

Talking to Change: An MI Podcast

Glenn Hinds and Sebastian Kaplan



Episode 16: MI in Leadership and Organizations (MILO), with Fredrik Eliasson

Sebastian Kaplan:

Hello everyone, and welcome to another episode of Talking to Change, a Motivational Interviewing podcast. My name is Sebastian Kaplan. I'm in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and I am joined as always by my good friend Glenn Hinds from Derry, Northern Ireland. Hello, Glenn.

Glenn Hinds:

Hey, Seb. How're you doing, man?

Sebastian Kaplan:

Doing pretty well. It's an early Sunday morning here on my end, but happy to be joined by you, of course, and our guest who we'll introduce shortly.

Glenn Hinds:

Fantastic.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Glenn, why don't you start us off as usual with the social media connections and ways people can contact us.

Glenn Hinds:

Yep. We're currently sitting at just over 160 Twitter followers at our handle @ChangeTalking. Please feel free to come and join us. This is a platform where you have a chance to just reflect on anything that is Motivational Interviewing or anything that we've talked about in the conversations we've had with our guests, so @ChangeTalking for Twitter. On Facebook it's Talking To Change. Then, for direct contact with myself or Seb, emails, it's podcast@glennhinds.com.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Excellent. Thank you for that. All right, we are going to get started and I will introduce our guest. Our guest is Fredrik Eliasson. He's a social worker with more than 20 years' experience, mainly with organizational development and as a manager. Today, he divides his time between being a self-employed consultant specializing in leadership in organizational development, MI training, and being a project manager at the Research and Development Department at the National Board of Institutional Care.

Sebastian Kaplan:



This is an agency also known as SIS, which is a Swedish government agency that delivers individually tailored compulsory care for young people with psychosocial problems and for adults with substance abuse. Overall, Fredrik is responsible for the MI training and supervision of more than 4000 SIS employees, and he is head of the unit of MI trainers and MINT members. Fredrik, it is very good to have you joining us, we are happy to talk with you today.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Thank you very much. I'm really happy to be on your podcast as well.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Maybe you can get us started, as some of our recent guests have done as well, just tell us a little bit about your early MI story. Just how MI came into your life and we'll take it from there.

Fredrik Eliasson:

All right, thanks. This is late 1990s, early 2000s. I was just out of University with a degree in social work and I had my first job as a low-level manager at a Swedish prison. I was employed to implement evidence-based practice at that prison. One of the things that it was decided was going to be implemented was Motivational Interviewing and I've never heard of it at that point. I was sent off to a three-day introductory training and trying to implement that at this prison that I was employed at. I think my first taste of MI was more as an administrator than as a practitioner, even though I tried to work with some of the skills, it was really hard and I didn't have very much supervision or coaching myself.

Fredrik Eliasson:

I remember, in the early days it was quite a struggle to learn. The environment that I was practicing in was highly confrontational. That was the culture that was at the prison. A couple of years later, I started working as practitioner, as a probation officer. I was doing CBT treatment. That's Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. I went to my second introductory training of MI. That's when things started to fall in place for me. It was really helpful to do the course twice. I was lucky at my workplace at the moment because I had a very talented colleague, who was a supervisor in MI was called Eric Canivstrum and we spend a lot of time together. I had the opportunity to meet with him on a weekly basis. He listened to my conversations or we taped... filmed my conversations. That was very helpful for learning Motivational Interviewing. That's where I started.

Glenn Hinds:

Sounds like it was something that came along. In some ways it sounds like it was given to you and told, "Get on with doing this." It wasn't something that you went looking for. But when you were introduced to it a second time, and again, I imagine it'll be very encouraging for some people listening to this, that here we are now talking to an MI practitioner after 20 years, and his initial introduction to it was something that he had to go back to a couple of times before it began to have any real influence for him. And so, again, it's that encouragement. If it's not working the first time, it doesn't mean it's not



going to work. So, what was it that, you mentioned there the support of your colleague, but also going to the second workshop. So, what was it that you started to experience or hear at that point that led you to want to do more of it then, Fredrik?

Fredrik Eliasson:

I think with Motivational Interviewing, I got a stronger sense of how I could do the things that I wanted to do. Because during my Social Work training, there was a big emphasis on relationship building with clients and that was more important than the specific method you were using. It was all down to being able to create that trusting bond to the people that you were working with. And that was truly emphasized during the whole of my training, but no one ever got down to how do you do that? How should I train to become good at that?

Fredrik Eliasson:

How do I do it with some very challenging people that might not want to be there, or they're forced to meet me and there's a lot of hostility in the room? How is it possible for me to be good at relationship building in really, really difficult situations? Nobody told me that. And I think with MI, you've got something to hold on to that described how you might do that. What skills should I practice to be better at that? And what really stood out, was that if you make people feel understood by you, that you get it, that you are able, them walking away from a meeting with you, "Man, he got it. He understood what it's about. He understood the struggles I'm in." That is so relationship building. So, trust building. If you're able to communicate that, and MI is very helpful in describing how you might do that.

