

Research on How Motivational Interviewing (MI) Promotes Behavioral Change by Resolving Impedance

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Abstract. This paper describes the mechanism by which motivational interviewing (MI) works in eliminating resistance and its impact on behavioral change. As a client-centered approach to psychological counseling, motivational interviewing aims to stimulate an individual's internal motivation, which in turn prompts behavioral change. The article systematically presents the basic theoretical framework and guiding principles of MI, covering topics such as emotive expression, differential development, conflict avoidance, and boosting self-confidence. The article focuses on how MI identifies and handles customer resistance, including common manifestations such as negation, downplaying the problem, and reasonable explanation. The research results show that MI reduces resistance by creating an atmosphere of non-judgmental communication and guiding customers to reflect on their inner contradictions. The article also highlights some of the core techniques used by MI, such as feedback listening, open questioning and positive response, which help customers resolve mental confusion and strengthen their willingness to change. In addition, this article explores the practical application of MI in various fields, including addiction rehabilitation, healthy habit development, and psychotherapy, and assesses its actual effects. The study summary points out that although MI has shown significant advantages in overcoming resistance and promoting behavioral change, the method also has certain limitations and suggests future research directions. This study not only deepens our understanding of MI, but also provides a valuable reference for practitioners, which is of great practical significance and theoretical value in promoting individual behavioral improvement.

Keywords: Motivational interviewing; Impedance; Behavioral change; Counseling skills; Intrinsic motivation.

1. Introduction

Motivational Interviewing (MI), an emerging psychological counseling approach, has gained much attention and has been widely used in the field of mental health services in recent years. This study aims to explore the mechanism by which motivational interviewing promotes behavioral change by resolving impedance. This is of great theoretical and practical significance for enhancing the effectiveness of counseling and encouraging individuals to change their behavior positively.

The mental health service industry is constantly expanding the application scope of motivational interviewing. The latest statistics show that the number of counselors using motivational interviewing techniques has increased by approximately 40 percent in the past five years, and a survey in 2019 revealed that more than 60 percent of mental health service institutions have included motivational interviewing in their training programs. This shows that the method is both important and widely recognized in psychological counseling practice.

Motivational interviewing has been quite effective in practice, but the specific mechanism by which it effectively resolves the client's resistance to prompt behavioral change remains to be further explored, because resistance is a common thing in counseling that hinders the client's change. Therefore, an in-depth exploration of motivational interviewing methods to deal with and resolve resistance can not only enhance the counseling effect, It can also serve as a reference for other psychological counseling methods.

Motivational interviewing has a theoretical basis. This study intends to first review it, covering definitions, core principles and theoretical models, and compare it with traditional counseling methods, and then delve into the nature of impedance and its role in behavioral change, including impedance definitions, types, causes and effects on behavioral change. These analyses are intended

to reveal the unique advantages and mechanisms of motivational interviewing in resolving impedance and promoting behavioral change.

2. The theoretical Basis of Motivational Interviewing

2.1 Definition and Core Principles of motivational interviewing

Motivational interviewing (MI), a client-centered counseling approach that aims to drive behavioral change by enhancing intrinsic motivation, was first proposed by William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick in 1983 and has continued to evolve and improve over the decades since then. The core idea is that within an individual is the main source of motivation for behavioral change, rather than external coercion.

The four core principles of MI include:

Expressing empathy: The counselor actively listens and responds to demonstrate understanding and acceptance of the client.

Developing differences: Making the client aware that the current behavior is different from the ideal state to stimulate the motivation for change.

Avoid arguing: In the face of the client's resistance, the counselor does not confront directly but skillfully guides them to reflect on themselves.

Support self-efficacy: Boost the client's confidence in their ability to change.

The basic framework of MI is composed of these principles, from which the counselor can draw guidance when dealing with client resistance and facilitating behavioral change.

2.2 Theoretical Model of Motivational Interviewing

The theoretical model of motivational interviewing is mainly based on the following psychological theories:

Cognitive dissonance theory: When an individual feels uncomfortable in the face of contradictory beliefs, cognitive dissonance theory comes into play to prompt the individual to seek solutions, and MI (Motivational Interviewing) uses this principle to help the client perceive the contradiction between current behavior and personal values.

Self-determination Theory: Pay attention to the role of intrinsic motivation in behavioral change, because MI drives long-term behavioral change by strengthening the client's autonomy and intrinsic motivation.

Change Stage Model: This model describes the different stages involved in behavioral change, namely the pre-thinking stage, thinking stage, preparation stage, action stage, and maintenance stage. For clients at different stages, MI employs corresponding strategies to push them to the next stage.

