

# Motivational Interviewing for Community Corrections: Expanding a Relationship-based Approach with Exemplar Implementation

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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN** research and practice remains a contested area. Many implore researchers to make their work more useful and relevant to direct practice, while a parallel appeal calls practitioners to embrace research in their day-to-day work. Research findings are not often written in practitioner-friendly language, and so much of what improves practice work with offenders is “lost in translation.” Practitioners can be wary of researchers who claim superior knowledge and can discount firsthand experience and qualitative narratives of direct field applications—which only seems to continue needless mediocrity.

How can it be that “what is known is not what is adopted”? This article actively seeks to detail firsthand experiences from our group of training purveyors who provide technical assistance for implementation of Motivational Interviewing (MI). MI has been labeled a “natural fit” for community corrections (Iarussi & Powers, 2018), and our group<sup>2</sup> has spent a dozen years implementing MI by facilitating training-of-trainer (ToT) initiatives, with over 30 large-scale projects for Community

Corrections (CC) departments across the United States. The Michigan Department of Corrections (MICH DOC) is our latest MI implementation project. To date, this ToT initiative has accredited 36 MI trainers who have trained MI to 2,400 staff. This DOC continues its commitment to train all 12,000 community corrections, prison, and administrative staff to make MI its “base of service” (Clark, 2018).

We hope to shed light on what we believe benefits CC groups if they adopt MI, the implementation route of training-of-trainers, and our belief in “bottom up” implementation efforts to increase staff motivation going forward. We close by speaking to training and implementations’ response to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic (Carlos, 2020) and CC’s introduction to social distancing. We also glance at new competency development using computer avatars to simulate client interviews, providing the end-user with guidance and feedback—all without close human assistance.

## **The Decision to Adopt: The Risk-Need-Responsivity Model**

Many departments have already adopted the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model—and for good reason, as the RNR model (Bonta & Andrews, 2017) is currently the premier approach in corrections, providing empirically validated methods for reducing recidivism.

However, RNR is not a perfect solution. Further work on the principle of Responsivity documents that one must retain a focus on

the person in order to apply any empirically-based model effectively (Lowenkamp et al., 2012). Even the best approaches will fail if the offender is uninterested and does not want to participate. Start with client engagement, or forget starting at all. Here again, research points the way for CC to reduce recidivism.

## **The Decision to Adopt: Blending Care and Control with Motivational Interviewing**

The research we list below is quite clear: Effective officers establish a working alliance via warm, high-quality officer-offender relationships, and these relationships improve the delivery of RNR. There is a blend of control and connections that has been found to be predictive of success on supervision (Lovins et al., 2018). Descriptions from research are plentiful:

- The “synthetic” officer—surveillance and rehabilitation to establish a “working alliance” (Polaschek, 2016; Viglione, 2017; Skeem & Manchak, 2008; Klockars, 1972, 41).
- Warm but restrictive relationships (Bonta & Andrews, 2017).
- Firm, fair, and caring—respectful, valuing of personal autonomy (Kennealy et al., 2012).
- “Hybrid” or “synthetic” approach to probation, combining a strong emphasis of both social work and law enforcement (Grattet, Nguyen, Bird, & Goss, 2018).

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- Motivational communication strategies and Motivational Interviewing (Viglione, Rudes, & Taxman, 2017).
- Open, warm, enthusiastic communication, mutual respect (Dowden & Andrews, 2004).
- Blending care with control through a “dual relationship” (Skeem, Loudon, Polaschek, & Camp, 2007).

Punishment or rehabilitation. Law enforcement or social work. Hard or soft. These “either/or” dichotomies have grown stale, while research points to the inclusiveness of “both/and.” To embrace outcome research is to concentrate on the middle ground—an area that could represent a “Goldilocks principle” of “just the right amount” of both control and a working alliance.

This call for a dual relationship raises a “good news”/“bad news” contrast. The good news is that multiple studies find the quality of the officer-offender relationship predicts success on supervision and determines whether programs actually reduce new crimes (Keannealy et al., 2012; Lovins et al., 2018). The bad news is that many researchers worry about the difficulty that line officers will encounter in balancing the dual roles of law enforcement with alliance (Paparozzi & Guy, 2018; Skeem et al., 2007; Kennealy et al., 2012).

