

- Summary -
Choose Change

Evaluation of the intervention theory, implementation and outcomes of the training for adult prisoners.

Janine Plaisier
Daniëlle Bouma
Allard Feddes
Vera Hoetjes
Helly Pollaert
Ischa van Straaten

What is *Choose Change* [*Kies voor Verandering*]? (Chapter 1)

Choose Change is a training course for adult prisoners. The purpose of the training programme is to get participants to reflect on their lives, on the question of whether they want to follow a different path after their period of detention and whether they are willing to stop committing offences. The programme is being run in prisons (including pre-trial detention) throughout the country. The target audience is all detainees with at least three weeks sentence to serve from the start of the programme (except for prisoners with serious addiction or psychiatric problems and those with an unlawful presence status). The training programme is not aimed at people who have no motivation whatsoever to participate. The programme consists of six sessions. The training programme may be given individually, although preferably in a group setting consisting of no more than twelve participants, and led by one or two coaches. There are two points in the implementation of the programme that differ from the developer's original design: 1) non-participation has consequences for prisoners (people are not allowed to switch to the *plus programme* that allows more freedom) and 2) the training programme is usually held over a shorter period: three rather than the original six weeks.

What is the aim of this study? (Chapter 1)

It is a broad assessment comprising three parts.

- *Part 1*: Assessment of the theoretical rationale: what is the *Choose Change* intervention theory behind the training programme?
- *Part 2*: Assessment of the implementation: is the *Choose Change* programme executed in the intended manner?
- *Part 3*: Assessment of the outcomes: are the intended changes being accomplished?

How was the study conducted? (Chapters 2, 10 and 17)

A combination of research methods has been used to conduct the study.

- *Part 1*: An intervention theory has been distilled based on analysis of documents about *Choose Change*. The theory describes which processes the developer expects to lead to the intended outcomes. This was followed by a study of international literature. Based on the found literature, an analysis was carried out in order to find out into what extent it may be assumed that the training programme could lead to the intended outcomes.
- *Part 2*: In order to examine to what extent the training programme can be run as intended, interviews were held with 8 coaches, 28 supervisors (mentors, case managers and coaches), 6 heads of departments and 71 prisoners at 6 prisons (including pre-trial detention).
- *Part 3*: Interviews were held and questionnaires completed to examine the extent to which the intended change process and outcomes occur. In addition to the interviews with officers and prisoners previously mentioned, questionnaires were completed by prisoners on four occasions: prior to the start of the programme, during the programme, immediately after the programme and six to nine weeks after the programme. The final survey was conducted among prisoners who at the time were still in detention; no interviews were held among prisoners who have since been set free.

The results

Results of the assessment of the theoretical rationale (Chapters 3 to 9)

The whole change process comprises several steps (Figure 1). The analysis shows that the training programme was initially aimed at increasing reluctance to continue committing crime using three core mechanisms: cognitive transformation, strengthening personal effectiveness and strengthening (perceived) social support.

- *Cognitive transformation*: change in self-image, a realisation of meaningfulness and a more negative attitude towards delinquency.
- *Personal effectiveness*: resilience, personal control, self-motivation, the opportunity that people see to bring about the intended changes.
- *(Perceived) social support*: knowing who people can ask for help and having the social skills to do so, the support that people can expect to be given.

The developer expects that together, these mechanisms ought to lead to greater *motivation to change*. The change relates to the life of the delinquents in a broad sense, including *giving up crime*. At the end of the training programme, when the motivation for change should have increased, the participants make an *activity plan* in which they state which goals they have set and how they aim to achieve them. After the training programme, they will be expected to implement their plans. In addition, they can ask for or be offered help from supervisors at the Prison.

Figure 1

Rough outline of the intended change process.



The study has shown that the assumptions of the intervention theory are broadly supported by scientific research, so we may expect the training course to lead to an increase in motivation. However, a number of critical comments need to be made about the intervention theory. The following two are the most important.

- 1) The intervention theory is based mainly on the first part of the change process, that is to say increasing motivation. Turning motivation into behaviour (what needs to happen after the training programme) is given little attention in the documents. However, the question remains as to whether the prisoners are sufficiently *equipped* to achieve the intended changes. It is expected that this also requires an improvement in *skills*, at least among some of the prisoners (for example daring and being able to ask questions, managing impulsiveness and controlling the tendency towards drug use). Changes may also be needed in the prisoner's *environment* (for example a less criminal circle of friends). Indeed, research shows that the intended results are not achieved among all participants. This is explained further in 'results of the assessment of the change'.

- 2) The question is whether the goals that prisoners set relate sufficiently to their *criminal behaviour*. If this is not the case, the literature studied would suggest that the motivation to change will not necessarily lead to a reduction in criminal behaviour. It may even be the case that the training programme results in more criminal effectiveness. However, in this study, such a counterproductive effect was not observed.

Results of the assessment of the implementation (Chapters 11 to 16)

The study shows that according to the staff and prisoners interviewed, the training programme is in broad terms being implemented as intended. No sessions are being skipped, the intended target audience has largely been reached and the workbook is being followed. There are four aspects that require attention though because they will affect the results.

