

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

Christina Näsholm

Licensed psychologist, licensed psychotherapist

Specialised in clinical psychology

symposium.se

Sweden

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

Since the very beginning,
the understanding of ambivalence,
and the strategies for resolving
ambivalence have had a central
position in Motivational Interviewing.

- **What is our understanding of ambivalence?**
- **What is our understanding of the dynamics of hecittance?**
- **How do we use the idea of ambivalence as an asset in the process of change?**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

- **What strategies do we use?**
- **How do we create an atmosphere where these strategies work?**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Unhelpful and even harmful?

Are there times when exploring ambivalence doesn't help the person arrive at a solution?

Are there times when exploring ambivalence can move clients away from change?

**Are there times
when exploring ambivalence
leads to reinforcing sustain talk and resistance,
instead of
eliciting and reinforcing change talk?**

Ambivalence – what is it?

**Should we understand ambivalence
as a stage in a change process
- or rather as a state?**

Ambivalence – what is it?

- **A recurring state in change processes?**
- **A constant companion?**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Ambivalence – what is it?

- **Hesitance**
- **Uncertainty**
- **Indecision**
- **Irresolution**
- **Doubt**
- **Vacillation**
- **Inconstancy**
- **Fickleness**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Ambivalence – what is it?

- **To be on the verge of...**
- **To stand between two ...**
- **To have mixed feelings ...**
- **To be in two minds ...**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Ambivalence – what is it?

- **A natural human state with different possibilities for understanding and action?**
- **A state of openness and opportunity?**
- **A capacity to see and understand things in more than one way?**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Ambivalence – what is it?

- **A capacity to experience, understand and cope with ambiguity and complexity ?**
- **A creative state, a creative space, with the possibility of mentally exploring and testing out different possible selves, different preferred selves?**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Ambivalence – what is it?

An important state or a stage in a change process, when the person starts and hopefully continues to think about, contemplates and explores the possibility of change

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

The concept of ambivalence – a simplification?

- **The concept of ambivalence –
an idea, "a map" for finding the way
out of a complicated insecurity**
- **A simplification which is not experienced
as an over- simplification
since it retains the complexity of the issue**

”Multi-valence” or ambivalence ?

General uncertainty:

**vague, diffuse, general, complex,
sometimes chaotic, a multi-valence**

One lacks stable points of departure ...

**One lacks stable foundations
on which to build ...**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

”Multivalence” or ambivalence ?

Ambivalence: more distinct, more precise

**You have opposite, inconsistent,
incompatible feelings**

about the same thing at the same time

**A feeling of being stuck, caught in a
dilemma**

**In most cases a double
approach – avoidance conflict**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

The idea of ambivalence – a helpful simplification

- **“As if” there are only two sides**
- **“one side” opens up “the other side”**
- **Thinking of and talking about one side of the issue activates thoughts about the other side of the issue**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

How do we facilitate?

- **How do we create the atmosphere ...?**
- **How do we invite the person into this state, into this helpful way of thinking?**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

How do we facilitate?

How do we help the person

... not only to enter,

**but also to stay long enough
to reach a conclusion, take a stance,
make a decision,**

**to leave this important state (stage)
and move on...**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

The atmosphere

**Empathic listening, genuine respect
and MI - spirit create the atmosphere**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Models of ambivalence

Help us invite the person

- **to take a step back,**
- **to see herself from a perspective outside of herself,**
- **to enter a mental state where both self-observation and self-confrontation are possibilities**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Models of ambivalence

- **Help us invite the person to contemplate – own behavior, and perhaps the possibility to change.**
- **Work as maps for finding the way out of a complicated uncertainty.**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Exploring ambivalence can be about establishing a simple decisional balance

- **A decisional balance where opposites are explored**
- **Using pairs of words or expressions like
”on the one hand and the other hand”
“the good side and the not so good side”
“pros and cons”**

A simple decisional balance ...

