FINAL REPORT: Enhancing engagement in community regeneration: exploring the application of a value-oriented behaviour change technique.

Dr Emily J. Oliver (Institute of Human Sciences, Aberystwyth University) and Catrin W. Roberts (Department for Housing, Regeneration and Heritage, Welsh Government\(^1\)).

\(^1\) Now with the Welsh European Funding Office.

Background and rationale for the study:

The proposed collaboration stemmed from discussions between the investigators regarding a £4.4 million European Union (EU) funded regeneration project in Blaenau Ffestiniog in North Wales. Demographically, given high unemployment in the area, and a high level of residents with no qualifications (average 43% versus UK average 35.8%), the provision of training opportunities to members of the local community is of particular importance. Furthermore, the project’s baseline review identified low community engagement.

Community engagement, in particular the willingness of individuals to work collectively, has long been recognised as a key contributor to regional prosperity and wellbeing. Regeneration programmes frequently fund access to and enrolment on training courses, however, post-course engagement has been demonstrably low. Drawing from behaviour change models more typically applied in psychological counselling and healthcare settings, this project piloted a novel method of activating citizens’ growth focused mindsets, namely motivational interviewing (MI). The project examined the utility of MI relative to traditional vocational planning and no-intervention models of training delivery, with a particular focus on the use of MI with young adults. Specifically, it:

- examined the effect of MI provision relative to traditional vocational planning and no-intervention models of training delivery on attitudes towards regeneration and community engagement; and

- informed future project delivery by identifying mechanisms of enhancing engagement behaviours (e.g., participation in community initiatives, uptake of employment/further training opportunities).

Development of the Llwyddo’n Lleol partnership:

After scoping several training opportunities being delivered as part of the regeneration work within Blaenau, a partnership was formed with the ‘Llwyddo’n Lleol’ project (‘Succeeding Locally’ - http://www.menterabusnes.co.uk/en/llwyddo). Established in 2002, this project focuses on creating opportunities to help young people live, learn, innovate and thrive within North Wales (Gwynedd). Funded through the Welsh Assembly Government’s Rural Community Action Fund, Gwynedd Council, and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, LLwyddo’n Lleol had successfully worked with over 2,000 young people prior to the present partnership being formed. Specifically, working with Llwyddo’n Lleol enabled the research team to utilise the training courses they deliver to young people as a host project for data collection.

The selected training course was a series of Entrepreneurship units delivered to Year 9 pupils (aged 14-15) that are accredited to a Level 2 BTEC Award in Work-skills. The focus of the units is on providing an opportunity for
young people to learn more about entrepreneurship through planning a business, producing a product, and running their own enterprise. As such, it was hoped that the courses would foster enhanced confidence, awareness of opportunities within the local communities and growth sectors, and intention to remain within the community.

Research methods and project progression:

Recruitment of a Welsh-language research assistant to deliver the intervention (as outlined in the project proposal) was successful with Mr William Geraint Davies appointed in January 2013. After attending Motivational Interviewing training (CBRT module 2: provided by The Skills Development Service Ltd) and receiving CRB clearance, ethical approval was received on the 8th February 2013 and data collection commenced on the 6th March 2013.

This small-scale project adopted an experimental between-groups design. Individuals that were enrolled onto a funded training place were invited to participate. Once informed consent was obtained (in loco parentis from the school, and assent from the pupils) participants (n = 52; 21m, 31f; M_age = 13.99; SD .412) were randomly assigned to an MI group (MI), a time-matched goal setting control group (GS) or a no contact control group (C). Questionnaires measuring attitudes towards the regeneration process, pro-social self-regulation, and the community contributions aspiration index were completed pre-course commencement, post-course and pre-intervention, and post-intervention.

