

PRACTICE COMMENTARY

Finding the Balance: The Case for Motivational Interviewing to Improve Probation and Parole

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Abstract

Newly published findings report that 45% of all state prison admissions in the United States are due to violations of probation or parole—by way of new offenses or technical violations. Community corrections has become a paradox, not only failing in its mission to divert and remediate, but making matters worse. This commentary focuses on the direct practice of probation and parole officers, as they exert much influence on decisions to punish. It identifies groups that willfully contribute to this “prison pipeline.” One group includes those who supervise with mindsets of “zero tolerance” and “incarcerate first”—those with seemingly little flexibility in remanding parolees back to prison. The author compares research into the failure of coercive force with new research on the hybrid or synthetic officer, characterized by blending the dual roles of “control” with “working alliance.” This type of practice includes officer traits of being firm, fair, caring, and motivating, all attributes predictive of success. Outcome research is merged into an initial continuum of practice. The author suggests empowering risk-need-responsivity approaches with Motivational Interviewing, ending with a discussion of the benefits that caused Motivational Interviewing to be deemed a good fit for community corrections.

THE PIPELINE PARADOX

Probation and parole (P&P) recently experienced a wake-up call from a 2019 report released by the Council of State Governments Justice Center. This report determined that 45% of state prison admissions in the United States are due to violations of probation or parole—by way of new offenses or technical violations (Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2019). New offenses aside, it is particularly disconcerting that a high number of these state prison admissions are for technical supervision violations such as failure to report or not completing community service work as directed. Skeem and Manchak (2008) report on these troubling results:

One might argue that detecting and sanctioning technical violations is an index of the surveillance model's success in preventing crime [citation omitted]. However, there was no evidence that violating probationers on technical offenses prevented new arrests or otherwise protected public safety. (pp. 230–231)

When technical violations of court orders are met with incarceration, the economic consequences are severe. Keannealy et al. (2012) determined that the cost of housing a single inmate is more than 20 times higher than supervising that individual via community corrections. Community corrections has become a paradox; not only are we failing in our mission to divert and remediate, but we are making matters worse. Community corrections has become a pipeline to prison.

WHO TO FOCUS ON—AND WHAT TO FOCUS ON?

Once a justice-involved individual is diverted to the community, *who* makes the decision to incarcerate?

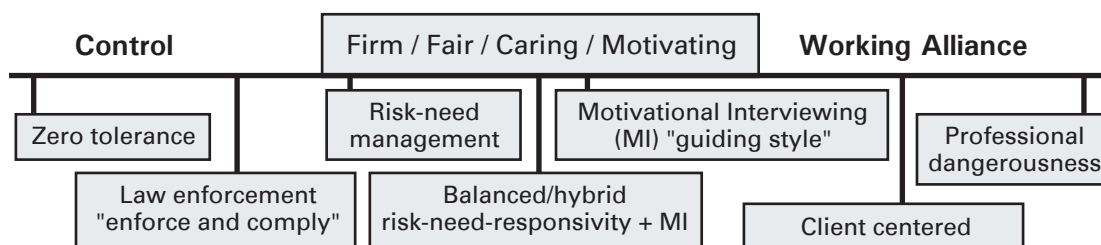
Initial attention may be directed toward the judge or prosecutor. However, many who truly understand the P&P supervision process will correctly acknowledge the considerable impact of the supervising officer's recommendations. Multiple studies note that supervising officers wield a powerful influence in decision-making and are critical contributors to punishment decisions (Kerbs et al., 2009; Rodriguez & Webb, 2007; Rudes & Portillo, 2012).

Working to establish compliance and then moving to influence behavior change is a complex business. To begin lowering prison admissions, what to focus on could be methods of practice—those techniques and strategies extended to individuals under court jurisdiction. Focusing on the supervising officer's influence toward revocations, this article seeks to examine suggestions for improving the direct practice of P&P officers. This commentary ends with a suggestion to employ Motivational Interviewing (MI) in community corrections work and examines several benefits of this approach to help reduce violations and revocations.

THE SYNTHETIC OFFICER: MOVING TOWARD THE MIDDLE OF "BOTH/AND"

Our field seems handicapped by a dualism; 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." Figure 1 merges outcome research to place the range of P&P practice on a continuum. To embrace outcome research is to concentrate on the blocked-off center area of this continuum. The middle ground seems to represent a Goldilocks principle of "just the right amount" of both control and working alliance.

