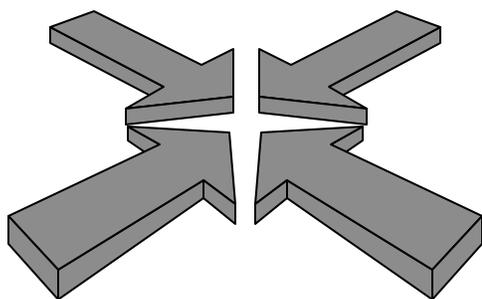


# Motivational Interviewing Newsletter: Updates, Education and Training

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## New Perspectives



## FROM THE DESERT

### Shock and Awe

The so-called “carrot and stick” approach to motivation is, I believe, one of the most misused phrases in the English language. The misuse has to do with differentiating it into two components; the carrot representing positive reinforcement, and the stick representing punishment. The reference is to beasts of burden: feed them when they do what you want them to do, and beat them when they do not.

In fact, the phrase originates from the use of a carrot *on* a stick. A carrot or other delectable is tied with a string and suspended from the end of a stick, so that it is just out of reach in front of the head of an animal pulling a cart. The driver seated on the cart keeps the carrot just out of reach, so that the donkey keeps moving forward toward it, trying to reach it. (The wise driver also lets the carrot be captured now and then, and replaces it with a new one.) In Monty Roberts fashion, there

is no pain inflicted; only moving forward toward a desired goal.

This is the mirror opposite of the “shock and awe” strategy used to attack Baghdad (terminology that many Americans find morally reprehensible). The implicit assumption is that change is motivated by inflicting such overwhelming dominance and punishment (in this case, death and destruction) that the adversary simply gives up and accedes to one’s wishes. The “shock” component is plain enough – a human body in medical shock just shuts down – but what of the “awe” component? My word processor lists the synonyms of *awe* as astonishment, esteem, fear, reverence, veneration, and wonder. Among other English language connotations, it describes a common human response to God, to that which one regards with ultimate esteem and wonder.

Shock and awe thus represent two different but inter-related elements of an ultimately authoritarian approach. Shock is the forceful, coercive component. In U.S. confrontational addiction treatment programs, this has been the “break them down” element. It has particular connotations of breaking the person’s will, self-esteem, ego. That is followed, in theory, by a rebuilding process: “Break them down in order to build them up.” The rebuilding is done, of course, in the image of the builder. Having been so shockingly overwhelmed, the adversary is awed by and reconstructed in the image of the victor. It is the ultimate expert role: I know what is best for you, and am willing to demolish you in order to achieve it.

Once I regarded this as a peculiarity of American addiction treatment. We made an exception to the usual rules of professional conduct by designating people as incapacitated “alcoholics” or “addicts” who required this kind of treatment, justified on humanitarian grounds.

Certainly Synanon and the related “therapeutic” communities provide a naked example of such authoritarianism at work. Now I understand this as a much more generalized disposition toward other human beings: that they are misguided and need to be either destroyed or remade in our own image. Within my favorite source of analogies, *Star Trek*, this is the fictional Borg race that “assimilates” all other species by devastating and then rendering them automatons subservient to a single communal consciousness. The historical real-life examples are legion. In fiction and in real life, this authoritarian approach is in tension with an opposite disposition that honors autonomy, represented in *Star Trek* as a “prime directive” of non-interference with established societies.

As Steve and I have sought to describe it, the underlying spirit of motivational interviewing embodies respect for autonomy, and fosters a collaborative approach. For me this is complemented by an awe for the positive, creative, enduring qualities of human spirit. I do choose to believe, as Rogers did, that there is an inherent natural tendency for individuals to evolve in a positive, healthy, pro-social direction given the right conditions of acceptance and support. The ancient Greek term is *teleo* – to grow toward one’s natural, mature, perfected form. It is consistent with the notion of a seed within each of us, an intended natural self that may or may not be realized. (When Christian scripture enjoins one to “be perfect”, the translation is usually from forms of the Greek *teleo*. To be “perfect” in this sense is quite different from being 100% conformed to rules. It is to be matured, to be grown into that for which one was intended. The dying words of Jesus, “It is finished,” derive from the same verb: It is perfectly complete.)