Fredrik Eliasson:

So, I think that's what really has drawn me in. And it was a lot about, also the spirit of Motivational Interviewing was very aligned with my own values today, and at the time as well. I think the first course that I did, there was much more emphasis on different skills, but not so much on the spirit. And the second training I did was much more emphasis on spirit, and the skills were there for you to practice that attitude, which we call the MI spirit. And that made a huge difference for me.

Sebastian Kaplan:

I feel like we could go in a few directions even already at what you said just then. That interesting comment about, if you start with the skills, it might be a struggle to build some momentum or to even apply things, which might seem a bit counterintuitive, because it's learning about what you actually do and you can just get on with it. I was struck hearing you talk about and reflect on those early experiences and it seemed like at a very early stage in your MI learning and in your career, you were already wrestling with the how do you teach MI? Not so much the client/practitioner dynamic, but maybe that more meta dynamic of how a trainer might infuse that into a clinical conversation. Is that accurate?

Fredrik Eliasson:



Yeah, indeed it was. Maybe it was because of the two trainers that I met. They had very different styles and different styles may suit different people. But for me, the style of my second trainer, where there was this emphasize in the beginning, of the spirit of MI, it made it feel less of something that you did to people. I remember feeling a bit frustrated in the beginning, when it was all skills, that it felt a bit manipulative. So yeah, I think quite from the beginning, it struck me that the same method or approach could come through quite different depending on who was talking about it.

Glenn Hinds:

It sounds like you really appreciated the opportunity to reflect on your own attitude.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Oh, indeed.

Glenn Hinds:

The way you were doing what you were doing. And once you had a grasp of that, and once you connected to the attitude, spirit of Motivational Interviewing, and it resonated with your own values, then the skills began to make more sense for you.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Exactly. Yeah. Exactly. I also think that what came out of that was that I tried to implement it at the prison. I thought of this as just another method. So you have this method, and you have that program, or you could do this, and then you have MI, and you need to make some sort of infrastructure for the inmates to be able to get these conversations. But from the second training, it was so much clearer that this was more of a way of being. Not a hat we put on, "so now I'm going to have an MI conversation with this client, and then I'm just going to be as I used to be, and then for someone else I put on the hat again." It was more of a way of being.

Fredrik Eliasson:

That was so interesting. When we had a small group of colleagues that were practicing or training MI together, and sometimes we had Eric with us, and sometimes we didn't and I remember once we talked about, "Could you use MI when you answer the phone?" And some of us said, "Yes, of course you will." And some was, "No, no. I only do MI when it's called for or when I make a conscious decision that now is a good time for this approach."

Fredrik Eliasson:

That was quite early, that distinction. Is MI more of a way of being, a way of doing the work that I do? Or is it something extra I put on in certain situations where I feel that it is needed, and for me, it was quite clear at that time, that this was more of a way of being, a way of doing the work that I'm supposed to do, this is the way that I do it.

Sebastian Kaplan:



Right. It's like the MI becomes the language that you speak and then there may be certain conversations that sound a bit different or a bit focused. For instance, when someone is ambivalent about change, which of course is what MI is all about, but a conversation could sound similar to or could have... you can hear and feel the MI spirit in any kind of conversation.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Exactly.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Even if it isn't about someone's ambivalence.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Precisely, and I think maybe we will talk a little bit more about that when we begin to talk about MI in a leadership context. But when we speak about MI, and we sometimes say, "Well, it's MI all the time." and some say "Oh, no, it can't be. It's for specific situations." Maybe we sometimes mean different things. When we talk about MI. So, if we mean the engaging part where you're interested in the other person's perspective and you value their autonomy and you try to do all of that, that might not be a hat that you put on and take off.

Fredrik Eliasson:

But the focusing part and the cultivating change talk part, that of course comes into play, not all the time. It comes into play in certain situation where there is a goal that you're working towards. Because before that, you don't have change talk or sustain talk. It's just talk. It's when you have the focus that you have the other processes that we talked about in MI.

Glenn Hinds:

So, it's almost like the engaging aspect of the four processes of motivation is a universal opportunity for us to have relationships with everybody we meet, and that we're interested in other people, because we're interested in other people.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Exactly.

Glenn Hinds:

Where the divergence takes place is, "What's my role in this relationship?" Is it a friendship? Is it a bit of support? Or is it I have a particular role where I've been engaged in this conversation with the purpose of helping you think differently? And depending on what role I play in this relationship will influence which road I go next. But whatever happens, we're all going to start in this engagement process of "Who are you?" and "It's great to meet you." As a consequence, you're going to be able to use your reflective listening. You're going to be able to use your affirmations. Because they're genuine, you



do want to hear this person than you are interested in who this person is, from that strengths-based perspective.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Precisely. And I think one of the beautiful things, I might have heard it on your podcast or it might be different podcast, but it was with one of the founders, Steve Rollnick, who was asked to give a very short description of what MI is, might have been a different podcast. Anyway, what he said was, it's a combination of attitude and skills. And if you call it spirit, or we call it a certain attitude towards other people, it's still that attitude is not something that you take on or take off. And that made sense as well because at a point in my career, I did a lot of supervision on wards for young people that were mandated to care. So, I locked myself in the ward and I listened to real conversation between the young people and the staff. And then I tried to supervise the staff to be more MI in their daily work.