Figure 1. Continuum of Probation and Parole Practice



In the middle of the continuum in Figure 1 is the risk-need-responsivity (RNR) framework that is complemented and empowered by MI. When it was introduced, RNR brought renewed optimism to the field. After decades in which the P&P field was adrift, this method demonstrated reduced recidivism in an accessible and practical way, providing much-needed empirically grounded and scientifically confirmed outcomes. RNR operates through three core principles:

- **Risk principle:** Risk assessment tools are used to determine a person's level of risk so that the dosage or intensity of treatment can be set accordingly. (It determines who should be assigned to a continuum or intensity of services.)
- **Need principle:** Treatment goals should be focused on criminogenic needs, or individual situations functionally related to criminal behavior. (It determines what issues are to be targeted or worked on.) What individuals "need" to work on are causal issues that have been shown to influence reoffending.
- **Responsivity principle:** This principle suggests that we base programs and services on what will effect change for the individual in front of you. (It determines how to design and deliver services that will sync to the individual, including relationships, motivations, and styles of learning.) This includes the role of the officer-supervisee relationship in increasing engagement and motivation.

However, RNR is not a perfect solution. The most often-cited critiques are that the RNR model can be more about programs than people, and that it lacks clear guidance for day-to-day implementation of the RNR principles across diverse programs and target groups (Polaschek, 2012). Further work on the principle of responsivity documents that one must retain a focus on the person to apply any empirically based model effectively (Lowenkamp et al., 2012). Even the best approaches will fail if the individual is disinterested and does not want to participate. Start with client engagement or forget starting at all.

Effective officers establish a working alliance via warm, high-quality officer-supervisee relationships, and these relationships occupy the middle of this continuum. This blend of control and connection has been found to be predictive of success in supervision (Lovins et al., 2018). Descriptions from research are plentiful:

- The "synthetic" officer: surveillance and rehabilitation to establish a "working alliance" (Klockars, 1972; Polaschek, 2016; Skeem & Manchak, 2008; Viglione, 2017)
- Warm but restrictive relationships (Bonta & Andrews, 2016)
- Firm, fair, and caring—respectful, valuing of personal autonomy (Kennealy et al., 2012)
- A "hybrid" or "synthetic" approach to probation, combining a strong emphasis on both social work and law enforcement (Grattet et al., 2018)
- Motivational communication strategies and MI (Viglione et al., 2017)
- Open, warm, enthusiastic communication and mutual respect (Dowden & Andrews, 2004)
- Blending care with control through a "dual relationship" (Skeem et al., 2007)

The Goldilocks principle also involves extremes to be avoided from both ends of the spectrum shown in Figure 1. Move to the left end (zero tolerance—law enforcement) and the officer is too distant and punitive. At the opposite end (client-centered—professional dangerousness), the officer is too close, believing there is no need for firmness where troubling (or repeated) violations are ignored.

AVOIDING THE EXTREME OF "TOO TOUGH"

Researchers have found that a fringe portion of community corrections staff seek to incarcerate. Lowenkamp et al. (2012) make reference to line staff who "hope for a negative outcome" (p. 11).

Although these authors believe this attitude is consigned to “isolated cases,” many believe the actual numbers are enough to place this group on the practice spectrum. For instance, Skeem and Manchak (2008) cite the common P&P adage “trail ‘em, nail ‘em, and jail ‘em.” This phrase is so well known across the community corrections field that these authors affix this adage not just to a few outliers, but as a type of “supervision model” (p. 230).

As it relates to technical violations, it is important to consider this rigid approach not as an artifact or remnant from the “get tough” era of 40 years ago, but very much in the present tense. Consider a recent publication in which Kras et al. (2019) speak of those “seeking to incarcerate” as a distinct group: “Justice workers committed to primarily punitive approaches such as ‘zero-tolerance’ or ‘incarceration first’ may encourage their own desired outcomes, regardless of the agency goals, even if their own aims are ineffective or potentially detrimental to clients and public safety” (p. 476). It would seem our first order of business could be to move this fringe group from a mindset of “force over” to one of “power with” (Hawkins, 2002)—all to moderate the “zero tolerance” stance as a way of doing business.

