**FACTSHEET** n. 3/2022

Intervision: The power of creative and collective thinking

Intervision is a form of knowledge development in a small group of professionals who share a common challenge or problem not primarily intended to solve a problem, instead, the group encourages each other to find answers by asking questions. These questions should help the issue owners to develop a new way of thinking in order to gain insight into their problem or question. It can be about dealing with problems at work, problems with an approach, or other types of problems. Intervision is always tied to something from day-to-day practice, professionalisation and improvement, learning and development. It makes the person involved aware of individual styles and preferences, their personal view on the work, and how work is handled. Moreover, in the case of the HOOD project, it is a useful dispositive for exchanges among partners about the learning and implementation of the Enabling Co-planning methodology, the core element of the HOOD Project.

Supervision, Intervision & Altervision
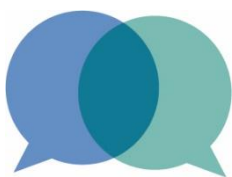
Supervision is a crucial part of reflective practice and an integral part of social work. Social workers increasingly have to look for innovative solutions to their work with clients daily. Supervision has, over the years, provided social workers with the opportunity to reflect on their practice and afforded them the necessary forum to reflect, evaluate, discuss and develop innovative solutions. Supervision has a positive impact on their day-to-day work with clients and professionals. A properly trained supervisor who is open to listening, giving feedback and having a balanced supervision session, contributes to good supervision. Within the supervisory environment, social workers have the opportunity to critically analyse their knowledge, values and skills and their understanding of the work they are undertaking.

The Intervision method is a form of peer learning that helps create a safe and reflective space amongst teams to tackle a common challenge or problem. We could call Intervision a form of reflective group supervision. The difference between supervision and Intervision lies in the hierarchy and the level of exchange between professionals. Supervision consists of being trained by an expert, who is outside the working group, and having one's work viewed from above. Intervision, on the other hand, is learning from others and seeing them and their work from within, together and mutually. Terms such as peer learning, peer assistance, group supervision, etc. are also used to refer to Intervision. Using Intervision develops a learning culture in the organisation. **www.hoodproject.org**

Altervision – a methodology developed by Professor Luigi Gui, at the University of Trieste– shares the core pillars of Intervision but it focuses more on bringing out the implicit knowledge of practitioners, which they apply in their daily work. Altervision adds some elements of novelty that will be further described in the following pages: the definition of the "abstract dilemma" and the sharing of similar memories among participants as tools for reciprocal learning. This kind of approach would also avoid some of the problems that come up from the first Intervision session developed by the partners. In particular, partners find difficulties in giving suggestions and recommendations related to the problem debated in the session, due to the high difference between national social services systems and national laws. Reasoning together on an abstract dilemma and sharing personal professional memories related to that allow participants to share meaningful knowledge, notwithstanding the countries' differences.

In the following pages, we present the final version of Intervision adopted by the HOOD project, following three years of practice among partners. This final version is the result of the lessons learned from the difficulties encountered along the way and of the inspiration drawn from the comparison with Altervision.

Intervision aims and linguistic barriers

Intervision is a methodology aimed at supporting social workers in strengthening their professional skills, improving their motivation and increasing their reflexivity and awareness of their choices and actions in their daily work. In the HOOD project, in particular, Intervision also enabled the operators to find a protected space of confrontation with respect to the implementation of Enabling Co-planning, which involved the project's four operational partners (Klimaka, Projekt Udenfor, SJD, Ufficio Pio). The Intervision sessions provided partners with the opportunity to share doubts, perplexities, difficulties, findings, results, and positive elements about the Enabling Co-planning and to collect important data to update the methodology of intervention.

The specificity of HOOD, however, lies in having carried out the Intervision in an international context, involving partners from different countries. This choice entailed several challenges: first of all the language barriers between partners. Considering this point, the HOOD project aimed to overcome language barriers through the use of an online platform with an integrated translation mode in the project languages. The platform allowed each partner to write in their own language and automatically translate into English. In addition, an integrated translation system made it possible to translate the entire platform from English into the HOOD project languages. The use of the platform led to the definition of a written and deferred Intervision mode.