MI has been called a “natural fit” for CC (Iarussi & Power, 2018), and certainly one important reason is that MI offers the methods and strategies for negotiating this blending of control with a working alliance. These relational skills emerge from the MI community—informing supervising officers how to carry out these dual roles. Polaschek (2016) states, “Not all officers may actually have high levels of skill in forming a constructive relationship with offenders, and others may have views about how to relate effectively that are misguided” (p. 6). The methods and strategies are available and within reach for probation and parole staff who seek to negotiate control with alliance. Consider the titles of various subsections in a new publication that focuses on the application of MI to community corrections (Stinson & Clark, 2017):

- Addressing Violations and Sanctions
- Explaining the Dual Role
- When Goals Don’t Match—Clarifying your Role
- Adherence to Core Correctional Practices
- Muscle vs. Meekness
- Understanding Control vs. Influence
- “Power with” vs. “Force Over” to Facilitate Change

Here is a “deep-dive” into negotiating this dual role. Administrators and researchers alike have found that Motivational Interviewing can transform mechanical and depersonalized offender models and add important core counselling skills, realizing all the while that offender engagement is a critical first-step. As a result, some of the most widely accepted RNR programs within the last decade, EPICS, STARR, and The Carey Guides, have all recommended and/or taught Motivational Interviewing as an important component to better facilitate a climate of behavior change (e.g., EPICS, University of Cincinnati Correctional Institute; STARR, Robinson, Vanbenschoten, Alexander, & Lowenkamp, 2011; see Gleicher, Manchak, & Cullen, 2013, The Carey Group Training Information, Carey, & Carter, 2019).

It is our experience that when agencies understand “just the right amount” they turn to Motivational Interviewing (MI) to increase RNR’s effectiveness (Clark, in press/a). Note that the Carey Guides trains MI and refers to it as “...a communication style that *provides the groundwork for the professional alliance* [emphasis added] that is so critical to helping offenders address skill deficits and implement risk reduction strategies” (Carey & Carter, 2019).

## Implementation of Motivational Interviewing

While research tells us what can improve our practice with offenders, it is of little use if implementation science can’t turn this “know” into “know-how.” As a technical assistance group, we have been fortunate to implement the practice of MI, and we add some reasons why MI is a boon to training efforts:

- “MI appears to be the exception to the often-cited gap between research and practice...a result of highly successful dissemination activities of its founders” (Hall et al., 2015, p. 1144).
- MI rises above many other interventions, because its procedures are clearly specified and measurable with fidelity monitoring systems (Weisner & Satre, 2016).
- There has been a large empirical examination of training methods in MI:
  - MI has unique literature about effective mechanisms for training MI.
  - MI’s procedures are well specified and defined.
  - Adherence and competence can be quantified and measured through the use of treatment integrity and

fidelity coding systems (Hall et al., 2015).

- MI is an EBP with a strong evidence base and relatively low costs compared with other interventions” (Williams et al., 2014).

The main authorities for this approach can be found within the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (MINT), an international organization established in 1997 as a professional community of practitioners and trainers (see Tobutt, 2010). Here is a unique asset for implementation—an international community of professionals committed to the improvement, training, and dissemination of MI. The MINT has grown to over 1,500 members and spread across 52 different countries. The spread of MI is truly notable because we estimate (Clark, 2020) that over 20 million people have been trained worldwide in MI—in 38 different languages. It is important that CC departments can discern quality for their training contracts by requiring purveyors to be members of the MINT community with resumes that document extensive large-scale implementations across corrections.

## Why ToT Implementation

Those who specialize in ToT initiatives want to leave MI trainers in their wake—all to enable in-house sustainability. Our group had witnessed two large waves of expert-led MI training come and go in the CC field; the first in the 1990s and the second in the mid 2000s.<sup>3</sup> We did not want to be part of any third wave that would not prove to be any more sustainable or enduring. Here’s where our practice reached concordance with research. A systemic review of 30 years of MI dissemination noted, “... The adoption of skills is rarely maintained by practitioners without extended contact through follow-up consultation or supervision” (Hall et al., 2015, p. 1148). The issue of “extended contact” and follow-up was what these training waves had certainly been missing. But if not through more training, how do we support skill retention and continued use?

