Core Correctional Skills

The Training Kit

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This book is a result of many years of teaching and training prison and probation staff in Romania and away.
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Acronyms

CBT – cognitive behavioral theories
CCS – core correctional skills
CO – correctional officer
PO – probation officer
RNR – risk needs responsivity paradigm
SRS – Session Rating Scale
WAI – Working Alliance Inventory
1. What do we mean by ‘effective skills’?

By ‘skills’ we mean ‘proficiencies, capabilities and other attributes that contribute to positive outcomes such as active service-user engagement with supervision objectives, rehabilitation and desistance’ (Ugwudike, Raynor, Annison, 2018:3).

The discussion around the effective skills and characteristics of correctional staff is long-running and complex (see also Saleilles, 1911; Grinell, 1941; Jarvis, 1972; Bottoms and McWilliams, 1979). The concept of ‘skill’ is multidimensional. One of the most significant difficulties in defining an effective skill is that the definition of the effectiveness in itself is context-sensitive. Although the definition of effectiveness may look simple, its applicability is not completely straightforward. As the results pursued by the probation or prison service are diverse in different jurisdictions, the intended results differ accordingly. For instance, in some jurisdictions, the primary aim of the probation service is to provide diversion for low risk offenders (see Czech Republic, for instance). In this case, effectiveness is measured as a proportion of cases diverted from criminal justice.

According to Underdown (2007), an effective practice in probation is a practice that produces the intended results.
### Table 1. The Central Eight risk/needs factors

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<tr>
<th>The Big Four</th>
<th>The Moderate Four</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>History of antisocial behaviour</strong> – including early involvement in the offending behaviour, early age of onset, history of probation or parole violations, etc.</td>
<td><strong>Family/marital circumstance</strong> – the importance of assessing the key parenting variables, if juvenile (caring, monitoring, supervising, disciplinary practices, the importance of the parent’s opinion); or the quality of the marital relationship, if adult (mutual care, respect and interest).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Antisocial personality pattern</strong> – impulsiveness, adventurousness, pleasure-seeking, restlessness, aggressiveness, callous disregard for others etc.</td>
<td><strong>School/Work</strong> – stressing the quality of the relationship with the school or work place. The risk is in low levels of performance and involvement, or in low levels of satisfaction and reward.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Antisocial cognition</strong> – including attitudes, values, beliefs, rationalizations and personal identity that are favourable to crime. Cognitive-emotional states associated with crime are: anger, resentfulness and defiance.</td>
<td><strong>Leisure/Recreation</strong> – focusing on the risk of low levels of involvement in alternative ways of spending time other than crime.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Antisocial associates</strong> – if the person is surrounded by so-called ‘social support for crime’.</td>
<td><strong>Substance abuse</strong> – problems with alcohol and other drugs.</td>
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2. The therapeutic alliance

2.1. What is an involuntary client?

When an offender comes into a probation office for the first time he comes accompanied by his past experiences with justice, his expectations, his anxieties, and so on. He does not come because he seeks help or advice. On the contrary, most of the time he comes being forced by a judicial sentence that decrees that if he does not comply, he will be sent to prison. The same applies inside the prison. Usually, the inmate does not come at first to the correctional officer hoping to find help. In most cases, he comes hoping that his performance in front of the correctional officer will grant him better prison conditions (enhanced regime) or early release. It depends on the worker’s skills how this residual motivation will be used in the process of relationship building.

Some forms of resistance are natural in the offender’s behaviour. The correctional officer should interpret resistance as ‘normal’ in the process of relationship building.

As they do not choose to come to the correctional worker, offenders are considered involuntary clients. If they are under a legal sanction, they are sometimes called mandated clients (Rooney, 1992). In practice, depending on their motivation to participate/collaborate, clients could be placed on a continuum from involuntary to partially voluntary or even voluntary (Trotter, 2006).
Annex 3 - Session Rating Scale

Session Rating Scale (SRS V.3.0)

Name______________________Age (Yrs):____
ID#________________________Sex: M / F
Session #____ Date:________________

Please rate today’s session by placing a hash mark on the line nearest to the description that best fits your experience.

I did not feel heard, understood, and respected.

I felt heard, understood, and respected.

We did not work on or talk about what I wanted to work on and talk about.

We worked on and talked about what I wanted to work on and talk about.

The therapist’s approach is not a good fit for me.

The therapist’s approach is a good fit for me.

There was something missing in the session today.

Overall, today’s session was right for me.

Institute for the Study of Therapeutic Change

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6 SRS is reproduced here with the permission. The working copy of this scale can be downloaded from https://betteroutcomesnow.com/about-pcoms/pcoms-measures/. Those interested just need to agree to the licence and provide their email address.