- **Helps us systematically sort out one side at a time**
- **Sometimes it is just a question of adding up the pluses and minuses**
- **Sometimes it is just a simple logical, rational process where the solution automatically becomes obvious, without any effort**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

**Are there times when using
a simple decisional balance
doesn't help the person
arrive
at a solution?**

- **When is a simple decisional balance sufficient and helpful?**
- **When is a simple decisional balance insufficient or unhelpful?**
- **When is an expanded or/and in depth exploration needed?**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

**What might be needed
to make an exploration
of ambivalence
helpful
for clients in their process
towards change?**

Before exploring - identify ambivalence

- **How do we use our "third ear" to hear the seeds of early ambivalence**
- **What words from the person help us hear and identify signs of ambivalence that are in the direction of change?**
- **How do we use our experience and our "third ear" to hear what the person is ambivalent about?**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

**Before focusing on
and exploring -
ask for permission**

Building, constructing a helpful model, "a map" for finding the way ...

- **Which model, which map is best suited to arriving at a solution?**
- **What perspectives should be explored?**
- **What headings?**

A simple decisional balance

Heading

On the one hand ...?

On the other hand ...?

Summarize ...

Summarize ...

Summarize both sides ...

Elicit and listen to the client's conclusion

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

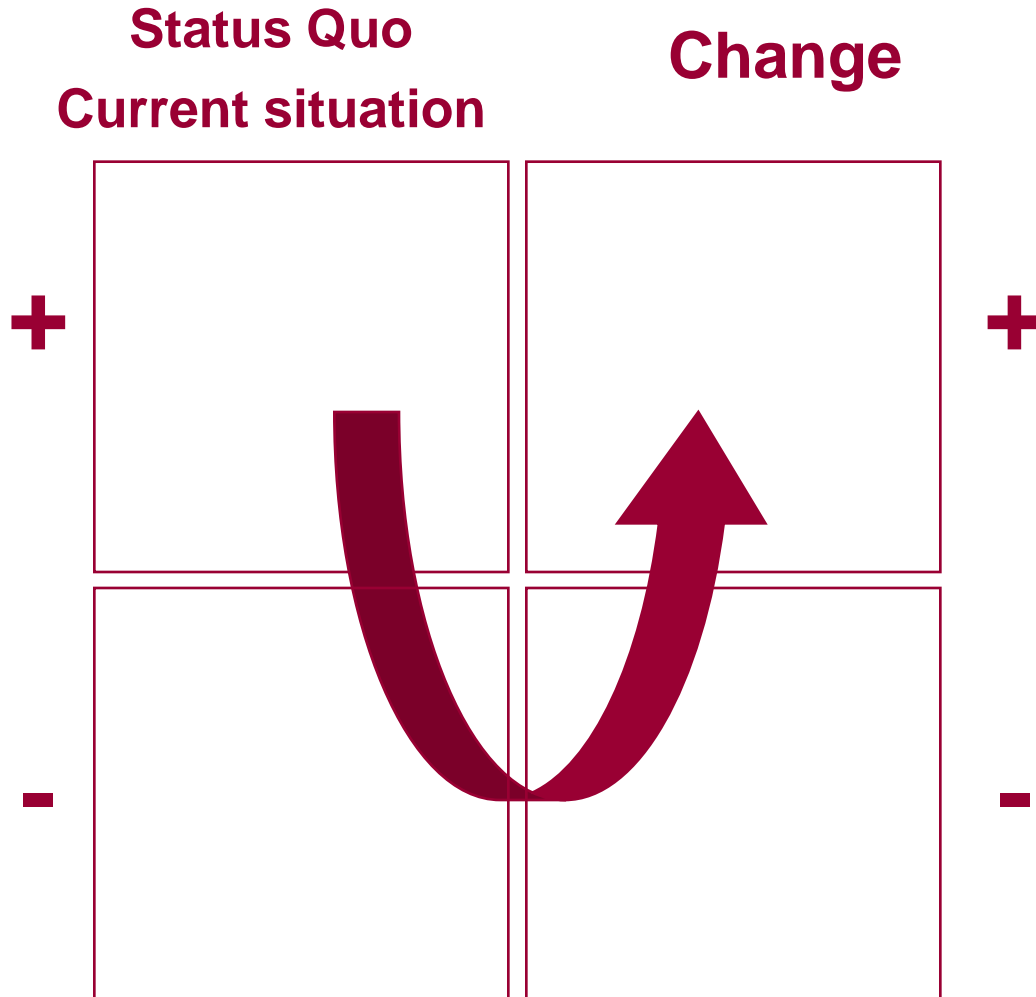
**Which or what perspectives
need to be focused on
and explored?**

Which perspectives?

- **Status quo ?**
- **Change ?**

A Double Decisional balance

Ambivalence Cross



Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Status quo?