Fredrik Eliasson:

And one of the youth, I remember him so well was a 17 year old boy, who was curious about who I was, and he asked me, "Who are you and why are you here?" And I said, "Well, I work at the head office. I help the staff with some supervision, and I work with a specific method of Motivational Interviewing. You ever heard of it?" "Yeah, yeah. Yeah." He said, "I've heard of it. I have an MI conversation once a week. I think it's Wednesday at two. I have one of those MI conversations." "Okay. So, what do you make of it?", I asked him. "Well, it's the staff, giving an act. It's more of theater. It's not something they really mean." Oops, I thought. I said, "That's, of course, quite interesting to hear. How come you think of it that way?"

Fredrik Eliasson:

"Well, I really like my MI conversation on Wednesday at two because at those conversation, it seems that I'm doing most of the talking. Which surprises me every time because I'm going there thinking, I'm going to talk to the staff again, I don't really want to. And I end up being the one who talks the most. And I usually talk about the stuff that's really important to me. Like, what I want with my life and how I want things to be when I get out of here. And how I think about my education, all of that stuff, which is quite good. But you know, all the time, that I am not in that conversation, all the time on the ward and all my other contacts with the staff, they're just telling me what to do all the time. And I don't like that."

Fredrik Eliasson:

Somehow, he, by saying that, shows us what happens when we put on the hat and we have the attitude one hour a week. And all of the other time, because this was 24-hour inpatient ward care, we have a different attitude. And this 17-year-old boy, could very nicely describe that.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. Yeah. Yet another example of a teenager who seems to capture things so beautifully and able to describe what perhaps many people experience with it. Interesting



how, even with someone who was, I would imagine, suspicious of the intentions or the motives of the staff, it sounds like going into the conversation in a guarded way. Would just find themselves talking about things that they weren't expecting.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Actually, I wanted to test out a metaphor with you guys, as I was listening to all this stuff about hats and things, that perhaps what we're saying is that the MI spirit is like our haircuts, or in our cases, almost like a shaved head. But then we can put on an MI hat of sort on top of that when we're getting into the change talk, listening change talk and how we respond to sustain talk and that sort of thing, where we might take off that hat and put on a CBT hat or an Acceptance and Commitment Therapy hat, but we still have that MI spirit underneath the hat, which is the foundation of wherever else we're taking the conversation.

Glenn Hinds:

Your head is your spirit, and you put your hats on top of your spirit?

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. I guess the head is a more permanent thing than the haircut.

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Again, maybe less so for us.

Glenn Hinds:

Certainly, my head...

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right, yeah.

Glenn Hinds:

And perhaps we can invite the audience to maybe extend that or to draw that out. Looking for metaphors to explain this part of the conversation. What's the image that comes up for you as you listen to that idea that there's this constant spirit with a fluctuation of what goes on top of it, depends what's going on in the relationship. There's our first invite to our audience to throw in some ideas.

Glenn Hinds:

And what also struck me when you were speaking, Fredrik, was that the young person was asking for something that was similar to what you were asking for in your practice, which was, you said, "This has to help me do what I want." As a practitioner, you were looking for something. You were looking for skills. You were looking for education. You



were looking for support, that ultimately helped you do what you wanted. The young person was going, "This is really interesting, this is surprising, because I'm talking about the stuff that matters to me." But ultimately, he was comparing the two experiences against his own need, which was "Help me do what I need to do." And maybe that's something for us all to consider is, "How am I helping this person do what they want? And do I even know what they want? Have I taken the time to ask them?"

Glenn Hinds:

I think that's what you were describing there in relation to the spirit. Is that the spirit embeds that genuine curiosity? But what is it you really want? Who is it you really want to be? As compared to, "This is who I think you should be and therefore I'm going to do these things to you." I think that's the shift that maybe takes place, certainly for me as a practitioner at the early stages, and sounds like for yourself as well, which was shifting away from doing to, to being with and accepting people, and ultimately to find out what it is they wanted for themselves.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Yeah, yeah. That's precisely it.

Glenn Hinds:

So given that development, and you've mentioned supervision a couple of times and the work that you're now doing, perhaps you could introduce us now, how your journey from Motivational Interviewing took you into the leadership and organizational aspect of it.

Fredrik Eliasson:

So, my first encounter with MI was from an organizational perspective. How do you implement evidence-based practice? How do you change work cultures that are high confrontational, to a work culture that more is in line with the spirit of MI, or person centered, way of being with people? I think, for me, it was at a point, this must be 9 or 10 years ago, I took a new job as a manager for an inpatient ward where we were supposed to give mandated care to people that were suffering from dual diagnosis and my idea was, if we could have spirit of MI as a workplace culture, this is how those that are taken into care with us, this is what they always meet in contact with us. That could be a pretty awesome thing, was my thought.

