Rollnick (2002) to make a change we need to be Ready, Willing and Able
  - Ready: refers to it being the right time for the individual to start making changes.
  - Willing: this implies choice as when an action is perceived to be chosen by the individual it is more likely to happen and be sustainable.
  - Able: the person needs to have the confidence to change and any barriers, actual or perceived, need to be addressed.

How do you motivate someone to change a pattern of destructive behaviour? How do you help someone to change who has been offending, committing anti social acts etc? How do you motivate someone to keep appointments and to participate in programmes to address their offending behaviour when they have lived a chaotic life and where criminal behaviour has been the norm? These are issues staff working in the Criminal Justice System face every day.

Often our response to an ‘unmotivated’ person is to give them the skills and resources to be ‘able’ whilst persuading them of the necessity to be ready and willing. They may agree to make changes, they may say they agree and carry on as before or they may get defensive, argue back and resist change.
Why is motivation important to our work?

- The need for constructive approaches to working with offenders to prevent crime
- Effective techniques of behaviour change
- Target criminogenic needs
- Motivation plays a part in the ‘responsivity’ of offenders to interventions (an understanding and response to level of offenders motivation to change)
- There is a great deal of money invested in programmes. They may be high quality but offenders have to sign up to them
- Offenders need to be ‘adequately’ motivated to change in order to benefit

We are not born with a level of motivation but most human behaviours are motivated by desires to achieve, eg. Individuals running in the London Marathon do so for very different reasons. For example, there are those professional athletes who are motivated by the desire to win, those who are motivated to raise money for charity and those who are just doing it for fun. People are also motivated to avoid situations e.g. if you are confronted by a wild animal you would be motivated to run away to ensure your safety. Thus our behaviour is goal directed and therefore it is important to understand the goal. Our goals can be internally or externally motivated with those internal being more likely to be sustained. There are many factors which can influence our goals and one way of looking at this is to use Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1954).
Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs

This theory is often depicted as a pyramid consisting of five levels with the four lower ones being grouped together as deficiency needs whilst the top level is termed a growth need. Whilst the deficiency needs must be met the growth needs are continually shaping our behaviour.

The above categories can be explained as follows:

**Physiological needs:** food, water, warmth and sleep  
**Safety needs:** freedom from pain, physical and psychological danger  
**Social:** friendship, belonging, giving and receiving love  
**Esteem:** the need for respect from others, need for status, recognition, independence, autonomy  
**Self actualisation:** the need for self respect, self fulfilment including feelings of confidence and competence.

Maslow proposed that some needs in our lives take precedence over others. For example, the basic needs of water and food take precedence over the need for shelter. He argued that only when the needs at the base of the pyramid were, for the most part satisfied, could those higher up be addressed. Therefore, when physiological and safety needs are taken care of, people feel the need for friends and family or seek a sense of being part of a community and so on.

It is useful to know where someone is in the process. Understanding where an offender is can help identify those factors that can be targeted to reduce re-offending (criminogenic needs)

**e.g.**

- If someone is being bullied and their personal safety is being threatened, they are not likely to be interested in anything else.

- If an offender is committing crime because they feel that they have a need to belong to a group (i.e. a social need), we can look at motivating them to engage in activities which encourage a sense of belonging in a pro-social manner.
The Cycle of Change

A key concept in motivational work is the Cycle of Change proposed by Prochaska and DiClemente (1982).

It is useful because:

- It helps understand where a person is at the present time in terms of motivation
- Where they are on the cycle will influence the work with them

It is possible that people will progress through the stages in a set order, however, this is the exception rather than the rule. Most people move within the cycle. When changing behaviours people might (re)lapse and return to an earlier stage several times before they achieve their goals. Each time this happens they will gain new information about their behaviour and will be able to apply that information in the next attempt.
What do the stages of change in the cycle mean?

**Pre-contemplation stage**: the offender does not believe they have a problem or does not want to change. During this stage the disadvantages of change outweigh the advantages, eg. You may be concerned about the consequences of the offending behaviour but the individual is not – it is ok with them. It is common for individuals to be resistant to ‘interventions’ and explanations about how to ‘give up that lifestyle’ however, relevant information about risks, and how to avoid or minimise them, may well be received.

