

Masters Class

Abstract

This is a collaborative method for developing Motivational Interviewing proficiency with a small group (up to about 12 to 15 participants). It could be used at any level of training, though I have found that it works somewhat better in more advanced training.

Note that the title is “Masters Class” (developing mastery together), and not “Master Class” (learn from the Master)

Overview

A group of trainees work with a trainer to design a practice case scenario, develop Motivational Interviewing strategies to be used in this situation, and try them out. The case practice segment is limited to ten minutes, and feedback from the group is constrained to provide positive reinforcement for skills demonstrated. Preparing, developing, practicing and debriefing one case scenario takes 40-50 minutes. Working together over time the Masters Class can develop a variety of case scenarios and creatively consider how Motivational Interviewing can be practiced. The atmosphere is designed to be one of safety, high interest, and mutual learning. Seating is typically in a circle of chairs or tables.

Outline

There are six parts to a Masters Class exercise:

1. Preparation provides the group with instructions and guidelines for what will happen. This happens primarily at the beginning of the Masters Class and does not need to be repeated with every new case.
2. Case Development entails the construction of a detailed client case scenario including the context within which consultation is occurring.
3. Strategic Planning involves evoking from the group how an interviewer might apply MI in this particular case situation.
4. Selection is the process of participants volunteering to be the participants in the Practice.
5. Practice is enactment of a consultation by participants role-playing the client(s) and interviewer.
6. Debriefing is a carefully structured discussion of the Practice session.

Guidelines for Preparation

It is vital for participants to understand the whole process before beginning the first case. In particular, everyone should understand in advance the rules for giving feedback about the Practice segment. Here is an example of what a trainer might say during Preparation.

This process is called the Masters Class because together we are going to consider how Motivational Interviewing might be applied in a variety of situations. The purpose is to develop proficiency in Motivational Interviewing, and we will be working together collaboratively. Here is how one round works. Together we develop a case scenario in which you would like to experience how Motivational Interviewing can be practiced; perhaps one where you find it challenging to do Motivational Interviewing. Once we have a case constructed, we'll brainstorm some strategies for practicing Motivational Interviewing in this particular situation. You will have the opportunity to take a client role or an interviewer role trying out the case and strategies we have discussed. It's always tempting in this situation to construct "the client from hell," an intractable case who does not respond no matter what the interviewer does, but that's not what we want here. There are no clients as difficult as those role-played by clinicians! What we want for the client here is a human being who responds normally to different kinds of interactions. Each Practice segment will be limited to ten minutes, after which we'll stop no matter where the interview process is.

So what happens then? We discuss the Practice experience in a particular way. You will be invited to comment only on what you saw as particularly good examples of Motivational Interviewing; what you thought was particularly effective. There will be no suggestions like, "Well, I would have done it this way," because often those are just stylistic differences, and there are many different ways to do Motivational Interviewing well. The person who played the client will also have the opportunity to describe his or her experience during the interview and to say what seemed particularly helpful, supportive, or effective. This means that the rest of you, while watching the 10-minute practice, need to be noticing and even jotting down what you saw that looked like good Motivational Interviewing, and why. Is that clear? When you have commented, I will also say what I saw that I liked as examples of good Motivational Interviewing practice. And I reserve for myself the privilege of making one suggestion, and only one, for what might be a good next step in practicing Motivational Interviewing. It's not helpful to get twelve suggestions. What you can expect, then, when you try out being an interviewer is positive feedback about what you are doing well, and one suggestion from me.

Any questions?

Guidelines for Case Development

The case scenarios come from the participants based on their own experience. Most often it is an actual or composite client from their own work setting, using a fictitious name and changing any identifying details. Ask for several suggestions of possible cases, and then choose one to develop. Your choice might be guided by interest expressed by participants, your sense of what kind of case would be good for skill development, your sense of the suggester's clarity about such cases, etc. But you decide the case.

Having done so, develop the case in sufficient detail. For example:

- Who is this person? How old?
- Where are we talking to him or her? Why has he or she come in?
- Is this a first visit? What background information do we have? What has already happened?
- What are the person's life circumstances: family, work, difficulties, interests?
- What are this person's strengths?
- What are the presenting problem(s)? How does the person perceive them?
- What is the focus for the consultation?
- What motivations does this person have for change?
- What expectations, reluctance or concerns does the person have about being here?
- Are there external pressures for change (from court, family etc.)? What are they?

Discuss explicitly the "difficulty level" of the case. What importance and confidence ratings might this person give early in the session (assuming that there is a clear focus)? Be sure you have discussed positive (strengths, motivations for change) as well as challenging aspects of the case.

It is also possible to use a "real-play" in Masters Class format. Here the "client" is discussing an actual life situation (such as a change he or she wishes to make). This usually works best after the group has some experience and trust together.