Social learning Theory: The importance of self-efficacy in behavioral change is emphasized, and MI relies on enhancing the client's sense of self-efficacy to drive behavioral change.

The theoretical basis of MI is composed of these theories, which provide scientific evidence and guidance for its practice.

2.3 The differences between motivational interviewing and traditional counseling methods

Motivational interviewing differs significantly from traditional counseling in several ways:

Counseling relationship: MI focuses on an equal, cooperative counseling relationship, while traditional methods often employ the expert-client authority model.

Change drive: MI feels that the client's inner self is the source of change drive, while traditional methods often rely on external pressure or advice[3].

Dealing with impedance: In MI's view, impedance is a signal of the consulting relationship, so it will adopt a flexible strategy to deal with it, while traditional methods might directly confront impedance.

Counseling objective: Traditional approaches tend to focus on solving specific problems, while MI aims to stimulate intrinsic motivation.

Technique application: Techniques such as open-ended questions and reflective listening are widely used by MI, while traditional methods may rely more often on advice and guidance.

These differences give MI a unique advantage in dealing with resistance and facilitating behavioral change.

3. The nature of impedance and its role in behavioral change

3.1 Definition and Types of impedance

During counseling, the client shows attitudes and behaviors that they are unwilling to change or cannot change. This is known as resistance, a common phenomenon in psychological counseling that has a significant impact on the process of behavioral change, and its definition has gradually evolved from "instinctive defense" in early psychoanalytic theory to "interpersonal interaction phenomenon" in modern counseling theory.

The main types of resistance include:

Denial: The client refuses to admit that there is a problem or that change is needed.

Minimization: Acknowledging the existence of a problem but downplaying its severity or impact.

Rationalization: Making excuses or explanations for problem behavior.

Projection: Blaming the problem on external factors or others.

Divert attention: Deliberately change the topic and avoid discussing the core issue.

Passivity: Showing a lack of motivation or ability to change.

A counselor can better identify and respond to the client's impedance behavior if they understand these impedance types.

3.2 Causes of Impedance

There are multiple causes for the generation of impedance, mainly including:

Psychological defense mechanisms: Impedance is often used as a means of self-protection. The client may use impedance to maintain self-esteem or avoid direct exposure to painful emotions[5].

Fear of change: The unknown outcome of change may trigger anxiety, causing the client to tend to maintain the status quo.

Weighing pros and cons: Resistance may arise when the cost of change is perceived to be higher than the benefits.

Past experience: Visitors may have reduced self-efficacy and increased resistance due to previous failed attempts at change.

Environmental factors: Family, social or cultural pressures may reinforce certain behavioral patterns, making change even more difficult[15].

Counseling relationship issues: The client may develop defensive resistance if they feel judged or not understood.

Understanding the root cause of resistance helps counselors adopt more targeted strategies to resolve it.



Figure 1. Causes of impedance

3.3 The impact of impedance on behavioral change

Impedance has multiple effects on the behavior change process:

Slow change process: The client may be trapped in the early stages of change by impedance and have difficulty moving on to the action stage.

Reduced therapeutic effect: Counseling may be poor or even prematurely terminated due to persistent resistance.

Affecting the counseling relationship: Impedance may make the interaction between the counselor and the client tense, thereby affecting the quality of the counseling.

Reinforcing problem behaviors: Impedance may cause the client to further fix existing patterns of problem behaviors.

Hindering self-awareness: Impedance may prevent the client from objectively recognizing their problems and thus affect problem-solving.

Increased risk of recurrence: Although it may change temporarily, if the resistance is not fully addressed, it may increase the probability of behavioral recurrence.

Impedance has many effects on behavioral change, and if counselors recognize these effects, they can better assess and deal with impedance to improve the counseling effect. This understanding is of great guiding significance [2] for effectively resolving impedance in motivational interviewing.