At this stage it is important to explore the advantages and disadvantages of their current lifestyles.

**Contemplation Stage**: the offender is beginning to evaluate their offending lifestyle and starts to think about change.

The balance of costs and benefits begin to shift, although the offender may appear not interested in change. ‘I should give up because of all the problems. But what am I going to do instead? I’ll miss it and my friends.’

**Decision Stage**: the offender decides they do want to change their offending lifestyle. The balance has shifted. The offender is preparing to take action and has confidence in their capacity to change. Change is seen as worthwhile. This is often a planning stage. Goal setting, identifying internal and external supports/resources and identifying strategies to support change can help.

**Action Stage**: the offender takes steps to change their lifestyle.

Support and specific skill training and/or relevant programmes can be provided. Review initial reasons that led to the decision to change.

**Maintenance Stage**: the offender keeps on working to change.

Changes in behaviour maintained for six months or more are usually associated with substantial improvements in the quality of life (e.g. housing, employment, relationships, physical and mental wellbeing). Without such changes, the effort to change may not seem worth it and relapse is more likely. Offenders need to be encouraged to talk about the positive reasons for maintaining change to reinforce their decisions.

**(Re)lapse**: the offender returns an offending lifestyle and/or stops engaging in behaviours to promote change.
This is when the client has ‘given up’ trying to change and is quite common. It is important to assist the person to see it as a learning experience, to assess their motivation to change and to develop strategies to overcome the issues involved with going back to their offending lifestyle.

At this time it is useful to use Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs as a possible guide to why the (re)lapse has occurred. For example, if the individual is being bullied (i.e. their safety is of concern) then they are not going to be concerned with maintaining the changes.

**How to identify the stage:**

**Pre-contemplation:** “I haven’t got a problem, it is just others who disapprove”

**Contemplation:** “I might want to change but I’m not sure”

**Decision:** “I want to change my behaviour”

**Action:** “I have started to……”

**Maintenance:** “Behaving this way is normal for me now”

**(Re)Lapse:** “I have gone back (but all is not lost)”

Once you have identified where they are on the Cycle of Change and what, if any, other factors may be preventing them moving, how do you help?

One method of this is the use of Motivational Interviewing techniques.
What is Motivational Interviewing?

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is an approach based on the principle that all human behaviour is motivated. Originally developed for use with people who had problems with alcohol and drugs, it has now been applied to a wide range of problem areas including offending behaviour. MI is a directive and client centred approach designed to help an individual change their problem behaviour by allowing them to explore and resolve ambivalence which is seen as the primary obstacle to change. Therefore, it acknowledges that many people experience ambivalence when deciding to make changes – they both want and do not want to change as all change involves a loss. It also acknowledges that people can perceive both the advantages and disadvantages of change as well as maintaining their current lifestyle. The aim is not to immediately focus on the action of changing but working to enhance their motivation to change.

As stated above, MI is a directive approach, not in a confrontational or ‘pushy’ way, but in a quiet eliciting style which allows the individual to move towards change rather than it being externally imposed. As previously stated, the motivation to change has to come from within or it is unlikely to be sustained. Therefore, the underlying power of the motivational interviewing technique is that the offender talks themselves into changing the behaviour rather than having it suggested or advised by someone else.

The ‘spirit’ of motivational work is having a genuine desire to understand and empower others to change.

To achieve this it is necessary to:

- Explore the positive and negative consequences of an offending lifestyle
- Provide opportunity to explore their specific concerns
- Use reflective listening and summaries to understand and communicate understanding
- Elicit self-motivational statements
- Help enable the offender to decide whether to change