**Do we need to split
the concept of “status quo”
in two separate perspectives**

“current situation”

“no change/sustain”

What is good about and what is not so good about:

- **Current situation?**
The situation that is now
- **Change?**
- **No change/sustain?**
Keeping things like they are
Continue without changing

A triple decisional balance

| Current situation | | Change | | No change | |
|---|-----------------|---|-----------------|---|-----------------|
| The good | The not so good | The good | The not so good | The good | The not so good |
| + | - | + | - | + | - |
| Summarize + | Summarize - | Summarize + | Summarize - | Summarize + | Summarize - |
| Summarizing + and - Eliciting a conclusion | | Summarizing + and - Eliciting a conclusion | | Summarizing + and - Eliciting a conclusion | |

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Finding "the name of the issue"

- What is the person ambivalent about?**
- What is the name of the dilemma?**
- How should the dilemma and the different choices or alternatives be formulated?**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

The choice of headings determines the results

**Which heading or headings
capture the essence of the client's
motivational struggle?**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Finding, formulating and choosing helpful headings

**A process where one together
with the person develops
a name for the dilemma
and finds headings that capture
the essence
of the motivational struggle ...**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Exploring ambivalence

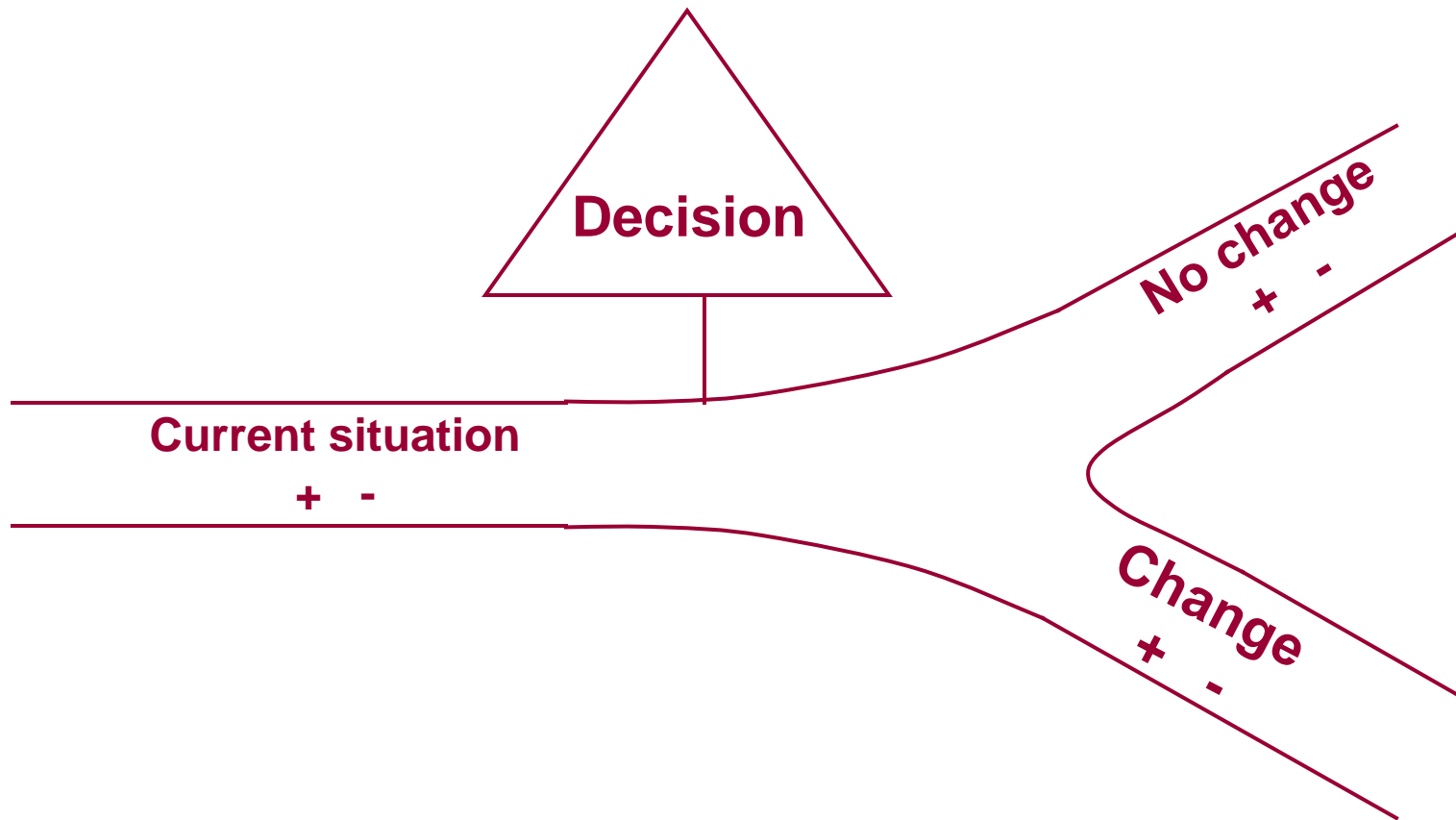
**Listening and guiding,
following and leading,
an exploration
through a helpful model**