As good fortune would have it, in 2007, the MINT organization gave consent for

<sup>3</sup> The first wave occurred in the 1990s as MI had become known and was gaining popularity in the CC. The second seemed to have a specific prompt. In 2004, the National Institute of Corrections (NIC) issued a publication entitled “Implementing Evidence-Based Practice in Community Corrections” and noted eight principles of effective intervention. One principle, “enhance intrinsic motivation,” cited MI—by name. The second spiral of training was soon underway.

interested MINT members to begin developing a “second circle” of trainers through training-of-trainers (ToT). Our TA group began offering ToT initiatives at that time, and over the next decade, interest in ToT implementation spiraled in corrections. Training by outside experts is expensive and many CC departments wanted to enable training and sustainability via in-house MI trainers. I (MC) remember a manager’s frustration, “I understand sustainability as well as the next Chief, but with my budget, I can’t keep hiring outside experts for more rounds of training.”

Avoiding advertisement or promotion, it’s hard to grasp how much implementation help a professional body like the MINT community can extend to its members. Consider the “MINT Forum,” an annual international gathering of all MINT members. Alternating between American and European destinations, the 2010 Forum was held in San Diego, California, where implementation expert Dean Fixsen gave the keynote address. The timing of this keynote brought to mind the adage, “When the student is ready the teacher will appear.” Since that time, MI training and implementation projects have increased in corrections to eventually realize MI implementation in all 50 states within the United States, with large-scale implementation initiatives achieved by multiple State Department of Corrections groups (Clark, 2018).

Why Training-of-Trainers? Simply, it works. Research caught up to practice as one of the first studies of ToT in MI by Martino et al. (2010), who reported, “This study provides the first evidence that program-based trainers, prepared adequately to teach MI, can help staff to learn MI with training outcomes similar to those achieved by an expert” (p. 439). The answer to the frustrated probation chief was realized. We could offer him an option, something that could rival the quality he was getting from outside experts—that would not drain future budgets. How to “prepare staff adequately to teach MI” is to build from the bottom up.

### “Bottom Up” Implementation

When agencies first contact us, they’ve already made the decision to adopt MI. We begin initial engagement by recommending meetings with all supervision/management to discuss installation tasks and timelines. There is a secondary agenda to these meetings—we seek to solidify their adoption decision by reviewing the benefits they will realize when MI is their “base of service” (Clark, in press).

We’ve made a recent change to build from the bottom up; so we now convene meetings to address line-staff as well as management. We were often frustrated that management had not considered staff buy-in before contacting us. Management generally makes the decision of what to import—often neglecting to consider the mind-set and motivation of line-staff.

When we started in 2007, almost all change within an organization’s routines emanated from management as top-down efforts. This was made apparent by the grumbling heard from staff in our initial training sessions—distracting us from important training content to try and work through their reluctance or resistance. A new study (Arbuckle et al., 2020) notes, “The spirit of MI is a ‘bottom-up’ model of quality improvement that develops collaboration as opposed to requesting change using confrontation and authority” (p. 5). Research-to-practice validates a new “bottom-up” approach to consider staff attitudes, buy-in, decisions, and readiness to change (Salisbury et al., 2019).

Our group has aligned ourselves to this inverted pyramid concept—using “roll-out” meetings with line staff that now run parallel with meetings we provide to management. Iarussi & Powers (2018) speak to considering staff readiness: “Providing information about the approach and evidence supporting its use can help develop trainee buy-in prior to arriving for the training” (p. 33). In our pre-training meetings, the benefits we speak of are many:

1. *MI is complementary to both the RNR model and Cognitive Behavioral Treatment (CBT).* When MI is added to RNR and/or CBT, both become more effective—and the effect sizes are sustained over a longer period of time (Miller, 2018). Two reasons for this empowerment: first, with MI in place, offenders are, first, more responsive to participate, and second, more likely to complete what is intended by the tandem EBP treatment. Add MI to empower outcomes.
2. *MI empowers the principle of responsibility.* Conditions that give power to offender treatment are well-known: engagement, intrinsic motivation, responsibility, readiness for change, and readiness for treatment. These conditions are both the focus and yields of MI practice.
3. *MI can stand the heat.* MI was created for

those who are more resistant, angry, or reluctant to change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). MI has been used successfully as an alternative to torture (O’Mara, 2018), improving interrogation techniques with detainees (Surmon-Böhr et al., 2020) and has recently been applied to counter-terrorism policing and deradicalization efforts (Clark, 2019). Ramping up coercion and toughness is paradoxical—the more you do it, the worse it gets.