Fredrik Eliasson:

So I tried to get that job with that description, I had this idea on how you can try to run this ward with the help of an evidence based practice that I hope could be like the binding culture for the workforce or the teams. What quickly became apparent, was that the way that we communicate with each other as a team, the way that I as a manager communicate with my employees or co-workers, that will have an effect on the chances that culture, that attitude also will exist between the front line staff and the patients. That was my discovery and that was quite, at the time quite challenging for me as a manager because that meant that I needed to do things a little bit differently in the way that I was interacting with my co-workers and the management team. It became so clear that there



were connection between those two things. How we communicate in the workforce, or the group, or the teams, and what comes out on the ward.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right, again it just seems like another instance of where you're starting from is not that front-line practitioner, client conversation, but at a level, not above it from a superiority standpoint, but from just a different level of things. I would image a lot of people, I know I put myself in that category, would think to make some kind of change, or to enact some new style on a unit like that, you need to start with the programming, changing the interventions and it seems like you were, or maybe you were doing things in parallel or at the same time, but really emphasizing the conversations between colleagues and from manager to practitioner as opposed to practitioner to client.

Fredrik Eliasson:

I started, as I understood you, at the same point as you described. I thought, let's give them some proper training in Motivational Interviewing, let's get some good supervision and lets them let talk a lot about how we can be in the spirit of MI, not just when we have one on one conversations, but how we interact on a day to day basis in the world. That was my initial idea. It didn't work. That's when I started thinking around, "Why isn't this working? Why is it so hard?" I started reading a bit about implementation and what I also got as feedback from my employees, was that they wished for me to be with them as they saw me be with patients. So, when I was with patients, I was in my MI spirit. I had a lot of practice, so that wasn't too hard. But when I was the manager, it was so much harder for me to be in the spirit of MI because I had all of this responsibilities and "Why don't people just get it?"

Glenn Hinds:

Right.

Fredrik Eliasson:

So it took quite a lot of looking into oneself and challenging the current way that I was leading this work.

Glenn Hinds:

Throughout your own willingness to reflect on yourself and the impact of yourself and other people is very evident and it's like, you being aware of the organization as almost a corporate parent. That here we are looking after these clients, and what you began to explore is, if we start parenting people like this, these are the outcomes. So you took a step back and began to think about what type of parent am I? And what type of parent do I need to be? That was about the relationship within the team, that you had with the team and almost the way we talk to each other in the team is the culture in which we ultimately then start to talk to other people outside of the team, which then teaches them how to talk to other people.

Glenn Hinds:



So by being caring and compassionate and nurturing to each other, we've created a safe place for us to be us and everybody who comes into that space has an opportunity to be safe to be themselves and ideally what happens is, they can then take that culture away and start to bring that into the relationships they have with other people. So, the people who can be with them, feel safe and supported by them.

Fredrik Eliasson:

And it was much later that I stumbled upon, there's some science behind this. There's a lot of research being done about how you change workplace cultures and what seems to be the most important factors for teams to thrive. That made me want to pursue this road a little bit further. How could MI be helpful for leaders?

Sebastian Kaplan:

Maybe that takes us naturally to your work now. You and your colleagues are developing its own subset, I suppose, of MI. The acronym is MILO, but maybe you could talk a little bit about what MILO is and who's doing that work, and where you're at with that?

Fredrik Eliasson:

So, I think it's important to say that the MILO concept is just the four of us who are doing and we just want to have some name for it, but I know there's a book that's called MI Leads, that a few colleagues have published through Amazon and then there's a whole bunch of really interesting work being done that's not just on the MILO. Just something that I want to say in the beginning.

Fredrik Eliasson:

But, the driving force to build this together was Pernille Koch Erickson, who is a Danish member of MINT, who quite early started thinking and conceptualizing MI in leadership. We met at one of the forums and I was in the midst of my exploration around what type of leader I wanted to be. So that's the starting point for our collaboration.

Glenn Hinds:

It sounds like the L in MILO stands for leadership?

Fredrik Eliasson:

Yeah, sorry. MI in Leadership and Organizations. Sorry, that's the MILO. MI in Leadership and Organizations.

Glenn Hinds:

So it sounds like it was very reassuring for you to discover that it wasn't just you thinking about this, there was this research going on about how do organizations be healthy and supportive, but even more interesting was within the Motivational Interviewing network of trainers, you met other people even in your own region who were thinking that way and it seems like there was an opportunity for a conversation to get started about what and if do we do with this?



Fredrik Eliasson:

Exactly.

Glenn Hinds:

So, there's four of you thinking about it and there's four of you working on it, what sort of things are you discovering and what sort of things are you practicing?

Fredrik Eliasson:

So, what we're trying to do is, build some sort of hub for people that are interested in MI in Leadership and Organization and to be a group that tries to bring some sort of community together for folks who think this is interesting. What we did was that we built this website. We tried to gather material, resources, around MI in Leadership. Just as a way of trying to spread this kind of thinking. It's me, it's Pernille Koch Erickson in Denmark. It's Greg Sumpter in Texas US and it's Jillian Gonzales in New Mexico. The four of us trying to facilitate, I guess, a place for people to find resources around MI leadership.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Great. And we'll get that website to the episode webpage as well. So, people can access that. Okay, so the four of you, so you developed this hub, you're trying to attract and invite people with similar interests to start sharing ideas and start developing a sense of, what does MI look like in a leadership and organizational context? What are some key things, if people were to ask you? Gosh, MI in leadership, why even do that? How is that a thing?