It is important to avoid arguing, imposing a label on them, telling them what they must do or trying to break down denial with confrontation. It should never feel as if you are confronting the offender but rather that you and the offender are confronting the issues together.
The differences from a more directive/confrontational approach of working with offenders can be seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Directive/Confrontation approach</th>
<th>Motivational approach</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Characteristics:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Characteristics:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Heavy emphasis on the offender accepting they have a problem.</td>
<td>• Emphasis on empathy and gradually building internal desire to change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Emphasis on labels such as ‘offender’, ‘sex offender’.</td>
<td>• Focus on behaviour and believe that change is possible.</td>
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<td>• Resistance is seen as ‘denial’.</td>
<td>• Reluctance to change is a normal part of the change process.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Resistance is met with argument and persuasion.</td>
<td>• Argument and resistance is partly a response to the interviewer’s style.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The interviewer decides what the goals are and how to reach them.</td>
<td>• Joint agreement of goals and agenda.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Core Skills:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Core Skills:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Telling/informing</td>
<td>• Affirming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Rational argument</td>
<td>• Listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Closed questions</td>
<td>• Open questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Advice</td>
<td>• Summarising and reflections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Instructions</td>
<td>• Supporting change talk and self motivating statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Warning and threatening</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Principles:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Principles:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• The interviewer is the expert</td>
<td>• Express empathy – strive to gain genuine understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The beneficiary must change</td>
<td>• Develop discrepancy – create internal desire to change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Consistency of approach</td>
<td>• Avoid argument, seek agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Everyone needs to be treated the same</td>
<td>• Support self belief/responsibility/empowerment</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>• Respond to difference</td>
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(Adapted from Miller and Rollnick 2002)

Motivation varies in degrees and levels for different activities. A person may be highly motivated to engage in some activities and ambivalent about others.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components of motivation</th>
<th>Signs of low motivation</th>
<th>High motivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Willing, able and ready</td>
<td>Resistance talk</td>
<td>Self motivating statements/ change talk</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Willing:** Importance (why?) | ● I don’t give a *****  
● Why should I  
● Ah but….. | ● I want to change because…  
● I’m concerned  
● The good things about changing are… |
| **Able:** Confidence (how?) | ● I can’t  
● It’s not my fault  
● They need to change not me  
● It’s outside of my control | ● I can do this  
● I have these skills  
● I did it before  
● I will be able to do it in these situations |
| **Ready:** (When?) | ● Not now  
● I’ll do it sometime | ● Now’s the right time  
● I can make the first step  
● I’ve started |

Actively helping someone to overcome barriers can be very effective after a decision to change has been made. Time and effort can be wasted if a shared goal has not been achieved. The nursery rhyme of “Soldier, soldier won’t you marry me” can be used to illustrate this point – the more the “sweet maid” helps the solider overcome the barriers to marrying her, the more barriers he finds. Finally he tells her that his goal is different to her goal, he has a “wife of his own”.

Motivational work is essentially dynamic and responsive to the individual. The essence of the motivational approach is not to make assumptions about what will motivate a person but to draw this out from them. Different values are expected and the aim is to understand these and find common ground.
There are 6 main techniques that are effective for this:

- **Express empathy:** Understand their perception without judging, criticising or blaming. Be respectful (this does not mean sympathising with, or approving of, their behaviour). Main way to achieve/express this is by reflective listening. Ambivalence is normal.

- **Avoid arguments:** Must not be a head-to-head. The worse case scenario is that the worker is arguing for change and the offender argues to defend their position and resistance to change may increase. They may back down and agree to change if you have the power to enforce but it will be superficial and not sustainable. Labelling someone is unhelpful and is may become self fulfilling.

- **Look for inconsistency/develop discrepancy:** between present behaviour and broader goals/values. Create cognitive dissonance triggered by looking at the costs or consequences of present/past behaviour. The aim is to create motivation within the offender rather than relying on external factors which are more sustainable. They have to present their own reasons not the worker giving theirs.

- **Roll with resistance:** 4 main types of resistance – arguing, interrupting, denying and ignoring. Use ‘psychological judo’ – use their momentum to your advantage e.g. reframe their statements slightly, turn back questions to them or reflect.