4. *MI is suited for busy caseloads.* MI has been designated as an evidence-based practice for increasing both engagement and retention in treatment (NREPP, 2013). This type of engagement is as rapid as it is durable. MI has been called an “effective tool” for use within compressed time frames (Forman & Moyers, 2019).
5. *MI crosses cultures well.* Research found the effect size of MI is *doubled* when used with minority clients (Hettema, Steele, & Miller, 2005). Some treatments do not cross cultures well—yet the effects of MI are significantly larger for minority samples.

Viglione, Rudes, & Taxman (2015) note, “Rather than presenting a reform simply as a task change, better models of technology transfer must emphasize benefits of the reform and how reform can enrich work processes” (2015, p. 280). These benefits lend more reasons that MI has been called a “natural fit” for CC (Iarussi & Power, 2018).

### ToT Implementation: Convene an MI Implementation Team

Creating an Implementation team (Imp team) is another “win” we’ve realized from the research-to-practice stream. Implementation science suggests building a team to help the initiative with changes and trouble-shooting via all levels and layers. Fixsen states that this team’s primary mission is “Not to research—but to fix” (Fixsen, 2010). Higgins, Weiner, & Young (2012) note, “Large-scale reform often requires changes at all organizational levels, so an implementation team would be responsible to ensure that individuals across and down the organization—with competing interests—implement a team’s strategic plan” (p. 366). Teams help with multiple changes that pop up and need to be empowered to change policy and staffing patterns to keep the initiative progressing. We didn’t use these Imp teams in our early work—and

our outcomes suffered. Now when we review many changes the departments can expect, it is often enough to tip the decisional balance towards forming a team. Salisbury et al. (2019) cautions to look beyond competency attainment and realize that organizational supports in community corrections are just as important—if not more so—to drive the change forward. At least on this occasion, it seemed like “research” was speaking, and this “practice” group was listening.

### ToT Implementation: Selection of ToT Candidates

We know that supervisors can often walk down staff hallways and point out the offices of staff who have natural abilities to engage offenders. With that knowledge, we ask the Imp team and administration to consider our philosophy of “best in = best out” for selecting candidates. We ask all of our agencies to think beyond traditional roles (i.e., most senior staff, officers with prior counseling experience, personnel in their training division) and base selections on those with the natural skills called for by MI. We offer a screening tool to help selection. Some criteria we ask them to consider:

- Those who relate best with the offenders in your agency. These are the staff members who excel at establishing helping relationships.
- Those with innate talents for empathic regard and a collaborative demeanor.
- Those who are above average in their use of reflective listening skills.
- Those who use many open-ended questions and work to fully understand the problem from the offender’s perspective before moving forward.
- Those who are admired and respected by their colleagues.
- Those who voluntarily express interest in the initiative.
- Those who are likely to stay with your agency, as you want to invest your resources wisely.
- Those who demonstrate certain skills necessary to be a good trainer. These include an outgoing personality, high energy level, and the desire to lead others and take initiative to drive agency change.

In Michigan, the DOC Imp team issued a state-wide notice that they were seeking individuals who were interested in becoming coaches and trainers in MI. Nearly 200 staff responded to the call. The team added to our screening items to include availability,

agency classification, and geographic location. Further, all interested parties were required to submit an application detailing their qualifications, motivation for applying, and understanding of their Michigan DOC’s reentry goals. It is noteworthy that one of their open-ended screening questions was, “What is punishment?” Answers that were not even-handed or balanced seemed to reveal applicants who were not in sync with the “Spirit of MI.”<sup>4</sup> With screening completed, the Imp team creating a pool of 96 staff to begin training.

The 2017 book *Motivational Interviewing with Offenders* (Stinson & Clark) includes a whole chapter on “Implementation and Sustainability,” with one section entitled “Implementation comes in many sizes” (p. 212); the message of that chapter is that starting numbers can be large or small, varying by department size and scale. Regarding scale, some groups elect to implement in only one region or office out of many; others (like Michigan DOC) seek a state rollout. Regardless of scale, we always start with more candidates than are expected to complete. This is due to (a) attrition, as the ToT numbers often reduce as the process evolves and (b) use of the extra numbers to populate the coaching ranks (discussed in a coming section).