Fredrik Eliasson:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I think that there's a movement for leadership and leadership development that comes in, quite some different names. Some call it Transformational Leadership. Some call it Humble Leadership, or Servant Leadership. Because what research seems to tell us, is that the Traditional Authoritarian Leadership doesn't work as well as different kind of leadership, which is sometimes described as more servant or transformational type of leadership. There's quite a bit of research on that. That's one thing. The other thing is that we have something called psychological safety, which is the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking, and it seems that in teams and organizations that have psychological safety, they thrive and some research show that this is one of the key factors for organizational teams to thrive.

Glenn Hinds:

So, in some ways, it sounds like, first of all if you think of leadership or organizations from a pyramidal perspective what you're saying is the pyramid is turned upside down. That the leader serves all of those above them in the pyramid. That's the role and that's their responsibilities of taking on that role and that's what the rewards come for, from taking on. That in itself influences the experience of people's interpersonal risk-taking or psychological safety, that the leader creates the environment to be safe to be vulnerable, to be safe to not know, or safe to experiment.

Fredrik Eliasson:



Yeah.

Glenn Hinds:

And to make mistakes and for each and every one to learn that it's okay for me to be me and for us to come together almost like in a hive and work together and create a safe place for everybody.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Precisely. The psychological safety is precisely that. You feel okay to take risks, to say, "Hey, I don't really get where's this project going." And that's a risk. Because some of us say, "Well, didn't you get the memo?" Or "Haven't you read the files?" or "Everybody else seems to get it, and you don't?" It seems like in a lot of workplaces that are not psychological safe, you don't really bring your full self and your full engagement to work.

Glenn Hinds:

So, it sounds like the manager in that instance, doesn't take the practitioner or colleagues or work mate's uncertainty personally. Or is a threat that they continue to see it from the other person's perspective. It sounds like that's part of what you were describing at the beginning, which was... going back to that attitude of, what if this wasn't about me? What if this challenge, what if I continue to try and understand it from the other person's perspective? Why does this not make sense? Well, the reason why it's not working is because there's something wrong with you.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Exactly. Exactly. So, if organization's leaders are trying to create psychological safe workplaces, and wanting to have a humble approach to leadership, they might at the same way as social worker practitioner need help with the how. How do I do that? What skills should I be good at? When someone comes and says, there's nothing working on this work, why aren't you taking your responsibility as a leader? This is terrible. It's very easy as the leader, to do into defending yourself. Then you have just a big argument. In that moment, to think that, okay now I need to put my listening skills into practice because there might be something here that I'm missing and there might be something here that this person brings to me, that is really important for the organization that I'm responsible for. But it's hard, because when you're accused, you tend not to listen. You tend to defend yourself.

Fredrik Eliasson:

I think what MI have, is some pieces of a puzzle that helps leader grow and become leaders that are able to create safe spaces and psychological safety at workplaces. I think what we can contribute about the skills. But again, the skills without the attitude doesn't do it.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. So MI, one of the things that it would bring to the table for a leader is more effective listening skills and all of the benefits that people feeling heard from their leaders would



bring to there for the organization. I wonder what you would say Fredrik, to someone who says, "You know, is that really what leadership is about?" Organizations need people to make tough decisions, the final answer needs to rest with that leader or manager person, whoever that is. If people don't like the answers, they don't have to work there, but what we really need is that strong person, the strong voice to say yes or no and to keep people in line. That's really where organizations thrive. What would you say to that?

Fredrik Eliasson:

I would say that research tells us otherwise. And what the successful leader seems to be able to do balance advocating his or hers own view with listening and inquiring other people's views. So, leaders who do that seems to be more appreciated by the workforce and seems to have better results. I think you need both to have leader that puts the direction, but you also need a leader who is able to make the person's that work for him or her, be able to bring their whole selves to work and feel engaged to the workplace and to the work that they're doing. You need to be able to combine those two.

Glenn Hinds:

So in some ways, the idea of a leader being a strong person, what's represented by that strength is not necessarily their ability to make everybody afraid of them, but to make everybody feel safe in their company recognizing how different things are and it's the practitioner's strength, emotional or psychological strength as much as anything else, to be willing to hear things from the staff perspective, not just their own or their organizations.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Yep. Yeah.

Glenn Hinds:

So, you mentioned that idea of the attitude and the thought coming to me is, how do we teach this attitude? You mentioned that something has developed for you and what is it that makes the learning of the spirit of the attitude of Motivational Interviewing possible? Is it through the experience or someone who manifests the spirit with you that eventually, it's almost like you learn it by osmosis? Do you take it into you through other people in the relationship? Or is there exercises that you do when you're working with organizations that maybe perhaps the audience could consider thinking for themselves?