- **Support self responsibility:** Offenders present arguments for change (acknowledgement of/concern about problem, intention to change, optimism about change)

- **Emphasise choice:** People are more committed to a course of action that they have freely chosen rather than those they are pressured into. However avoid too many choices at first as this can be overwhelming.
Tools to aid the above techniques:

**Handling Resistance:** Communication is a two way process and therefore our behaviour can contribute to the resistance. Therefore, if you are experiencing resistance be prepared to change your behaviour. Gordon (1970) refers to interventions which hinder change as ‘roadblocks’. He states that these may be used with the best intentions in trying to ‘fix’ the problem but is actually disempowering the offender. Such roadblocks include: moralizing; threatening; shaming; judging; criticising and arguing. Resistant behaviours include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resistant Behaviour</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arguing</td>
<td>Reflective listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interrupting</td>
<td>Reflective listening, change focus of conversation, reflect any discrepancy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denial</td>
<td>Stop giving advice; reflective listening; emphasise personal control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignoring</td>
<td>Reflective listening, reflect on the silence and observed feelings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Listening:** We all think we can listen but in practice good, effective listening, is rare.

There are different levels of listening:

- **Limited listening:** this is when the listener is preoccupied, thinking of other things and occasionally acknowledging the person who is speaking to them. In this situation the ‘listener’ may fiddle with objects, looks at their watch, eyes wander etc.

- **Content listening:** the main activity is to listen to what is said. However, listening is more than just the ‘words’ and important information may be missed which could result in misunderstanding. The ‘listener’ does try to limit the distractions and will be more attentive than in the former level.

- **Reflective listening:** the key is taking account of content, meaning, emotions and body language. Exaggerate the positive things they say and understate the negatives. Summarising is an important aspect:
  - Repeat back what you heard or observed
  - Summarise what you think the person meant
  - Summarise what you think they seem to feel
  - Summarise any discrepancies in what they say
How does it work?

Exploring the importance of the positive and negative consequences. This can be called decisional balancing which gives the offender a more complete picture of their offending behaviour. It can also be a positive experience for the person as someone is interested in them.

Questions: to see how important their lifestyle is to them and how confident they are to change. Some may think it is time to give up offending but may not be confident in their ability to do it. Others may feel confident they can give up the lifestyle but not see it as important to them (Ready, Willing, Able)

Summarise and invite action: do not try to provide solutions, invite the offender to provide them. The onus is on them, not you, to make a decision to change. Express empathy, especially about the difficulty of changing. Emphasise personal choice and control.

Building confidence: Ask questions to allow the offender to build confidence in the ability to change.

Exchanging Information: Providing information can be a useful strategy to provoke thinking about change and to correct misconceptions about risks associated with offending behaviour. It is important to explore the personal implications of the information for the offender. Do not use information as evidence to push the offender into change. Always follow up feedback of exchanging information by seeking the offender’s response.

Set goals: Goals are very important motivators. The more realistic, specific and attainable the goals are, the greater their emotional impact will be. Since goals belong to the offender and can promote their feelings of self responsibility and confidence, goal setting needs to be a collaborative process between the worker and the offender.

Effective goal setting is:

- Consistent with the offenders ‘stage of change’
- Negotiated with the offender so they are more likely to commit to them
- Positive. Changing behaviour will be more successful if couched in positive terms
- The goals are realistic and achievable
Principles of best practice:

**It is important to:**

- Acknowledge that changing an offending lifestyle can be a slow and difficult process even for those who do want to change
- Discuss what else might need to change in their life before they would be able to/consider changing their offending lifestyle
- Ask the offender what they think the main problems are
- Focus on the progress and effort the offender has made, and encourage them when they experience success even if small or temporary. Many small successes can lead to more permanent change than big dramatic changes
- Help the offender to set small, achievable goals that are meaningful to them
- Always maintain a non-judgmental approach. You may not agree with the offender’s behaviour but you must respect their right to make their own choices in life.

In summary, the techniques of Motivational Interviewing, together with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and the Cycle of Change, can be powerful in working with people to facilitate change.

**Finally:**

> ‘The skill is applying Motivational Interviewing techniques within the available time and in relation to your role’
References:

New York: Wyden

Motivational Interviewing – preparing people to change.

Transtheoretical therapy: Towards a more integrated model of change.
IMPACT is part of a community programme called Equal – a European Social Fund initiative which tests and promotes new means of combating all forms of discrimination and inequality in the labour market. The GB Equal Support Unit is managed by ECOTEC.