### ToT Implementation: With Selection Completed—Start Training

With ToT candidates selected, training begins. How much we train is made easy, as Martino et al. (2008) state, “Given the advancements in MI’s empirical testing, theoretical base, and training materials, research on MI has moved towards the most effective means of disseminating MI...” (p. 38). The extensive MI research took away the “guess-work” and established our format (Miller & Mount, 2001; Miller & Rollnick, 2002; Miller et al., 2004). We start with two days of MI-Fundamentals, followed by a four-to-six-week break for on-the-job practice, and then return for an advanced two-day session. Training is a mix of didactic lecture with discussions, small group, and full room exercises. “Watch one, do one, repeat” is our training maxim for skills-development.

### ToT Implementation: Stop to Assess Proficiency

After the two sessions of training concludes, candidates enter the fidelity phase. Our adage is simple: “To call anyone a piano teacher, you must first be able to play the piano—and *play it well.*” We use this maxim to justify obtaining objective ratings of MI abilities, where candidates tape and submit “live” demonstrations of their offender interviews. With the wide availability of “smart phones,” the ease of taping a session and submitting it has improved considerably.

Madson et al. (2013) state, “An additional strength in the research on MI is the abundance of observational measures available to assess MI fidelity” (p. 330). There are several instruments of varying complexity:

- Motivational Interviewing Skills Code (MISC; Miller et al., 2003).
- Motivational Interviewing Assessment: Supervisory Tools for Enhancing Proficiency (MIA-STEP; Martino et al., 2006).
- Motivational Interviewing Supervision and Training Scale (MISTS; Madson et al., 2005).
- Motivational Interviewing Competency Assessment (MICA; Jackson et al., 2015; Vossen, Burduli, & Barbosa-Lieker, 2018).
- Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity Code (MITI; Moyers et al., 2005).

While we know some who use the MIA-STEP, and also hear that many like the newer MICA, we use the most recent version of the MITI, which is designed to be used both as a treatment integrity measure and also as a means of providing feedback. It is an empirically-validated instrument that has met rigorous reliability and validity testing. It is the most widely used quality assurance instrument for testing MI and has been called the “gold standard” of MI competence assessment (Margo Bristow, personal correspondence, June 3, 2020). This is critical when training trainers—you must have the ability to assess skills—to know if a candidate is using MI (competence) and to what quality they’re using it (proficiency).

Scoring of our version of the MITI runs on a 1-100 scale, with a score of 75 representing beginning proficiency, yet we set the score of 85 as the entry benchmark for any candidate to continue in the ToT process. A candidate submits a tape, and results (scoring and feedback) are returned in a spreadsheet where a member of the MINT, trained in MITI coding, delivers a 20-minute telephone coaching

<sup>4</sup> The MI spirit is a mind-set (heart-set) that must accompany the skill-sets of this approach. It runs by the acronym PACE: Partnership, Acceptance, Compassion, and Evocation.

session based on their scoring results.

Our experience is that if the candidate will follow through to receive coaching, and resubmit a next tape, the candidate's scores generally rise to meet the required benchmark. A ToT initiative is difficult—you strive to end up with the best content experts possible, all within a 12-month window. It can be done but it's no easy task. With that in mind, we are fortunate that the MITI allows feedback and coaching to ready these candidates. Our use of time and efforts must be methodical and deliberate, so we use the fidelity assessment phase to ensure that more learning occurs, and use the MITI because feedback and coaching can be built in.

### **ToT Implementation: Developing Curriculum**

Those candidates who reach the fidelity benchmark now continue to the final ToT session. In this next step, they are given an assignment to develop five training modules that make up the core of MI. A random draw will pair them with a co-trainer and a second random draw will decide which module they are to present. Obviously, because they do not know what module will be selected ahead of time, they must come ready to present *all five modules*. We allow one week of preparation per module, so the break between the coding/fidelity assessment and the final TOT session is 5 to 6 weeks. The MI Implementation Team has already secured “agency time” so candidates can prepare their modules while at work. Here is another episode of learning to reach the goal of developing content experts. In our ToT model, candidates submit to evaluation while actively training. We are concerned when this is reversed and we see candidates being placed in passive, recipient roles (i.e., sitting in the back) while being “taught how to train.”