Although humanistic and existential traditions have much in common, here is an important point at which they differ. Existentialism assumes no absolutes, no given, latent, natural self. The only meaning or identity a person has is that which is chosen or created. The human potential movement of Maslow and Rogers started from a fundamentally different assumption: that there is this natural potential in human beings with both common and unique elements. I suspect (and, of

course, honor) that MINTies vary widely along this humanistic-existential continuum.

Both existential and humanistic perspectives view the process of psychotherapy as collaborative and companionable. Both are evocative. The humanistic therapist aims to help the client discover meaning; the existential therapist aspires to help the client create it. In this regard they are similar, and motivational interviewing lies squarely within this “third force” disposition of psychology. In practice, MI draws upon both cognitive (e.g., reframing) and behavioral methods (e.g., differential reinforcement), but in spirit MI is unmistakably part of the humanistic-existential tradition in which awe is reserved not for one’s own wisdom, but for that in the other which is yet to be born.

### Milestones for Training

I would like to suggest a series of places where people seem to get stuck in learning MI, as a possible agenda to guide training and supervision. They occur in a reasonably consistent order, so that as trainees pass one they often encounter the next obstacle. This is, as always, a work in progress, and suggestions are welcome.

**1. Menschenbild.** An initial point of difficulty has to do with openness to the underlying assumptions of MI. I considered stating this as “understanding” or “accepting” the underlying assumptions, but I don’t think it has to go that far. Without at least a *willingness* to consider MI as a possible frame of reference, however, it is difficult to get further. “It won’t work with my clients” may bespeak a view of one’s clients that is incompatible with the spirit and practice of MI. The task here is to help the trainee suspend *docere*, at least long enough to experiment with *ducere*.

**2. Empathy.** A second milestone is to develop facility with reflective listening. Without the skill of accurate empathy, and of OARS more generally, one can go no further in learning and practicing MI. That is why I have given such attention to reflective listening in MI training. I believe that OARS are fundamental.

**3. Recognizing Change Talk.** In order to move beyond reflective listening in MI, the next step is to be able to *recognize* change talk. Unless you know change talk when you hear it, you won't be able to evoke and reinforce it. With the new discoveries of Paul Amrhein, this step has been refined to recognizing Desire, Ability, Reasons, and Need language.

**4. Evoking and Strengthening Change Talk.** Being able to recognize change talk, the next hurdle is to learn how to call it forth and reinforce it. Here the directive component of MI is introduced. This involves an additional set of skills; in particular, learning how to use OARS differentially, to row in a particular direction.

**5. Collecting Bouquets.** Responding to change statements with immediate reflection is one step. Another important skill is to collect them into or summaries. Putting together the desire, ability, reasons and need stems into bouquets is, I believe, an important skill for resolving ambivalence in the direction of change. It is in seeing all of this together, simultaneously, that the person's perception shifts toward change.

**6. Rolling with Resistance.** It is fine and good to know how to evoke, reinforce, and summarize change talk. One also needs, however, an MI-consistent way of recognizing and responding to counter-change talk when it occurs, in order to reduce commitment to the status quo ("resistance"). The component skills are largely the same; it's a matter of using them to decrease rather than increase thematic material (e.g., amplified versus understated reflection).

**7. Evoking and Strengthening Commitment.** In terms of specific skill development, Phase 2 has been most neglected in MI to date. From Paul Amrhein's work, it is clear that an interviewer needs to differentiate Commitment from other forms of change talk. How does one know when to move from Phase 1 (desire, ability, reasons and need) to Phase 2 (commitment)? One needs skills for testing this transition, knowing whether and how to proceed with evoking commitment to a change goal and plan. Change talk without

commitment does not yield behavior change. Premature press for commitment undermines behavior change.