However, in the course of the project it became clear that language barriers were only one of the difficulties to be solved. In fact, the partners referred to even substantially different legislative frameworks and social and health services in the various partner countries. The comparison of different contexts risked blocking the work of Intervision when it was aimed at the collective search for solutions in the face of proposed problems. It was useful, therefore, to take inspiration from Altervision, which does not ask people to collectively search for solutions in the face of problems, but to tell stories similar to the one proposed by the storyteller. The objective of Altervision is not to find solutions to the case, but to broaden the horizon of possibilities. This declination of Intervision aims in particular to promote social workers' awareness of their expertise and to bring out the tacit knowledge underlying their decisions and actions.

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In this regard, it also emerged during the course of the project how much the online live mode of Intervision was better suited to generate this kind of fruitful confrontation. The live mode posed linguistic problems – as partners less fluent in English needed continuous translation by colleagues - but facilitated exchange and reflection. For this reason, the HOOD partners decided to continue by adopting both modes on an alternating basis. The live mode allow for a direct dialogue, which arises from the direct suggestions of the participants and benefits from the immediacy. On the other hand, the written mode allow to develop a more elaborate reflection, but it loses spontaneity and, spreading out over two months, runs the risks hindering the participation and the collection of all contributions.

Intervision Methodology

The literature suggests the development of sequential phases, that slightly differ from each other according to the reference considered. As already mentioned, the following steps are inspired by Professor Luigi Gui's Altervision methodology, aimed more at broadening the possibilities of intervention than at negotiating a solution together. However, the HOOD Intervision phases are not exactly the same of the Altervision, that are better detailed in Bite n. 12. **For the HOOD Intervision activity, the group has identified four phases to be adopted in the development of the activity on the online platform** and in the live session. The online work on the platform was structured according to a two-month time frame, according to phases established and coordinated between all partners. The same phases were sequential in the live sessions, lasting approximately 2:30' hours.

> *"the learning does not come from abstract reflections or recommendations, but from the real baggage of experiences present in the group. "*

Phases

Phase 1: Storytelling

One of the partners, the narrator, shares in detail an issue, challenge or problem. The narrator shares with other partners what Professor Gui calls a "dilemma": a problem and the different options he/she has facing it. Facing problems, social workers could think to be in front of blank space, they do not know what to do. Actually, they often have several options in mind, but none of these convinces them completely.

Phase 2: Questions

Other partners ask clarifying questions to understand the situation, elucidate particular points and find out more about the issue, challenge or problem. The questions are especially aimed at clarifying the options the narrator is considering. Indeed, it happens that it is during this kind of exchange that the options appear clearer to the mind of the narrator. During this or the previous phase, the narrator tries to sum up the dilemma in a brief sentence. The sentence is an "abstraction" of the dilemma: it is less related to the specific case described, and it could be applied to other situations or targets. Other partners should agree on the final sentence proposed.

Phase 3: Memories Brainstorming

Each partner evokes a similar situation he/she encountered. Facing the same dilemma, however in different conditions, each partner share memories, describing what he/she choose on that occasion and what happened. In this way the learning does not come from abstract reflections or recommendations, but from the real baggage of experiences present in the group. The experiential heritage is shared among partners and becomes clearer than before. After this round of memories, the group hold a wide body of experiences collected related to the same

dilemma. The narrator will not hold a final solution, but he/she will have access to several anticipations. Each memory shared, indeed, could represent a possible path to follow and participants can anticipate the likely consequences of each choice. The narrator will hold more elements to make his/her choice.

Phase 4: Feedback on learning

Each partner shares a brief comment about what he/she has learned during the session. For instance, participants could summarise the added value of the session and what they will remember in the future. The feedback phase shows how the comparison of similar experiences enriches social workers' awareness and self-confidence. Although they start from different welfare contexts, they often share similar dilemmas. Listening to how colleagues behaved when faced with those dilemmas helps them to become aware of their own actions, to recognise their own expertise and to consider new possibilities and horizons for action. It is important to remember that one does not come out of Intervision with a solution, but, as Professor Gui argues, with a broader horizon of possibilities for action. The responsibility for the final decision to be taken remains with the individual social worker.

