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ERASMUS PLUS DIALOGICAL APPROACH

Dialogical Approach / Project results 1

Aim:

To provide a description of the role of Governance Group in the process to enhance integrated, multi-professional and people-centred teamwork at the institutional, organizational and professional levels.

Description:

The Governance Group (GG) is a working group which is responsible for governing the implementation of dialogic work and monitoring its progress in the organization.

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1. Introduction

The background of the project is described this way in the grant agreement:

“Public organisations and authorities are challenged to be inclusive, innovative and reflexive in a context of unprecedented transformations and growing international interdependencies which require strengthened cooperation among the different sectors in society. Emerging insights and experiences demonstrate that to address these challenges it is necessary to put professionals and their skills to work in integrated and multi-disciplinary ways at the centre of change processes. The project faces these tasks and conceptualises training as a vital element of social change through strengthening teamwork, horizontal relationships and integration. In particular, the Dialogical-Work project responds to the educational challenges of aligning the competencies of health, social and education professionals to the evolving complex needs and expectations in changing societies providing the skills to professionals through a network dialogue-oriented 'method' of working which is still missing in the training curriculum of professionals working today.”

Organizational and cultural change

- Embedded change is complex – to ensure implementation of a successful new organization with a simultaneous focus on normal operations.
- Cultural change impacts behaviours in organisations. There are social systems in organizations that are derived from relational networks and professional identities.

Cultural innovation includes changes in values, attitudes, expectations, opinions and behaviour.

To summarise, cultural innovation means any behaviour that changes language, customs, stories, symbols, managerial ethics, social responsibility and all those values that characterise society.

Cultural changes can be particularly complex because people are very unlikely to change their behaviour and ways of thinking.

It is crucial to bring out the importance that change can have not only for the organisation but also for the individual

Building awareness is the first stage of any change process: the human intellect needs to understand the reason for change.

Resistance to change is a variable in human behaviour, so communication will be crucial to make people in the organisation aware of the importance of change and to try to shed light on the uncertainty of new projects. The negativity of the lack of change will have to emerge, and to do this, one of the primary necessities will be credibility in communication and to discuss openly and sincerely the causes of the need.

The agents of change

A person who supports the organisation's effort in bringing about the desired change, overcoming resistance, managing conflicts effectively and efficiently, and amplifying the active impulses for change, whether they are internal or external.

The change agent may work alone or in a team, may occupy a variety of positions and may be internal or external to the organisation;

Communication and training

Communication and training are two fundamental aspects to be analysed for successful change. The first of the two is necessary to inform all stakeholders of the importance of the change itself and the positive aspects it would bring. Good communication is indispensable to avoid misunderstandings, resentment and unexpected consequences at both organisational and individual levels. Appropriate communication provides the proportionate impetus to gain the support of stakeholders.

Training, in a change process, is crucial to support employees and to give them the foundation and knowledge to understand and manage their role in the change programme.

Any organisational change is driven by the people in the organisation. This should easily sum up the importance of the human factor within the organisation itself.

2. How to set-up a Governance Group

It is particularly difficult to define strict criteria for the set-up of a Dialogical Work Governance Group.

What can be useful is to understand what questions need to be asked in the first instance:

- What are the drivers of change toward the dialogic approach?
- Do they come from the outside?
- Do they come from within the organization, is a top-down or bottom-up process?
- Is there a leader or group leading this cultural change?
- Do the characteristics of the organization influence the Governance Group set-up?

The last question is particularly relevant, organisations always have different characteristics. Organisational structures, organisation of work and tasks, decision-making processes, hierarchy, formalisation of organisational positions, leadership, are specific to each organisation and define the organisational behaviour of the people working in it. The characteristics of the Governance Group, therefore, will be consistent with the type of organisation and its specific culture.

Therefore, it is very useful to make an organisational analysis of one's own institution. Here, too, we can ask ourselves questions, some examples:

- What are the characteristics of our organisation?
- What is our Mission?

- What are the activities we carry out?
- Are we a formal or informal organisation?
- Are we a hierarchical organisation?

It is important to have a clear idea of the characteristics of the organization where you want to implement dialogical work. The peculiarities of the structure and its operations and the specificity of the organizational culture.

After these reflections, it will be necessary to figure out which people should be involved in the Governance Group. The composition of the Governance Group is crucial to develop its commitment in the organisation and to be able to support the creation of a dialogical environment (fig.1).