Guidelines for Strategic Planning

With a clear case scenario, you now evoke from participants ideas for how one might practice Motivational Interviewing in this situation. If this is a first meeting, what would be helpful for the Engaging process? How would a Focus emerge? How could the interviewer begin? What would guide the interviewer in deciding what to do next? What open questions might be asked, and why those? What would the interviewer listen for? How might he or she respond to sustain talk or discord? You need not develop one consensus strategy (although that would be all right); you can develop a menu of strategic options from which the interviewer can choose.

You can also contribute suggestions, but avoid being the expert with the answers. Primarily you should evoke possible strategies from participants, and ask how and why they are consistent (or inconsistent) with a Motivational Interviewing style. The amount of coaching that you do during the Strategic Planning segment will depend on the level of training and experience of participants. If Motivational Interviewing inconsistent responses are suggested, ask participants whether that would be consistent with an MI style and why (or why not). If participants are unclear, do explain how and why a suggested strategy is not something one would be likely to do within Motivational Interviewing, and then go on with eliciting possibilities.

Continue discussion until there have been enough Motivational Interviewing consistent suggestions to give the interviewer an excellent head start. Offer a summary of the Motivational Interviewing strategies that have been suggested.

You can also focus Strategic Development on a particular process (Engaging, Focusing, Evoking, Planning) or skill set such as OARS. Before beginning you can “fast forward” a case to a point where one or more processes have been reasonably accomplished, and the starting point of the Practice is to try a particular process or skill.

Guidelines for Selection

Now ask for participants who would like to try out some of the strategies suggested, and also someone who could portray the client. It has been my experience that with advanced groups, the person who volunteers to be the interviewer is often the person who suggested the case, but that is not required. Thank and affirm those who will participate in the Practice. I usually put two chairs in the middle of the circle or at the opening of a horseshoe configuration. Make sure that everyone can hear. Ask if the interviewer or client have any questions before starting. Remind them that the conversation will end at ten minutes, wherever they happen to be at that point. Remind observers to note good examples of Motivational Interviewing practice.

Getting initial volunteers to be the interviewer can be more difficult with less experienced trainees. (Volunteers to play the client are usually easy to find.) Even under the safe constraints of the Masters Class, volunteering can feel quite threatening. If no one agrees, you have two options:

1. Select someone who seems up to the task.
2. Go first. Show how the process unfolds with you as the interviewer.

Guidelines for Practice

Simply allow the conversation to unfold for ten minutes. Keep time and stop right at ten minutes. No comments or interruptions during the Practice.

I have never had to interrupt a Practice segment, but of course it is conceivable that an interviewer could freeze up or really flounder. If this happens, halt the action briefly and you suggest a strategy that the interviewer can implement. Do not solicit suggestions from other participants in this circumstance, and get the conversation restarted as soon as possible – no lengthy discussion. You might also choose to adjust the difficulty level of the case if the client has been particularly challenging. Another option is to fast forward past the current obstacle. Your prime objective is for the interviewer to have a success experience in practicing elements of Motivational Interviewing.

Guidelines for Debriefing

I usually leave the interviewer and client in their chairs in the middle for the debriefing. Begin by asking participant-observers to comment on what Motivational Interviewing skills they saw in action; what seemed effective and why. Were there particularly good examples of _____? (Ask for skills that you saw demonstrated.) Why was that Motivational Interviewing? Why do you think it was helpful? Reflect the participants' comments. Reserve your own comments, except to affirm what participants say (e.g., "Yes, I saw that, too." "Yes, that was really good.") Your own comments will come last.

At some point midway in this process, ask the client to comment on his or her experience in the interview, and on what the interviewer did that felt particularly helpful, supportive, engaging, etc. (Choose adjectives that you think fit the interview you saw.) I don't usually start with the client's feedback because it can be mixed. Get positive feedback from participant-observers first, then ask the client to comment, reflecting and focusing on positive feedback.

Be strict about the positive-only rule. This is your responsibility. If a participant strays into a suggestion ("I thought that you could have . . .") or critical comment, interrupt politely and restate the guidelines for discussion. Then evoke other positive feedback.

When you seem to have exhausted positive comments from the participants, invite the interviewer to comment on his or her own experience in doing the interview. Here the interviewer may mention things he or she could have done better, but focus on the subjective experience of doing Motivational Interviewing. What was happening? (Often people talk about holding back their righting reflex, for example.) Was there self-talk chatter happening? What felt easy or natural?

Finally, you take your turn. Start with your own observations of Motivational Interviewing skills that you saw in the interview, what the person was doing well. Often this will simply repeat what others have already said. Then make one helpful suggestion, and only one. Choose the one idea that seems like a good next step for this particular person. Be specific ("Try taking a little more of a risk with complex reflections, rather than staying so close to what the person said.") rather than global ("Be more empathic.") Then finish with more positive feedback.

Developed by Bill Miller, 2011