To help this process, we can extend trainer resources that include all of the content that the candidates were trained with. This involves presentation slides, videos, audio clips, participant handouts, as well as the all-important presenter notes. We believe the familiarity with the training content is helpful. We caution candidates that they must know the material, as reading from notes while presenting is unacceptable.

The development of an MI curriculum can take years. Delivering so many ToT sessions means training is constantly scrutinized and evaluated through subsequent practice samples of trainees. A student's skill

acquisition is being scored and graded—both immediately and constantly—over time. Here is another reason MI is an exemplar for implementation. Curriculums can be improved to “best-in-practice” levels. Consider that data compiled by our author group (TC) found an unprecedented 21 tapes scored 100 percent on independent MITI evaluations (Chandler, 2019).

### **TOT Implementation: Coaches are Needed**

For sustainability, any agency will need both in-house trainers and coaches. Candidates who fail to score the entry benchmark from the MITI metric are not removed or dismissed. They continue through this process—with the new goal to become MI *coaches*. They have experienced several training sessions and tape submissions with feedback and coaching. These staff continue to represent a resource, so instead of being turned away, they are invited to the TOT session to observe and continue their learning.

Here again, the volume of MI research is so helpful. MI has found the amount of training we recommend our MI trainers deliver is enough to change staff behavior, but post-training coaching and feedback is needed to change *client behavior* (Miller & Mount, 2001; Stinson & Clark, 2017). Ongoing coaching and feedback must be built in, so we enter these trainer initiatives with an eye for developing *coaches* as well.

### **TOT Implementation: Final Trainers Session**

After the random draws that pair the candidates with a co-trainer and assign the module to be presented, each pair takes turns presenting to a mock audience. A member of our technical assistance group observes and evaluates each trainer—as do their peers—based on accuracy of content (knowledge) and engagement of the audience through their training abilities (skills). A safe learning environment is established so that critiques and analysis can be extended—and *accepted*.

The last portion of the session is set aside to help the group to coalesce as a consulting body. We asked them to name themselves to increase their sense of unity/identity and to develop lines of communication. Their first order of business is to meet with management and the Imp team to offer their insights on timelines and protocols for training agency staff. We remind them that management is free to accept or reject their advice, but it is

our hope that any pending implementation initiative will not fail because *they did not offer their advice*.

### **TOT Implementation: The “Extinction Effect” of Skills**

Known by many names—diminished skills, practice drift, competence drain, or skill erosion—the “extinction effect” (Clark, 2016) is a very real problem in implementation of MI. Learned skills can diminish over time, and people will also change important components of their practice, either replacing learned methods with preferred variations, or simply forgetting or disregarding important elements of the practice as was taught.

The extinction of skills and the need for boosters and coaching/feedback is a prime reason for agencies to engage in ToT initiatives. Yet, the fight against the extinction effect also occurs *within the initiative itself*. We have learned over the years that keeping an eye on the timeline is just as important as the next step that needs to be accomplished. Skill drain can occur at almost any juncture; waiting too long in between the two training sessions, too much time between the end of the training sessions and the first tape submission, dragging heels and taking too long between tape submissions, as well as preparing for the final training session. It doesn't stop there. Management has lagged in scheduling first presentations by their new trainers. We are mindful of one large jurisdiction that waited seven months for a pair of new trainers to deliver their first MI fundamentals training. Practice skills or training skills are all affected and in need of “exercise” and renewal.

### **ToT Implementation: Coaching Training and MITI Coding Training**

Coaching and feedback are so important that some forward-looking agencies will import a two-day training in coaching skills. Selection for attendance is usually worked out between agency management, the Implementation team, and the MI trainers. With staff attrition, there is wisdom in ensuring that an agency has enough trained MI coaches to work in tandem with the MI trainers, avoiding overload with either group. Another option chosen is to import MITI coding training. Any reason a CC agency would convene a ToT is a reason to train coders to be able to provide cost-effective, in-house fidelity checks, to keep skill-building durable.