Current research tells us that there is a failure of using force for preventing revocations:

- When supervising parolees, officers who emphasized law enforcement were three times as likely to revoke community supervision (Kennealy et al., 2012).
- When community supervision workers tried to use sanctions to shape behavior, failure rates rose (Clear & Frost, 2014).
- Supervision strategies rooted in punitive, deterrence-oriented principles have a poor record of reducing recidivism (Lovins et al., 2018).
- Research demonstrates that programs based on deterrence, incapacitation, and increased control do not reduce future criminal activity (MacKenzie, 2013).
- Research has shown that a punitive, fear-based treatment approach focused on avoiding “bad” behaviors has not been very successful (Wormith et al., 2007).

When problems do occur (and they will), they can be addressed by using “intelligent flexibility” (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2013), rather than pulling the plug upon first breach. This flexibility speaks to the responsivity principle and to officers individualizing their response(s) to match the person in front of them. Strategies for line staff, to be used during stressful situations when breaks or noncompliance occur, are important for reducing violations and revocations. Such strategies can be used to stop violations and revocations before they start, or to negotiate in more effective ways when consequences become necessary.

AVOIDING THE EXTREME OF “TOO SOFT”

What occupies the other end of this spectrum is what I have referred to as “professional dangerousness” (M. D. Clark, 2005). This issue involves a failure to bring forth violations that should be reported. It occurs with staff who have become too client centered and who may ignore the need for firmness and control. This happens in a fairly predictable way: Hard work is extended to gain the supervisee’s trust and engagement, and staff may hold too tightly to this hard-won rapport. An officer may fret that reporting violations will set back or weaken this working alliance. At this extreme, an officer might find themselves saying to a supervisee, “I won’t report this to my supervisor (or judge or prosecutor) *this* time, but don’t do it again.” Here the officer has swung too far to the opposite extreme and is not directive enough. The hope and belief that the officer can build an alliance and work together with a supervisee is not the same as ignoring violations. Believing that supervisees are worth doing business with is not the same as adopting the easiest way of doing business with them.

Agencies can help P&P officers avoid practices that are too distant and tough, or too close and yielding, by adopting evidence-based practices (EBPs). These practices include skill sets that can better equip

the supervising officer to ward off violations and revocations. Iarussi and Powers (2018) note that MI is one such EBP that appears to be a “natural fit” (p. 28) for delivering P&P services.

PROBATION AND PAROLE— THE BEST HYBRID USES MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

McNeill (2009) notes that “the legitimacy of the officer—on which his or her influence for good depends—is hard-won, easily lost and hard to recover” (p. 8). There is a wealth of literature on what officers should do but far less on how to do it. RNR and the ability to build quality relationships have been improved with the mindset and skills of MI. This is a true strength of MI—helping P&P staff with methods for direct practice.

As an experienced MI practitioner and trainer, this author moves to suggest several benefits of the MI approach for community corrections. These include:

1. MI can align P&P with evidence-based practices and is well placed in community corrections.
2. MI is complementary to RNR approaches and teaches staff how to negotiate the dual roles of surveillance/law enforcement and alliance/behavior change.
3. MI can stand the heat. It has effective methods for reluctant or resistant probationers and parolees
4. MI can influence positive behavior change through nonadversarial methods.
5. MI is suited for busy caseloads. It can make an impact in brief interventions—even single sessions or within compressed time frames.
6. MI crosses cultures well.
7. MI is learnable and has options for safe and responsible procedures for the pandemic era, with its need for physical distancing.

Benefit 1: MI Can Align P&P With Evidence-Based Practices and Is Well Placed in Community Corrections.

With more than 1,200 controlled clinical trials across many different fields (Miller, 2020), MI has been designated as an EBP (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2010). An empirical study of MI suggests that certain types of brief interactions are as beneficial as more lengthy interventions, and that certain kinds of direct practice work by staff could more effectively elicit change (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). MI started as an alternative to working with problem drinkers—particularly those individuals who may have been perceived as being resistant or in denial (Miller, 1983). It has been advanced as a way of communicating with people to help them find their own reasons for change (Miller & Rollnick, 1991, 2002, 2013). MI is especially suitable when P&P goals and supervisee goals do not match. It avoids advice-giving, confrontation, and coercion in favor of engagement, relationship-building, and amplifying the supervisee’s ideas for compliance and change (Stinson & Clark, 2017).