After the course, intervention sessions were delivered to the two contact groups. Due to pragmatic requirements, both sessions were administered in group settings (during children's lunch-hours). Participants in the MI group received sessions that focuses on their plans for change (e.g., Do you plan to change anything about you or your future as a result of completing the course? Could you be more proactive in your community – in what ways? (If no plans) - What could you do to improve your community? etc). MI principles were embedded throughout including expressing empathy and rolling with resistance (e.g., sometimes it can be difficult to try and change things/it can feel like there's no point trying to make things better, do you ever feel like that?), supporting efficacy (e.g., tell me about when have you previously successfully changed something/contributed to your community?), developing discrepancies (e.g., what are your plans for the future - what might happen if you continue the way you are now?) and decisional balance. Goal setting sessions focused around asking participants to consider their aims in terms of revitalising Blaenau in the short term and how they could contribute, with prompts for specific goals, measurable targets, discussing barriers and producing an outline of actions with timescale.

Summary of the main findings:

Descriptive Findings – Pre-post course:

Contrary to expectations, there were limited changes in pupils’ perceptions of their local area pre to post course completion. Mean scores for perceptions of the vitality of the local area and perceived local job prospects remained similar, with nonsignificant changes in intention to remain in the area. It is possible that this reflects students’ growing awareness of the reality of the local economy when forced to consider this as a topic given that the course focuses on the need for enterprise and entrepreneurial skills to create one’s own
job. Of interest, for the sample as a whole, intrinsic regulations for community engagement decreased significantly pre to post course ($t \ (43) = 4.05, p < .001$). This suggests that discussion of jobs, the economy, and earning a living, had unsurprisingly shifted pupils’ focus away from intrinsic motivation for engaging in their local areas, presumably towards more extrinsic aspirations.

**Hypotheses Testing – Intervention effects:**

Between group differences pre to post-intervention were analysed using ANCOVAs (pre-intervention scores as covariates - contemporary literature advocates this over mixed model ANOVAs or gain scores), and ANOVAs at follow up.

Using pre-intervention score as a covariate ($F(1, 34) = 5.53, p = .025$, eta$^2$ = .14), ANCOVAs with Bryant-Paulson follow-ups identified significant differences in the aspiration index at post-test; the GS group’s goals were more extrinsic than the MI group ($M_{GSadj} = -1.061$, $M_{MIadj} = -1.150$, $p = .047$) and the C group ($M_{Cadj} = -.25$, $p = .063$). Differences between the groups’ relative autonomy index (degree of internalised pro-social regulation) approached significance, with the control group displaying less self-determined motivation than both the MI group ($M_{Cadj} = 1.201$, $M_{MIadj} = 2.83$, $p = .092$) and the GS group ($M_{GSadj} = 2.95$, $p = .081$). Nonsignificant trends consistent with hypotheses emerged in terms of the MI group having strongest perceptions of future job prospects relative to the C and GS groups.

In sum, both a goal-setting and a MI-based intervention enhanced self-determined motivation for engaging in ones community following a training course. This is beneficial given that self-determined motivation predicts engagement and psychological wellbeing. Importantly, the goal-setting group’s aspirations became more extrinsically-weighted relative to the MI group. This suggests that MI encourages motivation for community engagement for pro-social and self-endorsed reasons, whereas goal-setting encourages the pursuit of tangible extrinsic rewards, which we know undermine long-term goal pursuit and wellbeing.

Thus, the findings of this pilot further endorse the use of motivational interviewing, extending previous work by showing its efficacy in a regeneration and training context, and suggest it has particular utility following an enterprise-focused training course that might naturally increase participants’ focus on extrinsic aspirations.

**Discussion of implications for theory, practice and future research:**

**Implication for theory:**

The practice of MI is housed with a theoretical framework provided by self-determination theory (SDT). To briefly summarise, SDT proposes that the satisfaction of three innate psychological needs, specifically autonomy (the need to feel self-determined in one’s actions and not controlled by external factors), competence (the need to perceive oneself as having the ability to deal effectively with the environment), and relatedness (the need to feel meaningfully connected to others), results in enhanced self-motivation and well-being. SDT also posits that the more self-determined behaviour is the more likely people are to engage in and persist with that behaviour. The beneficial effect of MI evidenced in terms of the development of self-determined motivation and a move from extrinsic to intrinsic motives for engagement further supports work that argues that SDT and MI are
conceptually aligned. It also adds to literature highlighting satisfaction of the three basic needs as driving internalisation of social values. Interestingly, the observed increase in self-determined motivation resulting from goal-setting (a technique not explicitly aligned to SDT) might suggest that goal setting increases efficacy or competence in terms of future actions, and also provide a structure through which individuals can monitor their progress.