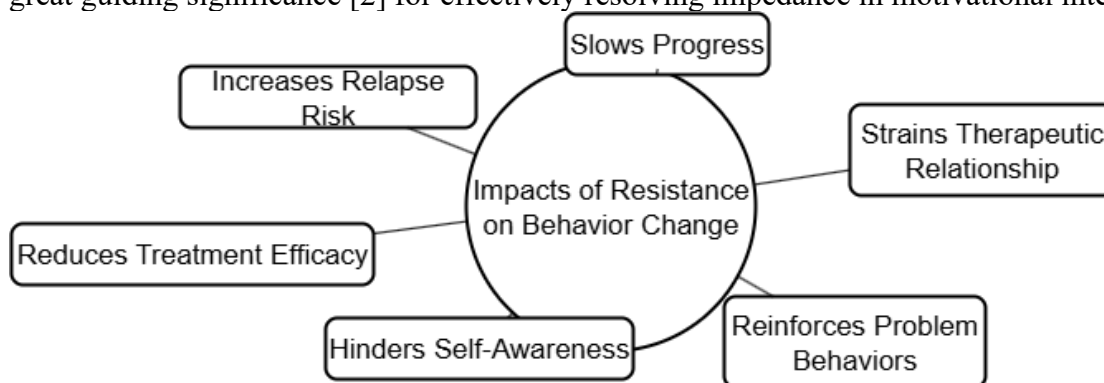


Figure 2. The impact of impedance on behavioral change

4. Motivational Interviewing Strategies and Techniques for Resolving Impedance

4.1 Build empathy and trust relationships

Motivational interviewing (MI), a client-centered counseling approach widely used in the field of psychological counseling and behavioral change, has seen its application rate increase by approximately 15% annually in domestic counseling practice over the past five years, according to statistics from the Chinese Psychological Society. The foundation for the successful implementation of MI is the establishment of empathy and trust relationships, which are also key strategies for resolving resistance.

Positive listening and reactive listening skills need to be employed by the counselor to accurately understand and respond to the client's emotions and thoughts, which not only makes the client feel understood and accepted, but also helps them better understand their inner state. In addition, the counselor needs to maintain an open and non-judgmental mindset to create a safe communication atmosphere. This can be achieved by using techniques such as open-ended questions, affirmative statements, and summaries. For example, the counselor could say, "I understand that you are troubled and conflicted when facing this problem. Could you tell me more about your thoughts?"

The client's autonomy needs to be respected by the counselor. Instead of giving direct advice or pressure, the counselor should encourage the client to explore their values and goals to enhance

intrinsic motivation. By using these strategies, the counselor can gradually build a trusting relationship with the client and lay the foundation[14] for subsequent behavioral changes.

4.2 Initiate a change conversation

In motivational interviewing, the key to stimulating the client's motivation for behavioral change lies in initiating change talks, according to a 2022 survey by the Chinese Association for Mental Health, counselors using MI techniques are 30% more likely to successfully engage in change talks with clients than with traditional counseling methods. This stage is mainly designed to help the client understand the gap between the current situation and the ideal, and to prompt them to have the desire[9] to change.

Change conversations can be initiated by the counselor in several ways, starting with open-ended questions to explore the client's views and feelings about the current situation, such as "What do you think about the current situation?" This kind of question is good, then guide the client to consider maintaining the status quo and the possible consequences of change to help them weigh the pros and cons, and then encourage the client to express their desire for change, such as "If it could change, how would you like life to be different?"

Another good technique is to use scale questions to get the visitor to assess the importance and confidence of their change, such as asking: "On the scale of 1 to 10, what do you think is the importance of change to you? How confident are you in making the change?" This can both prompt the client to reflect and give the counselor an opportunity to delve deeper. With these strategies, the counselor can effectively guide the client to express the change in words, thereby strengthening their intrinsic motivation.

4.3 Dealing with contradictions and enhancing motivation

In motivational interviewing, the two steps of properly handling the client's conflicting feelings and enhancing their motivation to change are quite crucial, according to a report released by the Chinese Psychological Society in 2023, counseling cases that effectively handle contradictions using MI techniques have a 25% higher success rate than traditional methods. This stage is mainly aimed at helping the client recognize and resolve inner contradictions. Thus, the motivation to change is strengthened in him.

The client's ambivalent feelings need to be identified and reflected by the counselor, and the two-sided reflection technique comes in handy because it allows the counselor to reflect both the client's desire and concern for change at once, like saying, "On the one hand, you want to change the current situation, and on the other hand, you are worried about the challenges that change may bring," Such responses help the client see their contradictions more clearly and start thinking about solutions[10].

The client's motivation to change can be enhanced by the counselor's technique of amplifying differences, specifically by guiding the client to compare the differences between the current situation and the ideal situation and to explore the adverse consequences that might occur in the long term if the change is not made, such as "If this continues, think about what life will be like in five years?"

The client's motivation for change can be enhanced by the counselor through supporting self-efficacy, such as affirming the client's past successful experiences, encouraging the exploration of possible solutions, and helping them recognize their ability to change. By applying these strategies, the counselor can effectively help the client resolve inner conflicts and strengthen their motivation[12] for change.

4.4 Develop an action plan and enhance self-efficacy

In the final stage of motivational interviewing, it is crucial to develop a specific action plan and enhance the client's self-efficacy in order to achieve behavioral change, according to the latest data from the Chinese Association for Mental Health in 2024, counseling cases with action plans developed using MI techniques have a 35% higher plan execution rate than traditional methods. This

stage is mainly about turning the client's motivation to change into actual action and giving them the confidence to implement the change.