**8. Transition to Other Therapeutic Methods.** Finally, once one has negotiated Phase 2, there is usually a shift into a more directed therapeutic process if treatment is to continue into a Phase 3. Once the client arrives at the action stage, the therapist often needs more than Rogers. It is also worth emphasizing that some clients arrive in therapy already at the action stage, and probably need little or no MI in order to get started. Relying on reflection alone can be counterproductive. (When you are wheeled into the emergency department of a hospital, you want your doctor to do more than say, "Ooh, I imagine that hurts.") We have seen therapists who were terrific at MI, who then had trouble negotiating the shift into a different and more directed phase.

In a way, these eight hurdles provide a broad outline for training. They are not going to be accomplished in a workshop, but can guide the process of training and supervision. When you are working with an individual or group over time, determining where each person is in the acquisition of these skills may provide clearer guidelines for where to focus training efforts next.

**“If...” – A way of broaching the subject  
without creating resistance...**

**Carl Åke Farbring**

If I were a rich man...

Fiddler on the roof

As MI counselors and trainers we all know that premature talk about planning what clients need to do usually creates resistance. Very clearly the level of commitment in Paul Amrhein’s research drops as the client is asked to go from previous change talk into explicit planning in DO-language; for those who have already made positive statements to change the level of frequency and strength drops dramatically. Bill concludes that this is a hazard with manuals when you go ahead without listening to where clients are and this may be an explanation why Project Match did not produce expected results. (MINUET, November 2002). A sudden drop of change talk and intensity of DO-language may be interpreted as resistance. This is an important message for us and for our work with clients. In corrections, where I work, a treatment plan is mandatory and a necessary routine in the work of prison officers and probation officers and we have been working a lot with manuals lately. So what can we do? Do we have to wait until we feel the client is ready? Is it all up to intuition and timing? My practical experience with clients tells me that there is a way out.

Do you remember the feeling you experienced when you were dreaming of everything you would do if you won a million: “If I were a rich man...” You were planning lots of things even though they were not real. Depending on the situation they were, of course, more or less realistic but contained nevertheless often a solution to immediate problems and there was also a positive feeling linked to it, sometimes even euphoric. The question is – can you use this method also with clients and make them think and talk about planning without feeling forced go through with their plans? And is it possible that *if-planning* will maintain or even increase previous levels of frequency and intensity of DO-language and avoid the emergence of resistance?

I have used this method often with my clients and though I have no empirical data to back it up I have found it useful and I frequently recommend probation officers in our service to use it. Clients often like elaborating on *if-planning*, experience cognitive structuring on the way and hopefully learn something from it.

*John, I know you don’t feel quite ready yet to make plans to move out from your neighbourhood where it seems difficult for you to stay away from crime, but **if** you did, what would be the best option for you and how would you benefit from it?*

*Maybe it’s a bit early, Michael, for you to think of the harmful effects of your use of heroin, but **if** you did how would you go about it? What would be the best way for you personally to bring about change here?*

*So Peter, in a way it is still important for you to use drugs together with your friends but **if** you suddenly would feel that it wasn’t worth it anymore – how could you tell or make it clear to your friends and make them respect your decision?*

There is a clear difference in that way of bringing up the subject of planning and this:

*So now Richard it’s time for us to make a plan for you. What kind of plan do you want to make in order for you to stop using drugs...*

To me it’s quite obvious that this way of bringing up the subject will increase resistance even with clients who have started thinking about change.

In ordinary conversation we use a lot of “ifs”. I think we could use it also with clients with the explicit purpose to elicit ideas about change without creating resistance.