Theoretically, as well as re-establishing the role of MI in promoting self-determined motivation for behaviour change, the study provided some novel evidence regarding the mechanisms through which this occurs. Specifically, we are able to identify shifts in value salience from extrinsic to intrinsic motives for community engagement.

**Implications for practice and future research:**
The primary outcome of the study is further support for the practice of MI as a counselling method promoting value change and raising engagement and motivation for action. This endorses the use of MI for individuals working in alternative value change settings (e.g., youth offender work, health behaviour).

Two important sample characteristics extend the application of MI. First, its use in the regeneration context, particularly suited as it focuses on elements characteristic of disengaged citizens, such as resolving immobilizing ambivalence and fostering efficacy to make a change. Second, the study identifies that group-based MI with adolescents has efficacy. This is important given that delivering MI with adolescents may have additional complications in terms of access and safeguarding. Group-based sessions may provide some of the benefits of MI more cost-effectively than traditional individual service models. One interesting observation by the research assistant was that the group setting appeared to facilitate more interaction and development of ideas. As long as the counsellor is skilled at eliciting individual values and motives, and the individual is able to feel comfortable being challenged and considering these in a group setting, group MI may work particularly well with younger children. The relative potency of group versus individual MI is a clear area for future research to evaluate.

In terms of the delivery of training projects, the data presented raises some concerns if current models of delivery are maintained. First, courses such as the enterprise training clearly undermined participants' perceptions of the vibrancy of the local area – without subsequent follow up to identify specific points of action, with accompanying efficacy support, it is possible that the net effect is discouragement from future action. Second, if goal setting is included in training provision, care needs to be taken to insure that

**Dissemination (undertaken and planned):**

Findings have and continue to be disseminated by the research team, supported by University's Communications and Public Affairs Office.

- Dissemination throughout the project was fed back through CR to the Department for Regeneration, Housing, and Heritage, and local regeneration officials working in Blaenau. Catrin Roberts has now moved to a new role working with the Welsh European Funding Office. As part of this role she is involved in mapping financial and social benefits of tenders, and, given the findings, is promoting ongoing discussion about how to quantify the projected future benefits of training programmes and revising a standardised evaluation rating to include an assessment of support around provided training services.
• Findings have been disseminated back to Blaenau residents primarily through the residents’ representative group ‘Blaenau Ymlaen’. Comprised of members of voluntary groups, local residents and business owners, and regeneration staff, this group meets bimonthly to discuss how to keep developing Blaenau. As a result, planning has commenced to involve local business owners in the next iteration of the enterprise units’ delivery, linking local businesses to the school.

• A meeting was held to disseminate findings and project observations to the ‘Antur Stiniog’ team. This is a training company based in Blaenau who focus on the delivery of downhill biking and outdoor education. Thus, the findings from one project within the community have been passed on to another developing business in the area to help them refine and promote engagement in their training courses by embedding motivational interviewing principles.

• An academic abstract has been submitted to the International Conference of Applied Psychology, Community Section (See Appendix 1). This will be presented with accompanying media promotion in July 2013.

• Invited news article under review at Welsh newspaper and online new site ‘Golwg’ and ‘Golwg 360’, through connections provided by the research assistant (http://www.golwg360.com/newyddion). In-house news articles and press releases produced (see Appendix 2 and 3).

• Ongoing work with Ysgol Moelwyn. Since establishing contact with the school, the research team have developed a broader relationship with the school, which includes a scheduled visit by the Institute of Human Sciences’ Director of Welsh and Cultural Affairs in Spring 2013. At this, she will present an overview of research work and the university environment to staff and students, hopefully raising aspirations for future study and showing the pupils what their input contributed to in terms of the project.

• A post-project briefing report is due to be submitted to the ‘Llwyddo’n Lleol’ project by the end of March 2014, for inclusion in their project evaluation (EU-requirements). It is hoped that this feedback will refine future course delivery and strengthen their applications for continued or extended funding.