Christina Näsholm

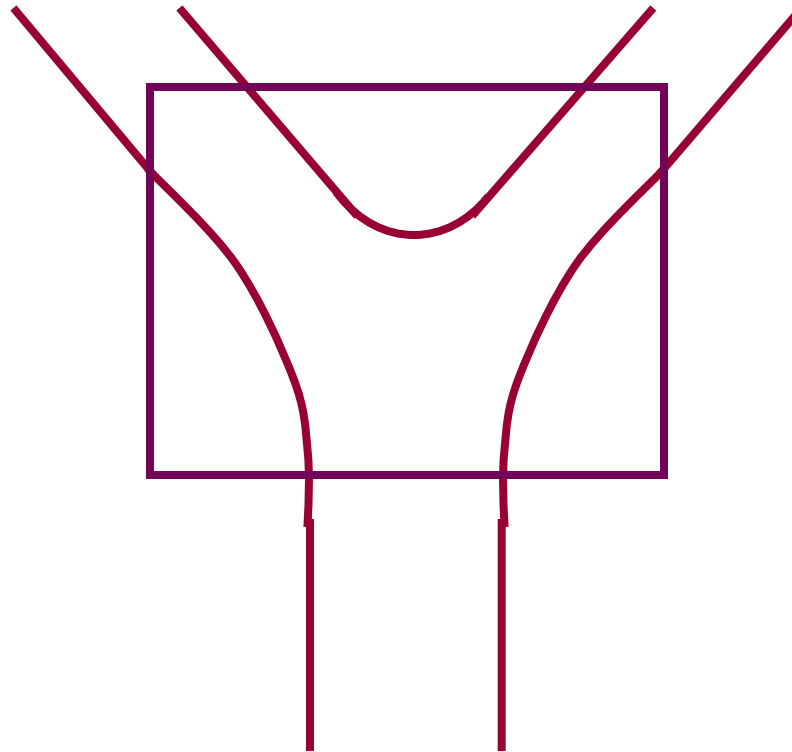
Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