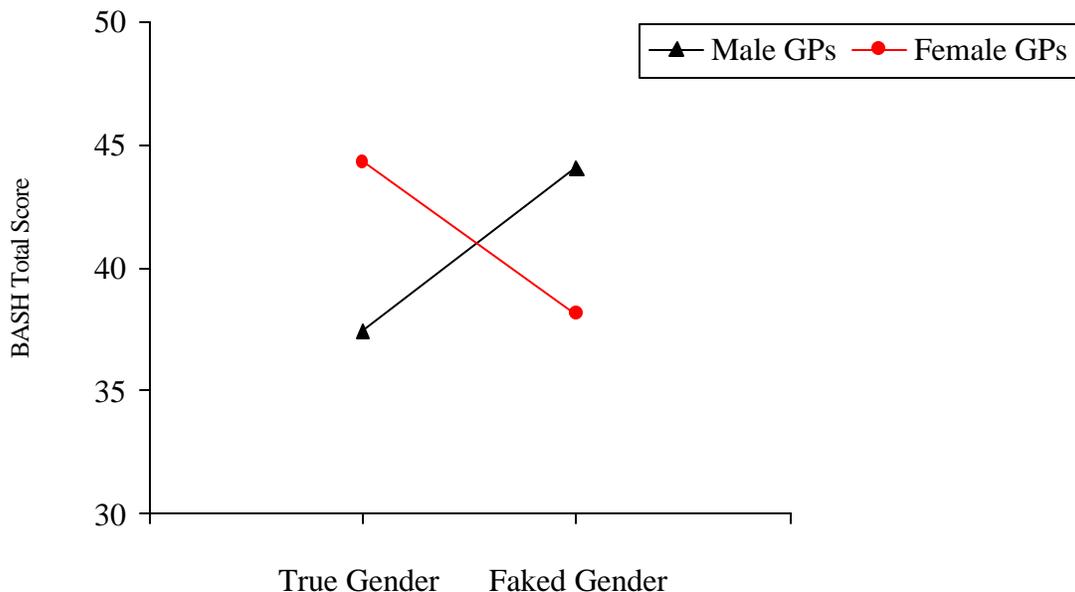
**FROM OLD EUROPE**

**Unpopular, disliked and frustrating research findings: II. Dressed to listen**

In a previous issue I presented our findings on personality correlates of inflated self-efficacy ratings: How do we change the expectancies of our clients if self-efficacy is strongly related to personality? However, here is another unpopular, disliked and frustrating research finding from our lab.

In order to determine the effects of our MI trainings for general practitioners we developed a German-language scale assessing patient-centeredness (Don't BASH: **B**rief **A**ssessment of **S**hared **D**ecision **M**aking in **H**ealth **C**are). During an early phase of scale development we asked MI experts as well as undergraduate students to evaluate transcripts of encounters with standardized patients.

With one exception all transcripts rated by the undergraduates had been carefully masked with regard to the GP's gender. Guess what happened? Unmasking one transcript changed the rankings dramatically in favour of the – less patient-centered – female GP (can't avoid a stupid smirk...). Meanwhile we have finished a study on gender effects in practitioner-patient communication (Hagen, Demmel, Nicolai, Zimmer & Rist, 2003). We presented transcripts of encounters with male and female GPs to 89 undergraduate students and faked the gender. The study revealed a halo effect: nearly all participants favoured the "female" GPs ( $F(1, 509) = 46.88, p < .001$ ). Most frustrating, "gender" did not interact with "performance" in terms of expert's empathy ratings. Shall we stop training females? However, we have to demonstrate the external validity of these findings...



## Sag' beim Abschied leise Servus...

Probably, in 2004 a new editor will take over. It's been a pleasure to edit the newsletter and to correspond with MINTies from all over the world: Thanks a lot!

What about the future of the newsletter? Will we find an enthusiastic new editor? The listserv is flourishing (Chris Wagner is doing a great job). Are we still in need of a second – public – discussion forum? Do we need a peer-reviewed journal? Personally, I don't want to miss Bill's notes from the desert and all the other pieces from Steve, Carl, David...

## Something completely different...

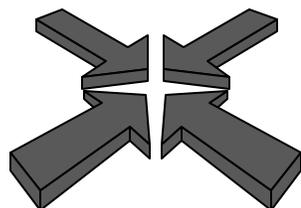
Some weeks ago I bought the new CD by Bill Frisell (<http://www.billfrisell.com>): The Intercontinentals (a recording with musicians from Brazil, Mali, the US and – Greece). I listened to the CD while finishing 5-minute tasks (e-mails, letters etc.). When track five started I stopped writing, searched for the booklet and looked up the title of the piece: "Listen" ... Have you ever been to a concert of this brilliant musician?

All the best,  
Ralf

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