Key references


StatsWales, Welsh Government.
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Appendix 1: Academic Abstract submitted to the International Conference of Applied Psychology: Community Psychology Section. Conference to be held 8th – 13th July 2014.

Enhancing engagement in community regeneration: using a value-oriented behaviour change technique with adolescents.

Community regeneration training projects do not traditionally utilise psychological strategies to underpin intervention design and delivery. Grounded in models of behaviour change, this study examined whether a value-oriented strategy (motivational interviewing: MI) enhanced attitudes towards regeneration, and internalisation of community engagement, relative to traditional models of training delivery. It was proposed that MI is suited to the regeneration context as it focuses on elements characteristic of disengaged citizens, such as resolving immobilizing ambivalence and fostering efficacy for change. Mechanisms underpinning MI’s effects were also examined.

Following institutional ethical approval, participants enrolled onto a school-based European-funded training course (n = 52; 21m, 31f; Mage = 13.99; SD .412) and were randomly assigned to an MI group (MI), a time-matched goal setting control group (GS) or a no contact control group (C). Questionnaires measuring attitudes towards the regeneration process, pro-social self-regulation, and the community contributions aspiration index were completed pre and post-intervention.

Using pre-intervention score as a covariate ($F_{(1, 34)} = 5.53, p = .025, \eta^2 = .14$), ANCOVAs with Bryant-Paulson follow-ups identified significant differences in the aspiration index at post-test; the GS group’s goals were more extrinsic than the MI group ($M_{GSadj} = -1.061, M_{MIadj} = -1.150, p = .047$) and the C group ($M_{Cadj} = -.25, p = .063$). Differences between the groups’ relative autonomy index (degree of internalised pro-social regulation) approached significance, with the control group displaying less self-determined motivation than both the MI group ($M_{Cadj} = 1.201, M_{MIadj} = 2.83, p = .092$) and the GS group ($M_{GSadj} = 2.95, p = .081$). Nonsignificant trends consistent with hypotheses emerged in terms of the MI group having strongest perceptions of future job prospects relative to the C and GS groups.

Taken together, findings imply brief behaviour change techniques (both MI and GS) enhance motivation for community engagement. Goal setting may disproportionally promote extrinsic aspirations, and thus should be using cautiously given extrinsic goal pursuit is associated with negative health consequences. Altering perceptions of employment prospects may require prolonged intervention.
Appendix 2: Sample online project coverage.

Research looks into the triggers of community engagement among teenagers

In a bid to understand what motivates and encourages young people to engage in community projects, Aberystwyth University is carrying out research with teenagers in Blaenau Ffestiniog.

Dr Emily Oliver from the Department of Sport and Exercise Science at the University was interested in exploring the factors that encouraged young people to get involved in community schemes and decided to concentrate on Blaenau because of the great regeneration work taking place in the town and within the community.

Working with teenagers from Ysgol y Moelwyn, Dr Oliver’s work looks at the psychological techniques, behaviour change and health behaviours individuals apply when engaging with the community.

She explains, "Residents in Blaenau are making a big contribution to their local community and with this study, we’ll find out how those living and working in the area have contributed to local developments and also, what their future ambitions and goals are.

“The Richard Benjamin Trust enabled us to carry out this research and the findings will be ready in October of this year.”

The regeneration work in Blaenau Ffestiniog, which is led by local regeneration organisation called Blaenau Ymlaen, has already been recognised for the quality of its design and physical works taking home two awards from the recent Institute of Civil Engineering Wales Awards. The innovative approach to community involvement resulted in the client team taking home the Client of the Year Award at the recent Constructing Excellence Wales Awards.

Bob Cole, from Blaenau Ymlaen, said, “We recognised that community involvement and support was vital to the regeneration project’s success. From the start we actively sought views and ideas from the town’s young people, involving them in writing the pavement text and the YouTube progress videos. Social media has been key to engaging people with tools they use every day.” Ends.

More information: Dr Emily Oliver, Aberystwyth University 01970 621543 / ejo@aber.ac.uk; Esther Eckley, Communications and Public Affairs, Aberystwyth University 01970 621571 / ese6@aber.ac.uk;

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