

## CHANGE LANGUAGE

Let's say you're talking to someone about something you want to change in yourself. You are now sharing your internal dialogue with someone else. In this dialogue, you make positive statements that argue for the change, and negative statements that argue against the change. In motivational interviewing, the statements that advocate for the change are called 'change language'.

Change language is therefore self-talk that has become specific, 'tangible' and 'audible'. This differs from the internal dialogue you had before. When you use specific verbal self-talk, what you say is more binding. It's like: if I say it, I also have to do it. That is the power of change language: as you hear yourself make more statements in which you say that you want to change, why you think it is important, what you think it will bring you and how you think you can tackle it, your intrinsic motivation increases. This is therefore an important goal in a conversation about change: to increase the number of statements with change language.

In the [book 'Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change \(third edition\)'](#), a distinction has been made between a few types of change language.

First of all, the distinction between preparatory and mobilizing change language. The preparatory change language indicates the willingness to change. The mobilizing change language indicates the tendency to take action, a step further than preparatory change language.

The preparatory change language can be divided into four categories:

- Reasons: the other says things about why he wants to change
- Desire/wish: the other person says something about his desires or what he wants to achieve
- Possibilities: the other person makes statements about possibilities (trust in himself) and how to approach it
- Necessity: the other states why it is important to him now

The mobilizing change language can be divided into three categories:

- Commitment: the other person makes statements about his intention, his need or his decision
- Action: the other says something about a specific intention (a movement towards action)
- Taking steps: the other person says that he has done things that led to behavioural change (preparations, orientations)

Some examples of all the above-mentioned categories change language:

- If I make a good planning, it will give me peace of mind (reasons)
- I would like to be able to run up the stairs again without difficulties (desire/wish)
- I am a go-getter, I have to be able to keep this up (possibilities – trust)
- If I ask my colleague, he can help me get this done (possibilities – how to do it, his approach)
- I hate that I run into this every time, I want to get rid of it now (necessity)
- I'm going to do this tomorrow ... (commitment – intention/need/decision)
- I think it's a good idea not to wait too long; maybe next Monday I can .... (action)
- I've asked others how I can approach this; From that I understood that ... (taking steps)

### **The opposite of change language: conservation language**

The statements that argue against the change are called 'preservation language'. Preservation language does the exact opposite of change language: it prevents you from taking the change. Someone who expresses a lot of preservation language talks himself out of the behaviour change.

Conservation language is not divided into several categories. However, in conversations with others, you will notice that the retention language used differs in 'weight'. One statement contains a more important argument against change than the other statement. The core activity in conversations about change and motivation is to influence the amount of preservation language without forcing the change language.

Here are also some examples:

- I've tried so much, but I can't do it
- But smoking is also fun, and it just relaxes me when I'm stressed!
- I'm just not punctual enough to follow a schedule

Change language, ambivalence and intrinsic motivation

Your internal dialogue has positive and negative self-talk concerning change. The internal dialogue often has two sides: a side that makes more positive statements and thus often motivates yourself, and a side that makes negative statements that reduce your motivation. Often the internal dialogue shows ambivalence, where on the one hand you want to (change) and on the other hand you do not. The result of ambivalence in yourself is that you often do not make a choice and thus maintain your old behaviour.

Positive and negative self-talk that is made explicit in a conversation with someone else becomes, as mentioned, change language and preservation language. Because self-speech is now explicit, it can also be better influenced by someone else and thus ambivalence can also be influenced. And that is exactly what motivational interviewing tries to do: to investigate and strengthen the language of change so that the ambivalence towards the change decreases. Doing this together with the other person (and therefore without forcing it) also makes the intrinsic motivation of the other person clear and explicit for yourself.

**Sources:** Miller, W. R.; Rollnick, S. (2012). *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change* (3. ed.). The Guilford Press: New York.

ViaPerspectief (n.d.). *Motivational Interviewing. Verandertaal*. [https://www.motiverende-gespreksvoering-nederland.nl/motivational\\_interviewing/verandertaal\\_en\\_motivatief/](https://www.motiverende-gespreksvoering-nederland.nl/motivational_interviewing/verandertaal_en_motivatief/), last accessed on the 23.05.2024.