Fredrik Eliasson:

I think this is very similar to training MI to other practitioners, as to train MI with leaders. I think you would like to try to get them to experience what that attitude or spirit feels like. And to experience maybe the difference between the hierarchical, "I'm the boss here. I'm telling you what to do.", how that feels. The other perspective, or the other approach, which would be, so "This decision has been made and you feel both ways about that. Please, tell me about that." Those two approaches would feel very differently. I think when you're training people, it's nice to have that experience and then learning the skills is so much easier.



Sebastian Kaplan:

Trying to place the clinical world of MI with the leadership organizational world, and wondering if there are some things that fit nicely or are clean parallels? Or maybe there are some things that just don't quite overlap and that can be okay too. For instance, a client. In a clinical context, there's a client who is struggling, let's say, with their drinking. Then a practitioner uses MI with them, not on them, but with them and helps them resolve that or make changes in their life. Is there a parallel in the leadership and organizational realm that can fit with that construct?

Fredrik Eliasson:

Well, I think what you're asking me was, is there some similarities between the practitioner who works with a client who maybe drinks too much and try to help them around their drinking, and leadership training, are there similarities or differences? I think with MI in leadership, you need to think about what part of MI would be most helpful for leaders? I remember Terri Moyers, who is a well-known researcher and trainer in Motivational Interviewing, asked the question at a workshop I was, "When should you not do MI when you're a leader?" That's a fair question. That depends on what do you mean by saying MI.

Fredrik Eliasson:

So, do you mean cultivating change talk to specific behavioral goals? I think leaders quite rarely do that. But if you're talking about the attitude and the engaging part, with the overall goal to have psychological safety in work groups and have engaged staff, I think the need to have that attitude all the time, even when making tough decisions. Even when laying people off or replacing people. All of that hard, difficult stuff that takes place in workplaces, to have a leader that can listen to that frustration you feel over the decision that you think is wrong, and you feel listened to, might influence how you feel about the workplace that you are.

Glenn Hinds:

And perhaps even leaving how you feel about the experience of having been laid off and the impact that has on your own sense of self or your own anger or your own frustration or ideally, you're own motivation to move forward and potentially, that the conversation with the person laying you off can itself be a change conversation, if done effectively. It sounds like in some ways the question that you're exploring there was, "How do we balance that ethical issue of, is it possible for me as a leader with these skills and this knowledge to manipulate people to almost try and generate change talk from staff that fits my needs rather than their own." I wonder what thoughts you have and what you've explored in relation to that in MILO?

Fredrik Eliasson:

Yeah that's a very good question and I think in a leadership context, that question is more important and more at the forefront than a lot of other MI work. Because if other MI work is done in context where we have a long tradition of putting the patient or the client in the center and it's their needs that we are there for. With leadership it's somewhat different. I



mean, I'm responsible for the whole organization. I might be responsible to stakeholders. I might be responsible for making a profit. You need to be much, much, much more careful about not trying to use MI in a manipulative way to suit your own needs. I think that's a big question if you want to train leaders in MI. How much emphasis would you give that training to the evoking change talk sustain talk. Or instead how much would you train to be an equipoise? The overall goal is for the employee, together with their manager, to find a path or find a solution that works for the individual.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Fredrik, could you just talk a bit about equipoise? A term that we may not have covered in the podcast.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Excellent. Thank you. As I understand it, equipoise is where you don't have a preferred outcome or preferred goal with your MI conversation. So, for some behavioral changes, it's not a better outcome or a worse outcome. I think of it as a scale. On the one hand, you have behavioral changes, but you don't feel an ethical itch to try to influence heroin use. I think it's better not to use heroin than to use heroin. So, I would try to influence this conversation. On the other hand, I have behavioral changes that I think there's not a better behavioral change than the other. It's more about the other person coming to a decision on what they want to do. So, marriage counseling. Should I stay or should I go? There's not one outcome that is better than the other. At least, in Sweden, I usually take the example of someone comes in thinking about having an abortion. Should I as a practitioner try to influence that person to have the abortion? Or to not have the abortion? Maybe I shouldn't do either. I should be an equipoise.

Glenn Hinds:

Right.

Fredrik Eliasson:

I should be neutral. But with someone who uses heroin, I'm not neutral. I think it's better not to use heroin than to use heroin. So, there's a scale between those two, which makes, as a practitioner, I always have to be mindful, is this a behavior that I think is okay to influence? That's an ethical decision for me to make. That make sense.

Sebastian Kaplan:

I think it makes great sense. Maybe, could you tie it back into the context of leadership and organization? What you were trying to say earlier?

Fredrik Eliasson:

Yeah. As a leader, I must be very aware on where on that scale I am. As a leader, I probably have more conversations on the equipoise side, the neutral side, then I have where I have a specific outcome that I would prefer.

Glenn Hinds:



I imagine for a lot of people, that's quite a shift in their way of understanding the role of leaders and organizations. I am put into a management position because it's my job to steer the staff to a certain place. I'm an expert, I know where you need to be. So, brace yourself, I'm going to take you there.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Yep.

Glenn Hinds:

What you're inviting us to do is to recognize that there's lots of different ways of getting to this place, let's all of us think about and let's all of us go there together.

