

Key Elements

This bite is the sixth of a series of seven documents that offer a first introduction to the approaches that will be adapted to the homelessness field along with the HOOD's project life: the Dialogical Approach and the Enabling Coplanning. They discuss topics ranging from epistemology at the basis of the approaches, the core principles of the two methodologies mentioned, and the key elements that characterized them. Overall, they facilitate the progressive comprehension of the two approaches considered, also providing tips for further readings.

Recovery

Those systems where general (not specialist) services help people to acquire citizen's rights are based on the concept of recovery, that in mental health replaces the bio-medical one of healing. The recovery paradigm makes it possible to build different pathways that are not necessarily based on a minimum level of performance – be it cognitive, social, or physical. Instead, it aims to build the support needed for a person to enjoy full citizenship. In this model, the goal of social work is no longer that of assessing, planning, and developing proper intervention for a certain kind of situation, but instead, it is the creation and multiplication of exchanges in a network of negotiation that implies material, emotional, symbolic, identity and cultural dimensions, in order to allow a person to live their citizenship to the full independently of their characteristics.

Further reading: Greenwood, R. M., *et al.* (2020), *Homeless Adults' Recovery Experiences in Housing First and Traditional Services Programs in Seven European Countries*, "American Journal of Community Psychology", 65(3-4), pp. 353-368.

Network



The importance of the network in the description of the problem and in the planning of action is a peculiar feature of both Dialogic Practices and enabling coplanning, although it could also seem a recurrent element in other approaches. Different from what happens with other methodologies, in Dialogic Practices network is not only a resource to resolve the problem but also a central place in which to look for voices that help to define them. People are known, described, met, and always seen by professionals as embedded in their network (they are *relational professionals*).

According to the Dialogic Practice approach, beginning immediately to talk about the situation in terms of network allows the practitioner, at any step of the process, not to imagine, think, and discuss anything about the person as they had intrinsic features that determine their existential situation, regardless of contextual and historical dimensions.

“Every action, description, and sentence about the person always include at least two actors and a context”.

With the network, we refer to everyone’s system of relationships in terms of exchanges (material and symbolic), roles (connected with the imaginaries or stereotypical), commitments, relational events, habits, and ties. Nevertheless, we must always pay attention to the temptation to assume the attitude – both within ourselves and in the relationship – of who is collecting information. The main part of the change is not triggered by the final outcome (what we learned about the person’s network), but by the process itself. Indeed, it requires effective activation to identify the significant people in our daily lives (this is a necessary step in developing the project, but not a way to test the person); it opens up the space to describe our everyday lives from our own perspectives, without being translated, adapted or inserted in predefined models. So, the power relationship will develop from the very early stage as much more symmetrical than a relationship in which one actor has the skills, languages, and knowledge to describe the other, while the other has no legitimate words to talk about themselves. Moreover, considering the content, to think and talk about someone while always considering their contexts of network and life brings about much a richer description, which enables a better definition of truly personalized and effective intervention.

Power



Dialogic Practices have mainly to do with the social worker giving up power. To give up power does not only mean avoiding deciding for the other but also, for instance, defining the other, pronouncing statements on their lives, interpreting the meaning of what they say. Even if we look at the first pilot experiences carried out in this field, it appears that the Open Dialogue stems from the abdication of great power: practitioners in Keropudas psychiatric hospital have chosen not to plan interventions on separate premises and have replaced staff meetings with sessions where the person and their network were present. Even where this has not been possible, practitioners continue to have meetings without the people targeted (as the enabling coplanning expects in some phases), constant attention is necessary for finding expedients to give up power. The main one is to talk and write at each step as if the people were present. This measure eliminates all those spaces for defining problems and directing intervention where the work team would hold total power, and it opens up the need to construct a new way of working.

The simple but brilliant insight at the basis of the Dialogic Practices is that in order to see different scenarios, the practitioners' positions must be changed. Renouncing the power guaranteed by staff meetings is a practical example of this change, but each process calls for different changes, according to contextual features. Giving up power is not an easy move, because power is not something you hold, but it has to do

“We spend so much time reasoning and trying to get the people in our charge to change, but we never try to change the one thing we can change, which is ourselves”.

with something you are, and then leaving it is a more complicated and painful process. The core switch at the conceptual level consists in the transition from imagining action aimed at changing the other to imagining concrete measures to change oneself as a practitioner, what one does, what one says, and the places and the times of one's own way of working. A first operative step is to equip oneself with tools and “glasses” to recognize how power is exercised in one's daily work routine, analyzing each part: (for instance, the power to define, the power to include/exclude, the power to give or deny an opportunity, the power to establish who deserves what, the power to define and evaluate access requirements).

Relationship



The major role that a (dialogic) relationship plays in the process is a key element that enabling coplanning takes from Dialogic Practices. The relationship is central: indeed, the relational world in which we are embedded from very early childhood contributes to shaping our psyche. Moreover, the relationship we hold at any given time, our way of being and doing, and the resources available at that point are intertwined. Firstly, as dialogic practitioners we always consider people within their networks (see sheet n°), then it makes no sense for us to describe a person without their network of relationships. Furthermore, being dialogic means developing dialogic relationships, free from that strategic aim to change the other. Changing the other holds several meanings: changing their minds, getting them to change their attitude, persuading them that a certain thing is better for them. Then, becoming dialogic implies transforming the traditional way of considering the nature of relationships aimed to promote change, into an educational relationship. According to the traditional model, developing strategic relationships needs shared opinions to generate any change. Following the dialogical approach, on the other hand, long-lasting and positive transformation in one's life are reachable through dialogic relationships. The development of a life project is enabled not by every single choice, but by the process itself. The kind of relationship adopted is the basis for the whole process of enabling coplanning. If the approach is still strategic (e.g.: we say something “to get the other to understand they should...” “to persuade them to...”), any tools adopted in the intervention will be in vain. According to the dialogical perspective, the change triggers when the practitioner actively and intentionally moves from a strategic to a dialogical approach. There are several useful concrete measures to promote this modality: talking in our usual way with other professionals in front of the person prevents them from developing either a first language for thinking and a second one for talking to them; to avoid imagining before the meeting what the person will say or do helps us to accept their saying something unexpected. As discussed above, the practical use of the dialogic perspective is detailed but easy to adopt, but what is most difficult for the professional is their giving up of power when there is that shift from a strategic to a dialogic relationship.

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