Specifically for criminal justice settings, early evaluations of MI with supervisee work in New Zealand showed a positive impact on recidivism rates (Anstiss et al., 2011) and effectiveness with high-risk individuals (Austin et al., 2011). Several studies have found MI to be an effective practice suitable for use in community corrections (McMurran, 2009; Taxman, 2002; Viglione et al., 2017). A recent study of MI in a community corrections setting found that the relational skills of MI were important predictors of treatment initiation (Spohr et al., 2016). We know that intervening at the human service level is crucial for effectively addressing the problem of criminality (Bonta et al., 2008). In other words, an approach like MI that emphasizes specific interactions to build a working alliance between a supervisee and P&P staff has proven successful through decades of research (Bogue et al., 2008).

Benefit 2: MI Is Complementary to RNR Approaches and Teaches Staff How to Negotiate the Dual Roles of Surveillance/Law Enforcement and Alliance/Behavior Change.

Why does MI fit in the middle of this continuum? Of the many reasons, two are important to review. First, MI fits as a base for RNR programming. Research has found that when MI is added to another EBP, *both become more effective*—and the effect is sustained over a longer period of time (Miller, 2018). Combining MI with an RNR approach is more effective for two reasons. One, with MI in place, supervisees are more responsive to participation, and two, they are more likely to complete what is intended by the tandem evidence-based treatment. MI has been studied as a prelude to treatment, but those in corrections view it as a “base” approach (i.e., a way of being) to be used throughout programming with supervisees. Use MI as a stand-alone practice or as an adjunct to existing treatment approaches already in place.

The second reason that MI fits is that it offers methods for negotiating the blending of control with a working alliance. These critical skills emerge from the MI community—informing supervising officers how to carry out the dual roles of surveillance/enforcement and engagement/assisting behavior change. The methods and strategies are available and within reach for P&P staff who seek to negotiate control and alliance. Consider the titles of various subsections in a recent 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

This list represents a deep dive into negotiating this dual role. Administrators and researchers alike have found that MI can transform mechanical and depersonalized supervision models and add

important core counseling skills, realizing all the while that supervisee engagement is a critical first step (Stinson & Clark, 2017). As a result, the most widely accepted RNR programs within the last decade—Effective Practices in Community Supervision (EPICS), Staff Training Aimed at Reducing Rearrest (STARR), and the Carey Guides—have all recommended and/or taught MI as an important component to better facilitate a climate of behavior change. (For EPICS, see University of Cincinnati Correctional Institute, n.d.; for STARR, see Robinson et al., 2011; see also Gleicher et al., 2013. For the Carey Guides, see Carey & Carter, 2019.) Note that the Carey Guides include MI and refer 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” (Cary & Carter, 2019, p. 5).

Benefit 3: MI Can Stand the Heat. It Has Effective Methods for Reluctant or Resistant Probationers and Parolees.

It might be helpful for community corrections departments to know that MI was originally developed for those more resistant, angry, or reluctant to change (Stinson & Clark, 2017). MI has been found to be a particularly effective approach for working with people who are angry and defensive *at first contact* (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). Research is clear about the impact of first impressions (Bar et al., 2006; Yu et al., 2014). From the first greeting and handshake, relationships can begin collaboratively rather than gearing up for a boxing match. In a past interview, one probationer noted, “I thought she [the supervision officer] was playing me, because some try to act interested but they’re not. She’s real. She cares. Never had one like her.”

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can add heat to an officer’s interactions. Studies have shown that people with a higher reactance level have a better response to MI than to more directive styles (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). A person with elevated reactance can be oversensitive, touchy, or even volatile. Consider that individuals entering community corrections caseloads might suffer from PTSD and the elevated reactance levels so prevalent in this condition. Research from the

field of trauma-informed work states, “MI enables service providers to carry out the intentions and goals of trauma-informed practice” (Motivational Interviewing and Intimate Partner Violence Workgroup, 2010, p. 101).

Now add the complexity of dual diagnosis, meaning that a new supervisee may enter a P&P department with both mental health and substance use disorders. Results from a 2018 study indicated that MI was associated with increased self-efficacy and treatment completion of dually diagnosed clients (Moore et al., 2018). A department chief told me of a parolee who had tested positive for illicit drugs following a random drug screen during an office visit. When confronted, he admitted to a recent relapse. Before being transported to detention, he begged to talk to the agency chief. The chief agreed to a quick visit and told me of his surprise that, rather than the expected plea to “give me a break,” the parolee had wanted to “apologize” for “messing up your new program.” When the chief replied that he wasn’t sure what “new program” he was referring to, this person said, “You know, the way your officers talk to us now, respect us. I don’t want ruin this and I’m sorry ‘cause I think I probably have.” This administrator realized this person was referring to the department’s recent implementation of MI. He noted that the visit left him “stunned” that someone being processed for a parole violation would apologize for “letting people down,” something that had never happened before in his 35 years of service.