## The 2020 Pandemic: MI Is Exemplar for Web-based Training Delivery

The 2020 Pandemic (Carlos, 2020) has sent training environments into flux and seemingly stalled learning initiatives. Many management teams easily embrace technology and internet-based learning options, while others have been reluctant and seem only to trust on-site classroom training. Consider that empirical comparisons of classroom and distance learning often find that both modalities enjoy similar rates of learning, and both can be equally motivating (e.g., Bernard et al., 2004; Clark, Bewley, & O'Neil, 2006). Anyone can readily recall an in-person (on-site) training that was painfully boring or held little value. The same can be said for internet-based distance education. If there are differences in learning outcomes, the discrepancies can be traced to engagement with the audience and accuracy of the content—not the medium used to deliver the instruction. In simple terms, it's not the medium that carries the message, it's the way the message is crafted (Clark, 1994, 1999; Clark & Mayer, 2007; Mayer, 2005).

MI is well-suited to respond to the changes in training mediums by way of options for safe and responsible internet-based training. Again, these multiple distance options make MI an exemplar for implementation—now through distance education. Space prohibits a full account, yet MI content is available through two far-reaching mediums as listed:

### *Web-training*

The 2020 pandemic has given many CC staff an introduction to online distance learning. These are web-based trainings via computers, using free or fee-based subscription services, already in use by many CC organizations (e.g., Zoom®, WebEx®, Go-To-Meetings®, Microsoft Skype®, etc.), some of which protect and encrypt conversations and transmissions. Web-training options allow a Motivational Interviewing trainer to meet and train full-day or multiple-day content with any number of learners in a real-time, collaborative format.

Web-training software platforms allow trainers to share their computer screens. This allows an outside consultant or the in-house trainer to share presentation slides, whiteboards, images, or training videos with learners—all while interacting with students onscreen via video, voice, and online chat features. Another feature allows the trainer to section off staff into “rooms” for small group

discussions before bringing them back to the large audience.

Webinars are similar—with some exceptions. Webinars usually differ from web-training in three ways; first, they are generally shorter in duration (1-2 hours); second, they are generally positioned as “open-group” and offered for anyone to attend (e.g., “coast-to-coast”); and third, they are scheduled and presented according to the host or presenter's schedule, not necessarily for those attending. Web-training is longer, often daylong or multiple days, and is normally geared for a closed group (agency-only) or where attendance is calculated by agency management, such as one's own agency staff and adjunct community partners. With web-training, management is also in control to set the days/times to fit their agency schedules.

With both formats, most software will allow the ability to “record” these presentations. The bad news is that recorded sessions do not allow real-time abilities to have question/answer interplay or be able to interact with the trainer(s). The good news is that they can be recorded and archived to form a topic library for future reference and “new hire” viewing.

### *Web-based Course Work*

Web courses are another form of distance learning that, when used efficiently, can offer great yields for competency development. Many MI web courses are sequential and require learners to successfully pass an exam at the end of the session before being able to access the next course and thus continue the series. Yet these courses can be forgiving by allowing unlimited access, enabling staff to retake any course at any time so that completing an extensive series is simply a matter of application and diligence. Courses are not shared among learners, but rather access is gained by password and entry codes, so only the student of record can access his or her own account. Each course allows a “certificate of completion” to be downloaded and printed, to provide evidence of completion/progress for administrative purposes.

First-generation web courses were general text-based slides, followed by true-false or multiple choice exams. They suffered from “learn wrong-do wrong” as they had no options for correcting mistakes or feedback. Newer software offers constant interaction and corrective feedback. Learners are often quizzed and assessed, yet now they are told why their answers were right or wrong, with

additional explanations to further improve learning transfer.

Additionally, with new technologies for web courses, participants are seldom passive. Learners may be called upon to decide, answer, interact, or compose responses, attending to the screen and doing something active on each new screen that appears. Selecting and choosing between clips of Motivational Interviewing dialogue, matching planks, decision trees, drag-and-drops, prompts to fill-in-the-blank and tasks to “rate that MI response,” are all new interactions that keep the learner active and focused.

Web courses do a wonderful job of learning transfer, but they cannot build skills. With that in mind, some web courses include “companion booklets” where communities-of-practice can be convened to reinforce the content and enable skill-building. These small group resources generally sync off the content of each web course to allow small groups to skill-build in tandem with the web-course learning for exercises, discussions, and skills practicing.

