

What are Communities of Practice?

Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor: a tribe learning to survive, a band of artists seeking new forms of expression, a group of engineers working on similar problems, a clique of pupils defining their identity in the school, a network of surgeons exploring novel techniques, a gathering of first-time managers helping each other cope. In a nutshell:

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

Note that this definition allows for, but does not assume, intentionality: learning can be the reason the community comes together or an incidental outcome of member's interactions. Not everything called a community is a community of practice. A neighborhood for instance, is often called a community, but is usually not a community of practice. Three characteristics are crucial:

- 1. The domain:** A community of practice is not merely a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.
- 2. The community:** In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.
- 3. The practice:** A community of practice is not merely a community of interest – people who like certain kinds of movies, for instance. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

It is the combination of these three elements that constitutes a community of practice. And it is by developing these three elements in parallel that one cultivates such a community. Communities of practice are not called that in all organizations. They are known under various names, such as learning communities, learning groups, or learning circles.

Communities of practice come in a variety of forms. Some are quite small; some are very large, often with a core group and many peripheral members. Some are local and some cover the globe. Some meet mainly face-to-face, some mostly online. Some are within an organization and some include members from various organizations. Some

are formally recognized, often supported with a budget; and some are completely informal and even invisible.

Communities of practice have been around for as long as human beings have learned together. At home, at work, at school, in our hobbies, we all belong to communities of practice, a number of them usually. In some we are core members. In many we are merely peripheral. And we travel through numerous communities over the course of our lives.

In fact, communities of practice are everywhere. They are a familiar experience, so familiar perhaps that it often escapes our attention. Yet when it is given a name and brought into focus, it becomes a perspective that can help us understand our world better. In particular, it allows us to see past more obvious formal structures such as organizations, classrooms, or nations, and perceive the structures defined by engagement in practice and the informal learning that comes with it.

Adapted from: www.ewenger.com/theory/index.htm

Motivational Interviewing Learning Communities

Learning together is often more fun than learning alone. Not everyone has access to an expert MI coach, but it may be easier to find colleagues who are also interested in developing their skills in MI. We have been experimenting with such learning communities as a resource to support continued development. There need not be an identified expert in the group, although some do invite an experienced coach to visit with them occasionally. The idea is peer-supported learning, to puzzle together over questions like:

“How could I apply MI in this particular situation?”

“What is a good next step in practicing MI?”

“How else might I have responded at that point in the session?”

“Should I be trying MI in this situation?”

“What interviewer responses seem most likely to evoke change talk?”

We believe that, as with coaching, listening to each other’s practice is a crucial resource for learning. So is practicing skills together. Talking *about* MI is not as likely to promote learning as actually practicing skills within a supportive learning community. We recommend that every meeting include some listening to practice recordings and some skill practice. Some clinicians who have developed a learning community of this kind have told us that they look forward to the meetings as one of the most rewarding experiences of their week or month. Here are some practical suggestions for skill practice with learning communities.

1. Focus on a particular interviewing skill or task. If you’re trying to increase your use of complex reflections, focus on that.
2. Try using “real play” instead of role-play. That is, have the colleague who is speaking as a “client” talk about something real, such as a change that he or she is actually considering or wanting to make. We find that this tends to promote learning better than enacted role-plays.
3. Don’t let practice go on too long before you stop for discussion. Usually 10 minutes is enough time to get in some good practice without boring observers.
4. Give observers something to do while watching. If there is more than one observer, they could use different coding tasks such as counting reflections, questions, or both; listening for change talk and sustain talk; when change talk occurs, what was the next thing the interviewer said; listening for any responses that might be inconsistent with an MI style such as giving advice without permission, confronting, or arguing with the client.
5. When a practice is done, the first person to comment on it should be the one who was practicing MI. What were they experiencing during the interview? Next, the “client” should comment. What did the “client” experience during the conversation?

What was particularly helpful? Then observers can provide their objective feedback based on their structured coding tasks. Observers should focus on the positive. It is very easy (and demoralizing) for observers to make many specific critiques and suggestions. Avoid the righting reflex here too. Focus on what was *good* about what was observed.

6. If someone is to make a recommendation of something to try, let it be just one suggestion. Changing one thing is plenty to try on subsequent practice.

A caution here is that with solely peer-led learning groups it is possible to get off track without realizing it. At least periodic check-ins with a well-trained observer/coach are advisable.

Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3rd edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013 (pages 327-329)

Recommendations for an MI Peer Support Group/Community of Practice

MINT, 2009

Developing proficiency in motivational interviewing (MI) is rather like learning to play a sport or a musical instrument (see Coyle, 2009; Miller et al., 2006). Some initial instruction is helpful, and real skill develops over time with practice, ideally with feedback and consultation from knowledgeable others. One way to do this is to form a local group to support and encourage each other in continuing to develop proficiency in MI. When a group like this is well done, participants enjoy coming and sometimes say that it is one of the most interesting and rewarding aspects of their job. Here are some ideas for such a group.

1. Schedule regular meetings for the sole purpose of working together to strengthen MI skills. Don't let administrative details or other agenda items fill the time. An hour meeting once or twice a month would be one possibility.

2. In early meetings, it may be helpful to discuss specific readings. There is a rapidly growing list of books and articles at www.motivationalinterviewing.org. Periodically the group may also wish to watch "expert" tapes, coding and discussing the skills being demonstrated in them. For those particularly interested in new research on MI, a "journal club" of 20 minutes or so might be added. Take it easy with any reading assignments, though. People learn a lot, and fast, just from bringing in and discussing tapes (see #3).