The Cross Roads Metaphor, The Fork Junction Model

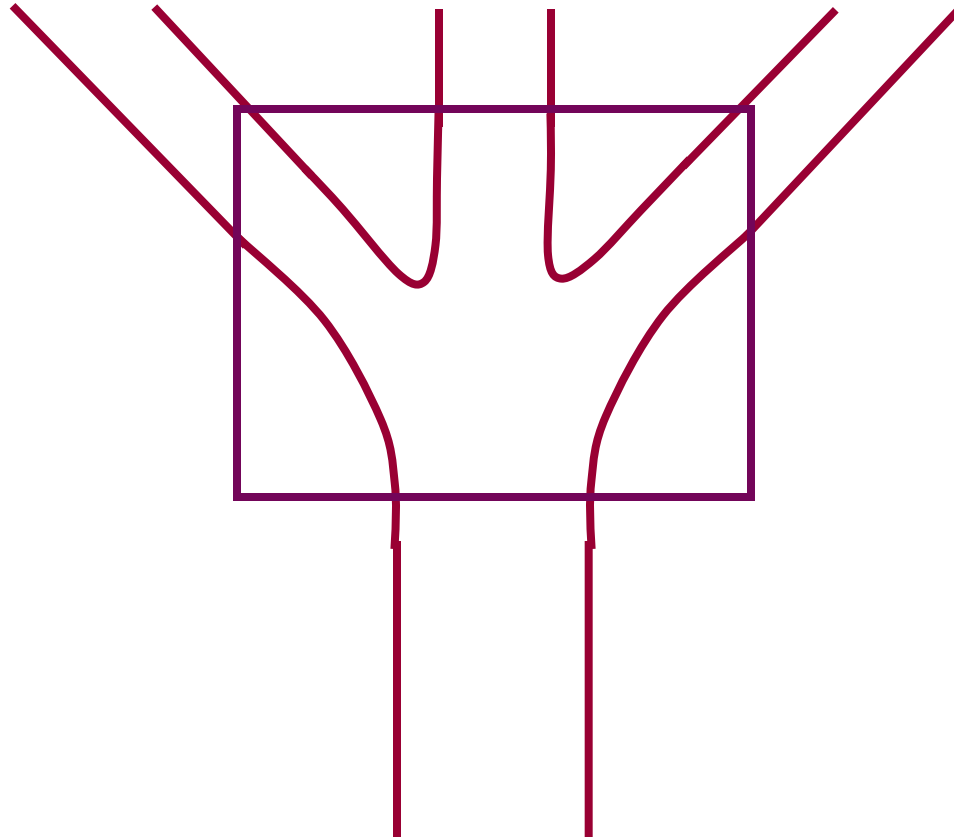


The Cross Roads Metaphor



Christina Näsholm
Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?
MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

The Cross Roads Metaphor



Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Exploring ambivalence

**Exploring ambivalence
can be
neutral, goal oriented and directive
or
non – neutral, goal oriented
and directive**

Christina Näsholm

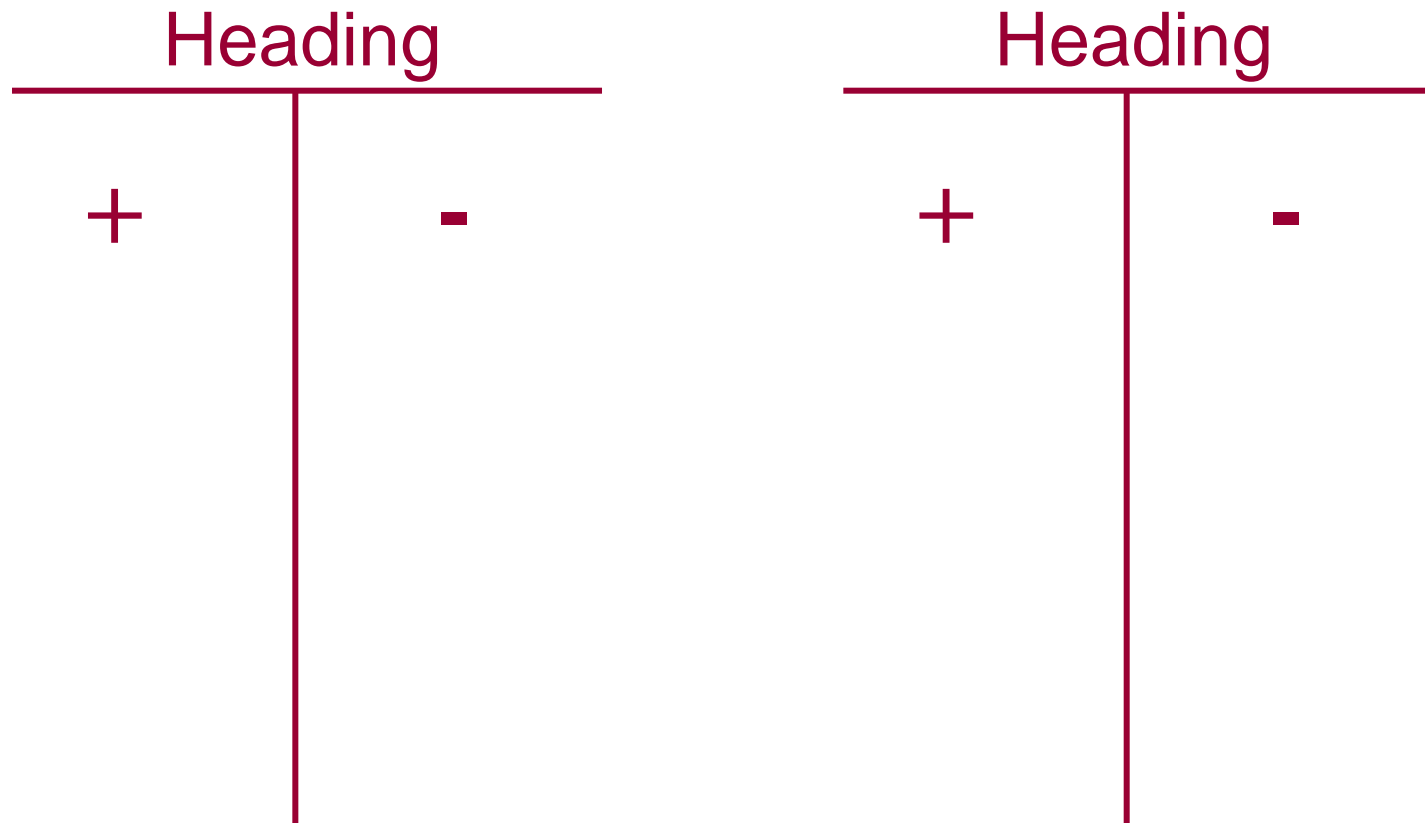
Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Neutral, goal oriented and directive