## A Look to the Future: Bot Training and Automatic Conversational Agents

When we think of web-based aids, we can easily bring to mind home-based tools (“smart speakers”) such as Amazon's “Alexa” or Google “Home”—web-based assistance that can play music, open your garage door, or converse with you in short clips of question/answer. These commercial “smart speakers” are types of “bots.” The term “bot” is short for Chatbot, which refers to a computer program that operates to serve its purpose via a conversational interface (Mugoye et al., 2019). In the training world, bots are powered by a mixture of artificial intelligence (AI)<sup>5</sup> and natural language processing (e.g., machine learning algorithms) to engage in short verbal interchanges or typed-text for human-like conversation with an end-user.

New help for CC is being developed by way of “conversational agents (CA),” which are much more complex computer programs, using language processing algorithms to help provide training to staff in counseling methods. Here, CA uses a form of “artificial

<sup>5</sup> We hope the reader will allow the term “AI” to suffice, albeit poorly used for brevity, rather than lead you into “Generative Pretrained Transformer 2 architecture” as well as “seq2seq Implementation” and “embedding based metrics of vector extrema,” with “Adam optimizer with weight decay.” (!)

intelligence,” derived from vast databases of counseling interchanges, to be able to teach counseling techniques to a user/learner—without close human supervision. Although quite new, initial work in this area (Tanana et al., 2019) is tremendously encouraging. Researchers present a system that implements an artificial standardized “client” that interacts with a staff person and provides trainees with real-time feedback on their use of specific counseling skills.

Members of the MINT community have been an integral part of this new vanguard of implementation technology (Pérez-Rosa, Mihalcea, Renisow et al., 2016; 2017). Fifteen years ago, a MINT member developed the Video Assessment of Simulated Encounters-Revised (VASE-R; Rosengren et al., 2005, 2008). This MI skill assessment uses video to present brief vignettes of actors portraying clients speaking to the camera about alcohol or drug use history along with problems and attitudes about change. Respondents enter timed paper and pencil responses, certainly another step of technology use but still needing close human supervision for coding and grading.

Within the last 10 years, members of the MINT community were already developing the next-generation tool, the Computer Assessment of Simulated Patient Interviews (CASPI; Baer et al., 2012). The CASPI dispensed with paper and pencil answers, using technology wherever someone might have a web-connected personal computer. With this upgrade, staff could offer responses to video segments of a “client,” spoken into a computer microphone, in real time. There are no recordings to submit and no paper/pencil answers that often suffer from issues of legibility, nor any consideration of voice tone or inflection when rating respondent’s replies.

While the 2020 pandemic has certainly brought limitations, we should not underestimate innovation. This next generation of computerized MI training will be both 24/7 and accessible with greater ease of use. Chatbot programs are already here (Park et al., 2019) in health care, where the respondent can text type-in responses to Bot “client” conversation and be rated (and corrected) in their delivery of MI. However, the horizon looms large with the development of client-like conversational agents to train basic counseling skills to officers. Systems are in development to provide an artificial standardized client that interacts with the counselor and gives trainees real-time feedback on their use of specific counseling skills, by offering

suggestions on the type of skills to use (Ken Renisow, personal communication, August 10, 2020). Such systems will make possible practice on-demand, immediate correction and feedback, and 24/7 availability, all without close human supervision. Those interested may soon be able to access exemplar implementation possibilities made possible by members of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers.

## Summary

MI is an exemplar practice for CC implementation. As a practice method, it offers probation and parole officers the skills needed to establish “dual relationships” between officers and offenders—the “just right” mix that research calls for to lower recidivism. MI implementation is empowered by a unique, worldwide organization of experts that conducts and disseminates extensive research (“know”) combined with decades of application (“know-how”) to respond to CC departments.

As a result, MI offers feasible, effective, and cost-effective ToT models that make possible in-house training and ongoing coaching for model sustainability. Finally, MI can continue to be implemented in unusual circumstances like the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, as MI training purveyors can deliver diverse training methods through safe and responsible distance-learning. Further, in the future new-age “bot clients” and “conversational agents” will be able to train people in MI through computer simulation of human dialogue. All of these factors make MI an important part of the vanguard for present—and future—EBP implementation.

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