Benefit 4: MI Can Influence Positive Behavior Change Through Nonadversarial Methods.

MI has a directional aspect, whereby clients are intentionally guided toward what the supervising officer (or court or judge) regards as appropriate goals (Stinson & Clark, 2017; Miller & Rollnick, 2013). The directional aspect of MI is not immediately apparent. Those who give it only superficial consideration may see it as only a warm, “hug-a-thug” counseling approach. The counterpoint to this assertion is straightforward—progress and change do not have sides. Direct confrontation has little relationship with actual behavior change, and in most instances, it damages the relationship

and leaves one less able to influence change. The MI alternative of negotiating ambivalence, evoking change talk, and increasing the readiness to change—the directional aspect of MI—is neither soft nor easy, as it requires more skills, patience, and strength from the staff member.

The less tolerant law enforcement view might rely too heavily on giving advice, yet such reliance often leads nowhere. Do you want to be right, or do you want to be effective? Success may depend on your ability to do something other than give advice. “Getting right to it” with advice and directions generally lengthens the process (Stinson & Clark, 2017).

What MI conveys to community corrections is that there is a limit to coercion. Disrespectful treatment is not a sanction, it is simply disrespect. Research is clear that approaches that favor confrontation or pressured compliance fail to produce lasting and meaningful change (Walters et al., 2007). There are staff who avoid the extreme of “zero tolerance” yet remain consistently wedded to harsh law enforcement tactics. These muscle officers are asked to consider new research that found that torture (O’Mara, 2018) and aggressive interrogation methods (Alison et al., 2014) have not been as successful as interventions that involve more of a working alliance. MI has recently been applied to counterterrorism policing (M. D. Clark, 2019) as well as used to improve interrogation techniques with detainees (Surmon-Böhr et al., 2020). Ramping up coercion and abuse is paradoxical—the more you push, the more they push back.

This directional quality is one important reason that MI has been described as a “natural fit” for delivering P&P services (Iarussi & Powers, 2018)—it steers the supervisee using a nonadversarial approach. Staff members who learn the mechanics of MI turn to a “guiding style” (motivation plus influence) and are in a much better position to blend “care with control” (Skeem et al., 2007). This is MI’s strong suit—building an all-important working alliance to enable a directional, nonadversarial approach.

Benefit 5: MI Is Suited for Busy Caseloads. It Can Make an Impact in Brief Interventions—Even Single Sessions or Within Compressed Time Frames.

MI has been designated an EBP for increasing both engagement and retention in treatment (SAMHSA, 2010). 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). Multiple randomized clinical trials have shown reliable outcomes when MI is used in just a single session (Diskin & Hodgins, 2009; McCambridge & Strang, 2004). Another multisite effectiveness study found that participants who received a single session of MI had significantly better retention in outpatient substance use treatment at 28 days when compared with controls (Carroll et al., 2001).

Many trainees ask, “But I have a large caseload—can I ‘do’ MI in five minutes?” I answer this question with a rebound, “Can you ruin motivation in five minutes?” Of course you can. Little time to intervene means little room for error. Training in MI can improve the likelihood that short interactions will prove helpful. You can confront and work through the ensuing tangle of arguments or excuses, or you can use a guiding style to move more efficiently to productive conversations. Miller and Rollnick (2013) were the first to posit this idea:

Perhaps the underlying question is whether it is possible to make a difference with a few minutes of MI. Not only is it possible, but if you have only a few minutes to discuss behavior change, MI is likely to be more effective than finger-wagging warnings. (p. 343)

MI has spread quickly across probation, parole, and corrections. One reason for this is that MI has helped staff to “raise the odds” by increasing the readiness to change in compressed time frames (Stinson & Clark, 2017). Despite this spread, many P&P staff are still not trained to have a working knowledge of motivation (and how to increase it) and the process by which human behavior changes (and how to influence it). Has this lack of training influenced the rise in revocations? Departments that are working to correct the pipeline to prison

can ill afford to ignore these training deficits. I was impressed with an officer who, even with an overly large caseload, had come back voluntarily for more training. “You’re so busy,” I noted, “and yet you’re back?” He answered, “With the caseload numbers I’m trying to juggle, how can I not use MI?”

