

**Abstract:**

In contemporary coaching practice, the ability to integrate evidence-based methodologies is central to achieving sustainable client outcomes. This article explores how psychodynamic coaching principles can be combined with Motivational Interviewing (MI) to support clients in achieving their goals. By addressing both the underlying drivers of behaviour and the mechanisms of change, this integrated approach fosters insight, agency, and sustained behavioural transformation.

Introduction

Professional coaching has evolved significantly over the last two decades, drawing on research and practice from psychology, organisational development, and behavioural science. While the primary aim is often framed as supporting clients in achieving specific goals, sustainable change requires more than action plans and accountability structures.

Behavioural patterns are shaped by complex personal histories, entrenched beliefs, and unconscious processes. These deeper influences, if unexamined, can hinder goal

attainment even when the client is motivated to change. This is where an integrated approach, combining psychodynamic coaching with Motivational Interviewing can provide a powerful framework.

The Psychodynamic Perspective: Addressing the ‘Why’

Psychodynamic coaching draws on concepts from psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theory, focusing on how unconscious processes and early life experiences shape current behaviour (Kilburg, 2004). Unlike therapy, its emphasis is on applying this awareness to present and future contexts.

Through this lens, the coach supports the client in:

- Identifying recurring cognitive, emotional, and behavioural patterns.
- Exploring the origins of self-perception and identity.
- Bringing implicit beliefs into conscious awareness for evaluation.

For example, a client experiencing difficulty in asserting themselves at work may discover, through exploration, that their reluctance is rooted in early family dynamics in which conflict was avoided. Recognising this connection provides not only self-understanding but also a platform for developing alternative strategies.

Psychodynamic coaching aligns with the International Coaching Federation’s (ICF) emphasis on deepening self-awareness as a pathway to meaningful and sustainable change.

Motivational Interviewing: The ‘How’ of Change

Motivational Interviewing, originally developed in the field of clinical psychology by Miller and Rollnick (1991), is a client-centred, goal-oriented communication style designed to enhance intrinsic motivation for change. While initially applied in health behaviour change, MI principles have proven highly transferable to coaching contexts (Passmore & Lawton-Smith, 2020).

MI is structured around four key processes:

1. **Engaging** – Establishing trust and rapport.
2. **Focusing** – Clarifying and maintaining direction in the conversation.
3. **Evoking** – Drawing out the client’s own motivations and values.
4. **Planning** – Developing commitment and action steps.

The central premise of MI is that change is more sustainable when the reasons, goals, and strategies are generated by the client rather than prescribed by the coach. For example, rather than advising a client to “take on more leadership responsibilities,” an MI-informed approach might involve asking: “*What would stepping into a leadership role make possible for you, and what might it cost?*” This open-ended inquiry promotes reflection, autonomy, and ownership.

Why the Integration Works

While psychodynamic coaching addresses the ‘why’ illuminating the internal and historical drivers of behaviour, MI focuses on the ‘what next’ and ‘how.’ This creates a complementary process:

- **Insight:** Psychodynamic principles surface underlying beliefs and patterns.
- **Motivation:** MI techniques harness these insights to build commitment to change.
- **Action:** The client co-creates a plan that is both realistic and self-endorsed.

This integration allows for both depth and practicality. Clients are not left solely with self-awareness, nor are they pushed prematurely into action without addressing underlying barriers.

Outcomes and Benefits

Integrating psychodynamic and MI approaches can yield the following benefits:

- **Enhanced self-awareness** – Clients gain a clearer understanding of the root causes of their behaviour.
- **Stronger agency** – By exploring their own motivations, clients develop a greater sense of ownership over their choices.
- **Sustainable change** – Plans are tailored to the individual’s values and readiness, increasing the likelihood of long-term success.
- **Greater resilience** – Clients acquire tools to navigate future challenges without becoming dependent on the coach.

Feedback from my own practice indicates that clients often describe this approach as both *insightful* and *empowering*. They appreciate the balance between reflective exploration and actionable planning.

Conclusion

The integration of psychodynamic coaching and Motivational Interviewing offers a robust, evidence-informed framework for supporting clients in achieving their goals. By addressing both the deeper psychological influences and the practical mechanisms of change, coaches can help clients move from self-understanding to intentional, sustained action.

In an increasingly complex professional environment, coaches who can draw from multiple disciplines are well-positioned to facilitate meaningful, long-lasting client outcomes.

References:

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- Passmore, J., & Lawton-Smith, C. (2020). *Motivational Interviewing for coaching: Increasing client change talk and commitment*. Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice, 13(2), 144–158.

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I combine extensive coaching experience with a strong background in adventure and the outdoors. My practice focuses on supporting clients to navigate complexity, build resilience, and achieve meaningful outcomes, drawing on the same principles of preparation, adaptability, and growth that underpin my work in challenging environments. This integration of coaching and adventure provides a unique perspective that empowers clients to realise their potential both personally and professionally.

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