**An empathic, balanced
and still directive exploration
of ambivalence
with the purpose of
helping the person to a decision,
irrespective of...**

A Double Decisional Balance Neutral



Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Non – neutral, goal oriented, and directive

**An empathic, directive exploration
of ambivalence,
selectively eliciting and reinforcing
change talk,
with the purpose of helping the person
to a decision
in a certain, particular,desired direction**

Exploring ambivalence

**Exploring ambivalence is not about
”nailing” a person’s dilemma.**

**Nor is it about confronting the person
with discrepancies and inconsistencies
in her life.**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Exploring ambivalence

Exploring ambivalence is an empathic, person-centered, directive and goal oriented strategy to help the person become aware of, understand, resolve or take control over her ambivalence

(including discrepancies and inconsistencies)

in order to take a stance, make a decision and move on in her process of change.

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Exploring ambivalence

**Exploring, together with the person,
the different and clarifying
perspectives
in a certain way**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Exploring ambivalence

A process which involves

- **Identifying**
- **Eliciting**
- **Safely exploring**
- **Reinforcing ?**
- **Summarizing**
- **Concluding**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

... and within this process,

**in a non- neutral
exploration of ambivalence**

- | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| •Identifying | Change talk |
| •Eliciting | Change talk |
| •Reinforcing | Change talk |

Exploring ambivalence

Exploring ambivalence is not only about exploring rational arguments.

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Exploring ambivalence

It is more often an expanded and in depth psychological process, including exploration of and reinforcing the emotional quality and affective context of the desires, reasons and needs for change

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Exploring ambivalence

It is a process which often crystallizes dilemmas

A process where the person is helped to see, explore, evaluate and re-evaluate ...

Exploring, summarizing and concluding ambivalence

**Involves skills in using
both simple and complex reflections
as well as
selective reinforcing
and
helpful double- sided summaries**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Exploring, summarizing and concluding ambivalence

Sometimes it is about “either ... or ...”

**Sometimes it is not about “either ... or ...”,
it is about “both ... and ...”**

**Most often it is about
“both at one and the same time”
which helps the person become aware
of and understand that apparently
irreconcilable elements can be pulled
together into a nuanced whole**

Exploring, summarizing and concluding ambivalence

**Contributes to important
shifts of perspective
which promotes change**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Unhelpful and even harmful?

- **When the person has already made a decision**
- **When the person needs to minimize and even deny a dilemma in order to cope with a difficult situation**
- **When the person needs to minimize remaining hesitation in order to carry out a necessary change**

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Unhelpful and even harmful?

- **When exploring ambivalence might lead to activation of emotions or/and thoughts which the person cannot cope with**

Unhelpful and even harmful?

- **When the person has no choice**
- **When there is no alternative**

Unhelpful and even harmful?

- **When the person lacks the ability and conditions needed to make decisions and implement change**

The essence...

The essence of ambivalence exploration is to help the person in an empathic and supportive way, to construct a picture, a map, of her complicated uncertainty and guide her through her ambivalence. To help her make a choice, take a decision and move on in her process.

Be that a change or stabilization

Christina Näsholm

Exploring ambivalence – more than a decisional balance?

MINT Meeting, Miami, December 2, 2006

Acknowledgement

**I would like to thank
MINTie Tom Barth, Norway,
my dear friend and colleague,
with whom I developed
these ideas and reflections
on ambivalence
during our years of collaboration**