Benefit 6: MI Crosses Cultures Well.

Some treatments do not cross cultures well—yet MI does. The great benefit from its use with people of color is that the effect size of MI is *doubled* when used with these clients. This was determined by 11 controlled clinical trials examining the cross-cultural applications of MI (Miller, 2020). A finding from one meta-analysis is significant. Hettema et al. (2005) published a meta-analysis of 72 studies, 37 of which looked at racial and ethnic composition. These researchers found that the effects of MI were significantly larger for people of color.

Why does MI work better cross-culturally—especially when one would hope for no difference between differing ethnic or cultural groups? William Miller, co-originator of this approach, offered a thought-provoking explanation:

MI seems to be particularly useful with people who are least respected. It is for people who are the most marginalized and who are the most despised and rejected members of our society. If you’re a minority member, you may not be familiar with being treated respectfully. (Miller, 2018)

This was made clear to me by a probationer of color who said, “I saw a sign once that said, ‘Nothing about me, without me.’ I thought—yeah, sure, what a lot of bullshit. But this is one report-in place that really tries to make that happen.”

Benefit 7: MI Is Learnable and Has Options for Safe and Responsible Procedures for the Pandemic Era, With Its Need for Physical Distancing.

A helpful research finding is that one’s ability to learn MI is not contingent on experience, education, or professional field. You do not need years of seniority or advanced degrees (Miller et

al., 2013). MI is now being taught and practiced in more than 50 languages and literally spans the globe. Here in the United States, it has been taught in varying degrees to courts, prisons, drug courts, and community corrections groups in all 50 states (M. D. Clark, 2020a). A considerable number of corrections departments across multiple states have implemented MI to the point of using training-of-trainers sessions to enable in-house sustainability.

MI also has well-established fidelity measures to determine whether it is being used correctly by officers in the field (competency) and to what quality and extent (proficiency). Miller and Rollnick (2013) found that even when trainees could not reach competency levels, their training often was enough to cause them to stop using several of the worst relationship-fracturing responses. Thus, indirect benefits are realized even when competency levels prove elusive (p. 381).

The 2020 pandemic 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 to trust only on-site classroom training (M. D. Clark, 2020b). 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; R. E. Clark et al., 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 (R. C. Clark & Mayer, 2007; R. E. Clark, 1994, 1999; Mayer, 2005).

MI is well suited to respond to the changes in training media by offering options for safe and responsible Internet-based training. The MI field has extensive on-demand web courses, in which the coursework is followed with the use of skill-building resources to convene small groups via web-conferencing tools.

The web courses allow learning transfer, and small group meetings enable skill-building. Webinars and web coaching are readily available for sustainability and continued skill-building.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It was no accident that MI arose in the field of criminology after several decades of muscle and punishment that had only made things worse. This left supervision programs overwhelmed by roadblocks that many now realize were self-imposed (Bogue et al., 2004; McMurren, 2002). There are over a thousand research studies demonstrating that positive relationships are one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of outcomes across human service approaches (Orlinsky et al., 2004). Holding fast to the idea that supervision work is any different is simply being resistant to change oneself. Thankfully, new correctional research is starting to investigate the working alliance between officer and supervisee. The benefits already attributed to MI are cause for optimism (Polaschek, 2016).

One point of confluence is offered: “No matter what population you work with, the mechanisms that propel behavior change remain the same. This is the reason that motivational interviewing has such broad applicability to such seemingly different groups” (Stinson & Clark, 2017, p. 241). MI seems to take hold in systems that have relied too heavily on the “killer Ds” of degrading, directing, demanding, and domination.

For cynics to say that MI cannot work within P&P—after it has been shown to improve techniques for interrogating terrorists labeled “high-value detainees” (M. D. Clark, 2019)—is simply resisting change MI can offer the know-how and techniques for P&P to deliver services with a nonadversarial, nonpunitive approach. This approach demonstrates that the working alliance does not have to be abandoned when the road gets rough. MI, which has been a leader in developing and delivering this noncoercive approach across several decades, reminds us all that while you may not be responsible for the supervisee's starting point, you have considerable influence over what happens next.

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