- 1) The programme integrity varies widely. Since no direct quality monitoring exists, it is unclear whether the changes that coaches make fit in with the intervention theory and if they contribute to the intended effect.
- 2) The quality of the activity plans is poor. The goals are not always clearly formulated, the proposed steps are not always consistent with the goals and obstacles, and by no means do the goals always focus on criminogenic needs.
- 3) The supervision of the training programme is clearly inadequate. More than half of the prisoners fail to request help from their supervisors either because they are unaware of the possibility, or are unwilling or lack the courage to do so. Equally, mentors often fail to take any action. They say that they lack information and time and they find it difficult to play a double role (motivating prisoners and guarding them).
- 4) The Custodial Institutions Agency has chosen to apply the principle of pressure: prisoners qualify for the *plus programme* only if they participated in the training programme. The developers emphasise that intrinsic motivation to participate is vital if change is to be brought about. Although participants who take part because of the plus programme are much less likely to say that they have changed because of the training programme, the results of the questionnaires reveal no noticeable differences. This is explained further in 'results of the assessment of the change'.

All in all, there is an urgent question as to whether the training course in its current form will be able to achieve the intended reduction in recidivism. This matter will be addressed in greater detail in the next section.

Results of the assessment of the changes (Chapters 18 to 21)

In this section we examined whether the training course leads to the intended changes. The key findings are as follows.

Changes in the core mechanisms:

- 1) First of all it is striking that three-quarters of the participants are very positive about the training programme and that they have reflected upon a number of core mechanisms. However, many participants said that they had also reflected on these issues before the programme. More than half of the participants say that they have had some benefit from each of the three core mechanisms. 41% of participants say that they themselves have been changed by the programme. These are mainly participants who embarked on the programme for themselves. The ones who took part mainly due to the plus programme are less likely to say that they have changed.
- 2) Although the intervention theory is well supported scientifically, *no* proof has been shown for the whole intervention model for the total study population of prisoners immediately after the

training. However, a number of changes are visible among subgroups, although it must be emphasised that the effects were minor. A minor result can also be seen six to nine weeks after the training programme.

1. Immediately after the training programme: less pronounced criminal attitude among those with a medium/high education and those who had a shorter sentence still to serve (less than three months).
 2. Immediately after the training programme: more personal effectiveness among *first offenders*.
 3. Immediately after the training programme: more social support, perceived or real, among those during pre-trial detention.
 4. Six to nine weeks after the training programme: the reduction in criminal attitude (as element of cognitive transformation) can still be seen and now there is also an increase in meaningfulness (as an element of cognitive transformation). This suggests that cognitive transformation has taken place. Since the study group is too small at the time of the survey, it is not possible to establish whether this only applies to certain subgroups or if the effect will manifest itself throughout the group over the course of time. If so, the change would be only observable in the long term. An increase in personal effectiveness and social support can no longer be seen.
- 3) The fact that some participants experience pressure to take part in the programme due to its connection with the plus programme has little influence on the results. Although participants who sign up because of the plus programme say that they have not changed as a result of the training programme, they exhibit the same changes with regard to the separate mechanisms as participants who embarked on the programme for themselves.

Changes in motivation:

A quarter of participants say that they are more motivated to change because of *Choose Change*. Coaches have also observed changes in motivation among part of the group. This positive result is not confirmed by the results produced by the questionnaires conducted among the participants. Indeed, immediately after the training programme, the level of motivation in a specific group – the ones who wished to take part for themselves – is lower than it was before the training. Six to nine weeks after the training programme, this appears to be stable.

Implementation of activity plans:

1. Six to nine weeks after the training programme, around half of the prisoners asked say that they have worked on their goals and are seeing progress. These seem mainly to be the inmates during pre-trial detention.
2. On average, 80% of prisoners say they know what is needed to achieve all their goals and how they need to go about it. Six to nine weeks after the training programme they themselves are positive about their progress and prospects. However, the study shows that one in five people in this group is currently unable to name any specific steps that need to be taken, that in half of the cases the steps they do mention do not match the goals set and that six to nine weeks after the training programme, scarcely any goals have been achieved among more than 50% of prisoners.
3. A third of prisoners who encountered barriers in striving towards their goals say that at the time they found the training programme somewhat beneficial: they felt less powerless. These mainly appear to be prisoners with low personal effectiveness. In particular, it is the ones who do not know how to go about things who say that with regard to this point they have benefitted from the training programme.