3. A key learning tool to be included in regular meetings is to listen together to and discuss tapes of participants' MI sessions. Some groups have experienced that the energy and engagement level of the group picked up when they began to listen to each other's tapes. A rotation schedule can be arranged whereby participants take turns bringing in new tapes. We recommend listening to and discussing one tape per session. A 20-minute segment of tape is probably about right. We recommend using a recording device with external microphone(s) to improve the quality of sound and facilitate listening.

4. Written permission should be obtained from clients for this use of recording, explaining how the tapes will be used, who will hear them, and how and when the tape will be destroyed.

5. Be sure to thank and support those who bring in a tape to share. They are taking a risk and being vulnerable, which can be difficult, particularly early in the life of a group. Beware of having high "expert" expectations when someone is just beginning.

6. Rather than simply listening to a tape, make use of some structured coding tools. Some examples are:

- Counting questions and reflections
- More generally coding OARS

- Coding depth of reflections (simple vs. complex)
- Counting client change talk, and noting what preceded it
- Tracking client readiness for change during the session, and key moments of shift
- Coding forms can be found on www.motivationalinterviewing.org. Participants may use the same coding form and compare their findings, or participants can use different coding forms to attend to different aspects of the session.

7. In introducing a session to be heard by the group, it is advised to indicate what target(s) for behavior change is being pursued. Without this, it is not possible to identify change talk, which is goal-specific.

8. In discussing a participant's tape, it is suggested that the person who did the interview comment first on its strengths and areas for improvement.

9. In discussing any tape, focus discussion on the ways in which the session is and is not consistent with the spirit and method of MI. Again, it is useful for the person who did the interview to lead off this discussion. Participants can ask each other, "In what ways was this session MI consistent?" and "What might one do to make this session even more MI consistent?" When providing feedback to each other, adhere to the supportive spirit of MI. *Always* emphasize what you heard or saw that seemed particularly effective and consistent with the style of MI. One approach is a "feedback sandwich" in which any suggestion for further strengthening practice is sandwiched between ample slices of positive feedback. The group atmosphere should be fun and supportive, not pressured or competitive. Group participants report that they often learn more from helping others than from receiving feedback on their own tapes.

10. Focus on what is important within MI. There is always temptation to wander off into more general clinical discussion of cases: Focus learning on the spirit, principles, and practices of MI.

11. The group may focus on practicing and strengthening specific component skills of MI. One such sequence of skills to be learned is described in: Miller, W. R., & Moyers, T. B. (2006). Eight stages in learning motivational interviewing. *Journal of Teaching in the Addictions, 5*, 3-17.

12. Some groups begin with a "check-in" period in which anyone can bring up an issue for discussion.

13. Bringing coffee and refreshments can add to the relaxed atmosphere of a group.

14. Consider whether there is a prerequisite for participating in the group. Some groups have required, for example, that participants complete an initial training in MI before beginning to attend. Others have left the group open for any who wish to learn MI skills.

15. Consider whether you want to contract for a specific length of time or number of

meetings together. If so, at the end of this time each member can consider whether to continue for another period.

16. An “MI expert” in the group might resist taking on an expert role, because doing so can stifle participation and learning. Don’t withhold your expertise, particularly if invited, but avoid a pattern of interaction in which the group always looks to the expert for the “right” answers.

17. Most of all enjoy this privileged learning time together. As with other complex skills like chess, golf, or piano, gaining proficiency in MI is a lifelong process (see Coyle, 2009). A real source of fun and learning in these groups is admiration for the many artful ways that people find to apply MI within their own clinical style and the people with whom they work.

Motivational Interviewing Session Review

Sandy Downey

Target Behavior(s): _____

1. How did I work to establish an emotionally safe atmosphere to help the client build trust in me and in the therapeutic/treatment process?
2. To what extent did I continue using reflective listening and open-ended questions (using about 2 reflections per open question) throughout the duration of the session?
3. What change talk did I notice (statements of desire, ability, reasons, need, commitment) and how did I respond to the change talk when I heard it?
4. How did I help the client explore why it might be personally important for him or her to initiate a positive change in their target behavior(s)?
5. How did I assess the client's current level of confidence in beginning to make a change in the target behavior and how did I help enhance the client's self-efficacy?
6. What strengths did I notice and affirm in the client? How did I convey that I valued the client's experiences and ideas throughout the course of the session?
7. If I observed signs of readiness to move to commitment, what did I notice? How did I initiate discussion of a plan for change and help the client consolidate commitment?
8. What might I try next time to further support the client's desire to change and build confidence in the possibility of change? What MI skills do I need to further develop?

MI Self-Appraisal

As the interviewer, I...	<i>0- not at all</i>	<i>5- extremely well</i>
1. Provided a safe, welcoming presence with my words and actions. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
2. Engaged with and showed genuine interest in the person, e.g., what she or he enjoys, needs, values. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
3. Found out and clarified what the person wanted to focus on currently. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
4. Helped explore both sides of the person's dilemma , e.g., what's working and what's not; upsides and downsides. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
5. Avoided trying to "fix" the problem or <i>get</i> the person to change by advising, confronting, warning, or teaching. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
6. Elicited what might be some possible reasons to change, <i>if</i> the person were to decide to change. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
7. Learned about possible ways that he or she might go about making this change. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
8. Asked how important it is at this time for the person to make this change. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
9. Asked how confident she or he feels to be <i>able</i> to make this change. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
10. Inquired about what steps , if any, the person might take next. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
11. Asked permission before providing information or suggestions . <i>Example:</i>	0	5
12. Used the core skills of MI (open questions, affirmations, reflective listening, summaries) throughout the conversation.	0	5
13. Consistently demonstrated the spirit of MI:		
> <i>Partnership</i>	0	5
> <i>Acceptance</i>	0	5
> <i>Compassion</i>	0	5
> <i>Evocation</i>	0	5

Developed by Ken Kraybill based on Miller, W.R. & Rollnick, S., Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change, 2013