

Colorado Probation Research in Brief

Probation Officer—Probation Agency Fit: Understanding Disparities in the Use of Motivation Interviewing Techniques

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Key Words: Probation, community corrections, motivational interviewing.

Summary/Conclusions

The current study evaluated if the adoption of Motivation Interviewing (MI), as measured by perceived comfort, was influenced by perception of organizational climate, support, and resources for MI. Researchers collected three different surveys from 834 probation officers from six different jurisdictions. The results indicated that when the organizational support depended on the alignment of probation officer comfort of MI and the perceived organizational support and resources for MI.

Limitations of Information

The current study examined MI skills, which may not apply to other practices. MI comfort may not be an accurate gauge of MI use. The study utilized data from individual perceptions. Perceptions can differ between individuals, even in similar environments. It is possible the survey missed other variables that may have influenced perceptions.

Caveat: The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings. Some of its limitations are described above.

Staff Satisfaction Through Support

One of the biggest challenges for community supervision organizations is integrating new skills and training into daily practices. The current study examined probation officers' perceptions of individual MI comfort and organizational attributes. Researchers used a series of surveys to collect the probation officers' opinions of MI use, organizational climate, and officer's perception of the functioning of the organization. The surveys were sent to six different United State Probation jurisdictions. The final sample included 834 probation officers.

Probation officers completed surveys on organizational climate, motivational interviewing, and organizational functioning. The organizational climate survey focused on how the agency planned for the future, employee performance, development of employee skills, and perception of openness to innovation and new ideas. To gauge MI, probation officers were asked 10 questions about their comfort with various aspects of MI. The final survey asked about the functioning of the organization, such as staffing levels, staff retention, funding, focus on training, and community support. The survey responses and demographic data was run through statistical analysis to determine what relationships exist.

The results of the analysis indicated that most (96.6%) probation officers perceived they are more comfortable with MI techniques than the agency is supporting the officers' use of MI. The analysis uncovered that overall satisfaction was highest when the PO's perception of MI use was consistent with the de-

gree of the organization's support for MI. The analysis suggests that probation officer satisfaction was highest when organizational support matched the probation officer's level of comfort with MI. As the gap in support and MI comfort widens, a drop in satisfaction begins to emerge.

Practical Applications:

- ✓ Before implementing a new skill, departments may consider surveying staff about organizational climate and organization functioning.
- ✓ Check in with staff as they are learning new skills.
- ✓ It may be beneficial to discuss organizational support, resources, and skills when attempting to improve employee satisfaction.
- ✓ Assist staff in determining their own personal reasons for implementing new practices.
- ✓ Ask innovators and early adopters of skills to inventory the resources and support available for new practices.
- ✓ Try matching level of resources and support with the use and comfort of practices being implemented.
- ✓ Since the probation officer fit was found to be important to satisfaction, probation departments may want to revisit their hiring process to ensure they are continually hiring individuals who would be a good fit for current practices.
- ✓ Probation departments may consider communicating which practices are essential for unique caseloads and job titles.