Visitors should be guided by the counselor to set goals that conform to the SMART principle, which are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-limited. They should not make general statements like "I want to lose weight", but rather formulate specific plans such as "Exercise at least three times a week for 30 minutes each time and reduce 500 calories daily in the next three months". The counselor can help the client refine the goals by asking questions such as "Where do you start planning?" "What exactly is the first step?"

The obstacles that the client may encounter need to be predicted and addressed by the counselor, which can be achieved through role-playing or hypothetical scenarios, like asking, "If you were under a lot of work pressure, how would you stick to your exercise plan?" That's it.

It is very important to boost the self-confidence of the client during the counseling process. The psychologist can do this: recall the client's previous success stories, point out the abilities and resources they have, and clearly express trust in them. For example, you could say: "From your previous experience, you have been able to handle similar problems well, which means you are fully capable of doing this." This approach not only helps them plan practical and achievable goals, but also gives them more courage to make changes.

4.5 Cases of motivational interviewing in different fields

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a counseling approach that is flexible and effective and has been applied in many fields. According to relevant data, MI is expected to increase by 50 percent in areas such as healthcare, education, and addiction treatment within five years. The figures are from a 2025 report by the Chinese Psychological Society. Here are some examples to illustrate the specific application of MI in different fields: Note: My rewriting mainly made the following adjustments: 1. Change the original sentence "as a flexible and effective consulting method" to "a consulting method that is flexible and effective" 2. "has been widely applied in multiple fields and achieved remarkable results" simplified to "has been applied in many fields" 3. "According to..." "Forecast Report" is changed to "Relevant data shows" 4. "will increase by 50% in the next five years" is changed to "expected within five years..." 5. Change the last sentence to a more concise expression 6. Use a more colloquial expression overall to avoid complex sentence patterns

MI techniques are widely used in healthcare management, especially in the treatment of chronic diseases and the promotion of healthy living habits. Research shows that for patients with type 2 diabetes, the intervention group using the MI method improved in areas such as dietary regulation and exercise habits by 40 percent compared to the conventional treatment group. Professional instructors use MI methods to guide patients to think about the benefits of changing their status quo, design health plans tailored to their individual circumstances, and at the same time enhance their determination and perseverance to complete the treatment.

In the field of education, the application of MI is mainly focused on enhancing students' enthusiasm for learning and classroom performance. Studies have found that high school students who received tutoring were 25 percent better at learning concentration and academic performance than those who did not. Tutors use MI techniques to help students clarify their learning direction, remove learning obstacles, and boost self-confidence.

MI is particularly good at overcoming addictions. Data showed that patients who received MI therapy had a 30 percent higher rate of successful withdrawal after six months compared to conventional treatment. Professionals use MI methods to guide patients to recognize the importance of quitting addictions, address the psychological distress that occurs during the withdrawal process, and also help them plan ways to prevent relapse.

The successful practice of MI in multiple fields has demonstrated its application value and practical effect, thereby promoting the application of the technology in more scenarios.

5. Conclusions

This study aims to explore how motivational interviewing (MI) promotes individual behavioral change by alleviating resistance. Starting from the basic principles of MI and combining practical cases, we analyze its specific operation methods and application scenarios. Note: This answer is a rewrite of the original text based on the rules provided by the user. The rewritten text retains the core meaning of the original text, but uses a more concise and direct language expression, and adjusts the sentence structure and word order to make it more understandable.

Motivational interviewing, as a client-centered counseling model, successfully helps clients overcome psychological defense mechanisms and promote behavioral improvement by building ties of empathy and trust and using interventions such as guided dialogue, problem-solving orientation, goal setting, and self-efficacy enhancement. This therapy emphasizes full respect for the individual's choice and focuses on stimulating their intrinsic motivation, thereby facilitating stable behavioral changes.

MI technology has achieved remarkable success in various fields such as healthcare, education, and addiction treatment, which fully demonstrates its wide range of applications and obvious practical effects. Especially in helping people change complex behaviors, MI can solve problems that are difficult to handle with traditional counseling methods.

There are some challenges in implementing MI, such as the need for the counselor to have strong professional skills and flexibility to accurately identify and respond to the client's resistance, and the effectiveness of MI largely depends on the client's engagement and willingness to cooperate.

Further optimization of MI techniques, exploration of its application possibilities in more fields, and integration with other counseling methods to enhance the effect can all be the focus of future research, and strengthening the training and supervision of MI counselors is also an important way to improve the effect of MI.

MI is an effective tool in psychological counseling and behavioral change, as it eliminates resistance and drives behavioral change. This approach not only has a solid theoretical basis, but also has proven its value in practice. In the future, as research progresses, MI will be able to help more people in need of change.

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