Fredrik Eliasson:

What we think that will do, is that will increase psychological safety, if you meet a person who talks to you like that. And it will increase your engagement to your work because you think that your opinion matters.

Sebastian Kaplan:

This question or the notion of psychological safety seems to be really at the core of what you all are doing with MILO group and maybe that's, not that it has to fit cleanly on top of a clinical context, but whereas someone changing their drinking or heroin use, as you were saying, that is what we're trying to achieve in a clinical context. From a leadership context, what we're trying to achieve with regard to the role of MI, is that level of psychological safety within the organization, which will then lead to whatever changes come from there. I imagine maybe there is a similarity. The person who is using heroin and is in a conversation with a substance abuse counselor, I imagine there would need to be a level of psychological safety that person experiences before they begin to even consider changing their heroin use. I suppose the parallels are there.

Fredrik Eliasson:

In order for people feel safe and trusting in you, there are certain actions that you can do that will increase that safety and trustworthiness and there is other actions that you can do that will decrease them.

Glenn Hinds:

I'm not sure of the right word, it's not a metaphor, it's the story of the sun and the moon trying to get the coat off a guy. As leaders we can blow really hard or else, we can just make the environment such that the person feels safe. It sounds like what MILO is exploring is how does Motivational Interviewing help leaders be the sunlight that influences people's attitudes and behaviors in their own organization rather than trying to force them into being productive.

Fredrik Eliasson:



Precisely. Yeah, exactly. I think MI in leadership and MILO is a part of something bigger in the leadership world. There are others out there trying to strive for the same outcome, but with other good methods and very inspirational methods, and I think MI has a place to contribute as well.

Sebastian Kaplan:

It's making me think of some of the other conversations we've had recently with Jeff Breckon in the context of sports, and talking about MI for coaches or a sports coach using Motivational Interviewing, or even what you were talking about earlier Fredrik, as a probation officer that I could see how the conversations might be similar as well. The probation officer will talk with their client so to speak, and there's some realities to that arrangement.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Exactly.

Sebastian Kaplan:

A judge has said that person needs to do X, Y, and Z and you as a probation officer is someone who is going to help coordinate that and manage that and report back and all of that is hopefully a very transparent process. A leader in a business will also have certain expectations of the worker. You'll work from this hour to this hour. These are the expectations that you have and so there are... seeing it and how it would relate to other contexts besides business organizations.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Yep, yep. Thank you Seb for bringing that back to me. Yeah, that's absolutely true. I remember a specific moment when I realized that the attitude or the spirit of MI wasn't just something that I put on once in a while when having MI conversation. It was, I had a new client coming in to visit and the first meeting with a new client had a specific route it always took. It was me gaining loads of information about this and that and what happens if you don't do that and eventually you could be back in prison if you don't comply. I was talking 80% of the time.

Fredrik Eliasson:

I thought, maybe it's possible to do those conversations in an MI manner and how would I go do that? Maybe he knows quite a lot about probation already. This might be the eighth time, what do I know? He might have friends who have been on probation. So instead of giving a lot of information, I used the strategy of giving information in a conversation. So, I asked him. So, now you're here. You have a probation, what do you know? And he knew a lot. So, I didn't have to get that much information. I could start by giving affirmations and say, "Wow, you've done your reading and you really want this to work. You've put some effort, really trying to dig in on what's being asked of you now that you have probation." You would imagine that conversation had a different vibe to it than my usual conversations. Huge eye opener for me.



Glenn Hinds:

So instead of trying, again in a probation situation where it could be understood that this person has done wrong, part of my role is to make life difficult for them and that's the only way they're going to change their attitude. It sounds like your approach, by you being different in the way you approach things, seeing them from a strength-based perspective changed the way they experienced being with you. That shifted the way they thought about their relationship with you and the metaphor that we've talked about a few times and is very familiar for people who are around Motivational Interviewing world, the dance that you were doing began to change and the conversation that you were having in that dance was again back to that, how does this help me get what I want from the client's perspective? Ultimately, I imagine for most people going to probation, what they want is to get the probation officer out of their life.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Which is a good thing.

Glenn Hinds:

Absolutely. You were inviting them to explore what do you think needs to happen for me to not have to see you again? They started to give you the information and its back to that idea that I learn who I am as I hear myself speak. It was their own ideas coming up with probably the same things you were going to explain to them, they have explained it to you, and more importantly explained it to themselves.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Yeah. It's really about that strength-based perspective. As a leader, to have the strength-based perspective, I think makes quite some difference. I had this one training with leaders and I was invited for, I think it was three hours, two hours, quite short, could you please give us something about MI leadership? And they had MI as an approach for their staff and they were curious about what does this have to do with us as leaders? Given the short amount of time that I had on my hands, I was struggling with what I'd do with those two hours.

Fredrik Eliasson:

What I decided upon, was to do a workshop around affirmations. This skill of strength-based approach. After I did that training and this must have been six months after, something like that, one of the leaders came up to me and say, "Oh man Fredrik, you've done my job difficult." But she had a smile on her face when she said it. So, I thought, well, this is probably not too bad. She told me the story about how she wanted to be an appreciative leader. How she wanted her staff to feel appreciated by her. She used to say, "Good work everyone." She said. She said that all the time and she told me, "Usually I ended my emails with great job. Great work!" And it didn't work she said. It didn't work.