During each session, participants cover some roles for the best management of the session. At each meeting different persons can cover the roles, that are:

- The **storyteller**: the person who tells the dilemma on which the session will focus;

- The **note-taker**: a person in charge of taking notes, and, at the end of the meeting, writing a summary of the salient points that emerged;

- The **facilitator**: in charge of guiding the success of the meeting, taking into account the time, trying to moderate the interventions, and allowing everyone to participate.

Characteristics of Intervision

Following the suggestion shared by Professor Gui, the main features of the Intervision approach are the voluntary presence of a group of equal rank, whit a common professional focus, whit a target-oriented exchange, that in a mutually defined structure wants learn from each other and help each other.

Below, at a glance, the presentation the main characteristics.

Group of equal rank
The group that does Intervision is of equal rank. That does not mean, that people in the group can be differently qualified, but it means, that everyone in the group may bring in his problem equally and no one in the group is a professional coach who leads the group or process.

Common professional focus Another thing is the professional focus. Usually, there is a common professional interest. People in the group have a common objective because they work in the same social area related to homelessness.

Target-oriented process
The process is target-oriented which means it is about a solution-focused exchange to find one or more solutions that can be transferred into work afterwards

4

Mutually defined structure

There is a mutually defined structure that supports the Intervision.

Voluntariness, liability

Peer coaching should be voluntary, but within the group, there is a need for liability to take part actively and feel responsible for the processes

Ideas of "giving and taking"

There is the idea of "giving and taking" which means you learn from each other and help each other.

Counsel without fee

Peer coaching is without fee because there is no external professional needed. It creates solidarity in a team or between similar functions in an organization. It develops awareness of one's capability to learn from experience It breaks down the idea that one can only learn from an expert, somebody who 'knows'.

It develops several important learning skills

▪ Active listening, Empathy and Questioning skills ▪ Creative thinking and innovative problem solving ▪ Synthesizing skills, Teamwork and solidarity between professional peers ▪Process Facilitation skills (when not facilitated by the external facilitator).

> *"Intervision helps create solidarity amongst a group and bring awareness of one's capability to learn from experience. It promotes the idea that participants can learn from each other, not only from an outside expert. The mindset behind the process of intervision is based on a feeling of belonging to a group and contributing to the team's common purpose"*

Benefits

Intervision in HOOD has shown to have multiple benefits for participants.

● *Enhanced professional capability*: Sharing their expertise to come up with new ideas and address challenges they face in their everyday lives helps participants develop and better their skills.

● *Emotional impacts*: Intervision has shown to reduce the risk of burnout because of the emotional support shown during a session of intervision. Participants feel heard, which will result in feeling more valuable and increase their desire to invest themselves professionally. This will have a positive impact on their productivity.

● *Social impacts*: Intervision is a social activity. It provides a platform for enhancing social networks and exchange among colleagues. It helps the stakeholders feel like a part of the organisation and creates a stronger connection and link with their peers. Mutual help leads to stronger professional solidarity in the team.

● *New perspectives*: Sharing during an intervision helps participants broaden their understanding and perspectives regarding different issues they may tackle.

● *Skills development*: skills such as improvement in communication, active listening, empathy, creative thinking and problem solving, analysis, collaboration, professional networking, etc.

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Language barriers were a complex obstacle in the live sessions, while in the platform sessions the deferral in time of the exchanges impoverished the richness of the content that emerged. In addition, on several occasions partners fell back on interpreting Intervision as a collective search for a single solution in the face of a problem, experiencing frustration. Succeeding in interpreting Intervision as a space for confrontation, oriented toward learning rather than defining a strategy for action, instead fostered the creation of a space for confrontation in which to enjoy the benefits described.

Further information on HOOD is available on the website: *www.hoodproject.org*, where the possibility to subscribe to the project mailing-list is provided. To get deeper information regarding the project, on the website there will be a second section beside the "factsheets", called "bites". As the name suggests, bites are more informal and briefer considerations coming from HOOD's development that could help other practitioners, policymakers, researchers, citizens to understand our work. Additionally, as the dialogic approach leads our project, we will always be happy to share our next steps with all those interested: do contact us!

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