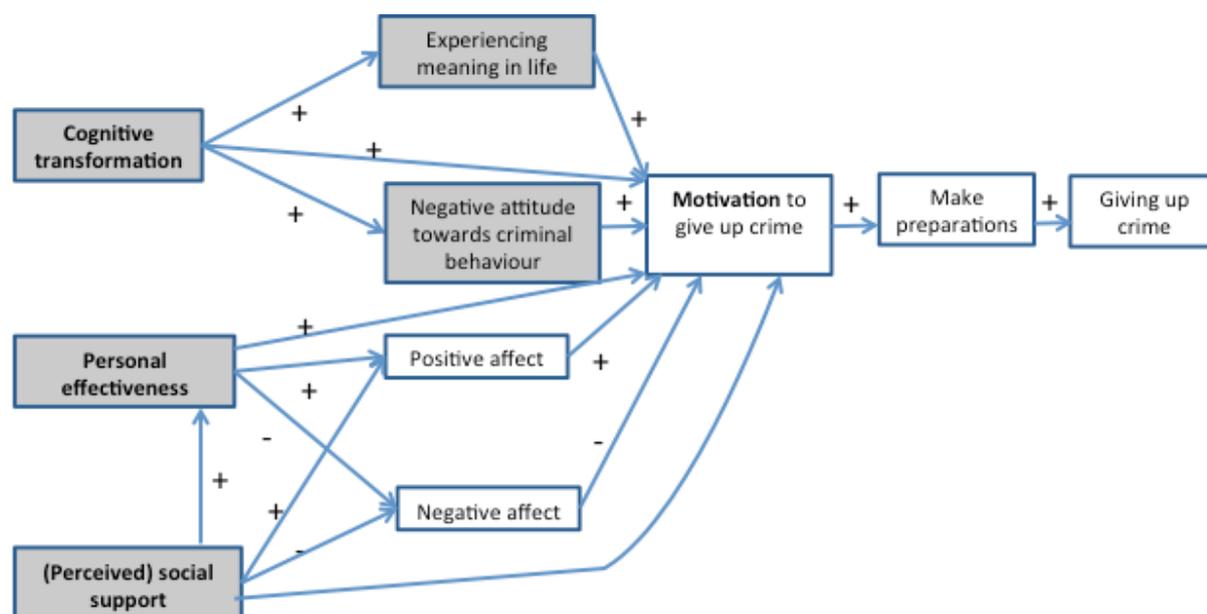
Side effects and counterproductive effects:

1. A positive side effect of the training programme is that 70% of the prisoners have got something out of talking to others about their lives and goals.
2. The possible counterproductive effect that emerged from the assessment of the theoretical rationale, i.e. an increase in criminal effectiveness, has not been established.
3. The study has not shown any negative effects resulting from putting pressure on inmates to participate. Although participants who take part because of the plus programme are much less likely to say that they have been changed because of the training programme, the results of the questionnaires reveal no noticeable differences. Their motivation seems to drop less than is does among those who took part for themselves. This implies that the use of pressure to take part has no counterproductive effect on the results.

The figure below shows which of the intended changes emerged from the study.

Figure 2

The changes that were observed in this study: immediately after the training programme, no significant changes in the three core mechanisms were observed among the whole group. Only minor changes have been observed (in the grey boxes) among certain subgroups or just in the follow-up survey. No change could be seen in the white boxes. Recidivism was not examined in this study.



Discussion

For a large part, the contents of *Choose Change* training programme are supported by findings in scientific research. However this mainly concerns the first part of the intervention theory (increasing motivation). The second part (from motivation to behaviour) has not been worked out sufficiently and appears not to be given much attention in practice.

Participants are enthusiastic about the quality of both the training programme and the coaches. However, the intended changes in the core mechanisms have not been observed for the whole group, but only (minor) effects have been seen among certain subgroups in respect of certain

elements of the intervention theory. According to prisoners and coaches, the most important intended outcome, changing motivation, is increasing, although this cannot be seen or even appears to decrease slightly when the results of the participants' questionnaires are examined.

An explanation for the fact that the intended changes are only seen in elements and only among subgroups, is that different parts of the training programme influence different people. The training programme is given as a *one-size-fits-all-model* to a heterogeneous group of participants, whereas more customisation will be required if the intended changes are to be achieved. As is known from meta analyses (Landenberger & Lipsey, 2005), interventions usually have a greater effect the more they are tailored to the individual needs. Although the current training programme offers targets and responsiveness for individuals, it offers too little in the way of reducing problems for everyone. The programme is too brief to be able to achieve the intended changes in motivation in all participants. As far as any change is achieved, turning intentions into behaviour has only been partially successful; on the one hand presumably because prisoners do not have enough skills, and on the other hand because of insufficient supervision after the training programme.

Giving up crime, the programme's ultimate goal, is therefore not something that can be achieved by everyone. A more realistic goal would be for the *Choose Change* training programme to provide an *initial push towards change* among some participants.

Regardless of the results: participation in the training programme is seen by many as a positive life experience. This might be sufficient reason for the programme to continue. If the Custodial Institutions Agency wishes to achieve a better outcome, then more is needed. If this is the case, more attention should be given to motivation beforehand, problems, criminogenic needs and skills.



WHICH INTERVENTIONS REALLY HAVE AN IMPACT ON HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

Prins Hendrikkade 193
1011 TD Amsterdam

Tel +31-20 6684797
E-mail info@mpct.eu
Web www.mpct.eu

impact^{R&D}