Fredrik Eliasson:

"What you taught us was that I needed to be specific. If I think someone has done a good job, I need to tell them why I think that. What specifically had they done that I think was a



good job. Then I realized I didn't know that. This was just something I said. Then I had to go out and spend time with my employees to have something to go on. When I did that, I couldn't say it that often, but when I did say it, and I was specific, something happened."

Glenn Hinds:

So, in some ways, when you make a genuine affirmation, it's evidence that you've been paying attention to the other person and they notice that.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Exactly. That's one example of a skill that we'll have at MI that's really helpful for leaders to have the attitude of wanting to be appreciative and strength based.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Then how that translates to the notion of psychological safety, I imagine, is that the person who receives that affirmation has this experience that the other is trying to understand them, tries to see their strengths, tries to see the good in them and that the other person values them and then creates a safer environment both psychologically and throughout the workplace.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Exactly.

Glenn Hinds:

As often is the case, we find ourselves at a juncture in our podcast where undoubtedly we could continue to explore this really interesting topic of Motivational Interviewing in the context of leadership and organizations, but alas we now have to begin to think of our time. What we normally do at this point Fredrik, is just invite our participants and our guests to think about, is there anything that's going on for you at the minute, or around you in the world that's particularly caught your attention or curiosity that's not necessarily Motivational Interviewing, it might be, but it doesn't have to be, you just want to share it with us and the audience?

Fredrik Eliasson:

It is around this same topic that we've been on about. I've been getting a contract for leadership training where they actually invited me to do four days, four full days for their leaders, which usually I didn't get. I got shorter contracts for leadership training. It's a two day back to back and then three months of follow up and then three months, another follow-up. I've collaborated with a friend of mine who's a researcher at the university here in the south of Sweden, and we are going to try to do some research on how it will influence the workplace when we do the training. So, that's something that I'm really excited about.

Glenn Hinds:

A before and after?



Fredrik Eliasson:

Precisely.

Glenn Hinds:

I wonder which aspects of the organization are you particularly interested in measuring?

Fredrik Eliasson:

So, what you want to try to look at is engagement. How engaged are the members of the workforce for their work and their workplace? How meaningful is their work? What's the quality? The experienced quality of leadership and what's the social support of their leaders? Psychological safety is something that you want to look at. So, it's variables like that, that you want to see if those increase or decrease during this period of time.

Glenn Hinds:

I suppose from an organizational perspective, I guess that the organization is going to want to know is if we make this place psychologically safe for all the people will they become more productive? Because from an organizational perspective, that's what they're interested in, bottom line.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Yeah, and there's quite a large body of research out of the MI work that points to, that psychological safety is one of the key factors. And it's a researcher called Amy Edmonds, that's the big name around psychological safety. She rose to a bit of fame because of a New York Times article around a project that she did for Google called Project Aristotle. So, if you're interested in psychological safety and that's able to look up. Amy Edmonds, New York Times article and the Project Aristotle is that Google had going.

Fredrik Eliasson:

They tried to see what the factors of effective teams were. It showed that the overall most important factor for efficient teams, that is the backbone for everything else, is psychological safety.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Fantastic. We will look for that and maybe put a link to that on the page as well.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Nice.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Great. Fredrik, so we also ask if our guests are willing to have the audience contact them directly with any questions or feedback. If they'd be willing to do so. Are you willing? And if so, how can they reach you?

Fredrik Eliasson:



Yeah, sure absolutely. So, my email is Fredrik F-R-E-D-R-I-K and there's underlining and my last name is Eliasson, E-L-I-A-S-S-O-N and there's @icloud.com.

Glenn Hinds:

You also mentioned the MILO website am I correct? Do you want to reference that?

Fredrik Eliasson:

So it is, as one-word Miinleadershipandorganizations.

Glenn Hinds:

MI in Organization and Leadership.

Fredrik Eliasson:

As one word. Or you can Google MILO MI Leadership and it will pop up.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Right. And is that dot com or dot org?

Fredrik Eliasson:

That's dot com.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Dot com.

Glenn Hinds:

And again, as Seb mentioned, what we'll do is, we'll put those links in the actual podcast blurb for people to access too.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Yep.

Glenn Hinds:

Fantastic and perhaps you just want to, as we finish up here, again just to remind people if you have something to say about this episode or any other episode, or to contact us in relation to what Fredrik has talked about, you can do that on Twitter @ChangeTalking, on Facebook it's Talking to Change. Emails it's podcast@glennhinds.com

Sebastian Kaplan:

All right, excellent. Well Fredrik, thanks so much. This has been a fascinating discussion. Look forward to seeing your work as it unfolds.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Well, thank you for having me. It's been a true pleasure.



Glenn Hinds:

Thanks Fredrik. Thanks, Seb. See you soon.

Sebastian Kaplan:

All Right. Bye Glenn. Bye Guys.

Fredrik Eliasson:

Bye.