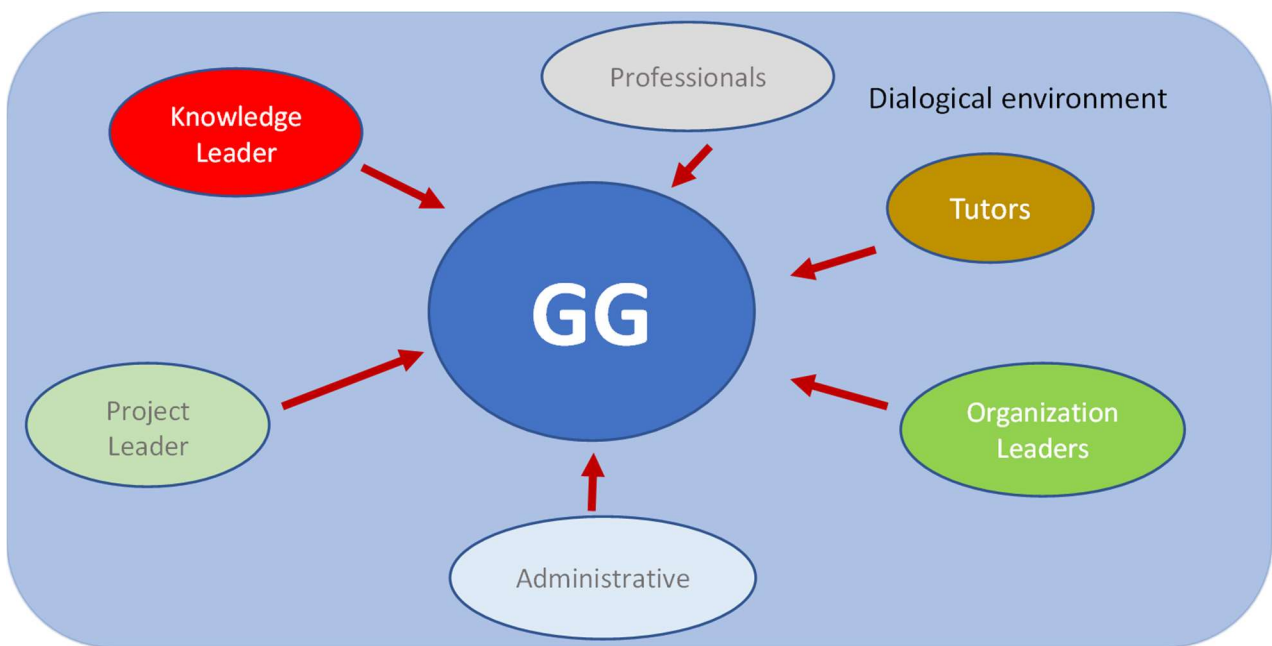


Fig. 1: Who is in the Governance Group?

3. Characteristics of Governance Group

The GG should have the necessary characteristics to influence what happens in the organization, to institutionalize and legitimize changes, the Governance Group should have a commitment by internal stakeholders.

Once it has been defined its first tasks are:

- To receive training about dialogical work as necessary
- Where to implement change through dialogic work
- Define communication strategies in the organization about the dialogic work
- Choosing who to train as tutors
- Support the tutors in their tasks
- Monitor results and expand the dialogic approach in the organization as necessary

Decisions and practices to implement Dialogical Work are the result of the dialogic work in the Governance Group itself.

The activities of the Governance Group should be supported by the dialogue approach. For this, the members of the Governance Group should be trained, or at least have a clear idea of the approach on a theoretical and methodological level. In carrying out the work of Governance, members may alternatively be supported by Tutors, who act as facilitators in the dialogical environment.

The first activity of the Governance Group concerns the implementation phase of dialogical work in the organisation. Thus, the Governance Group will have to have the necessary commitment, foster communication about the dialogic approach, identify areas or processes in the organisation where dialogical work can be implemented.

A second phase of the Governance Group's activity is that concerning Tutors. The choice of people to be trained as tutors depends on the type of organisation and which part of it has been identified as suitable for the implementation of dialogue work. One can choose people within the operational activity (professionals) or people with normally transversal tasks (HRM or administrative).

The bosses of these persons have to agree, which is why the Governance Group's commitment is very important.

Once the tutors' training phase has been managed, the Governance Group will have to foster the implementation of the dialogical work, support the tutors in their role as facilitators of the dialogues, and monitor the results achieved downstream of the construction of the dialogical environment.

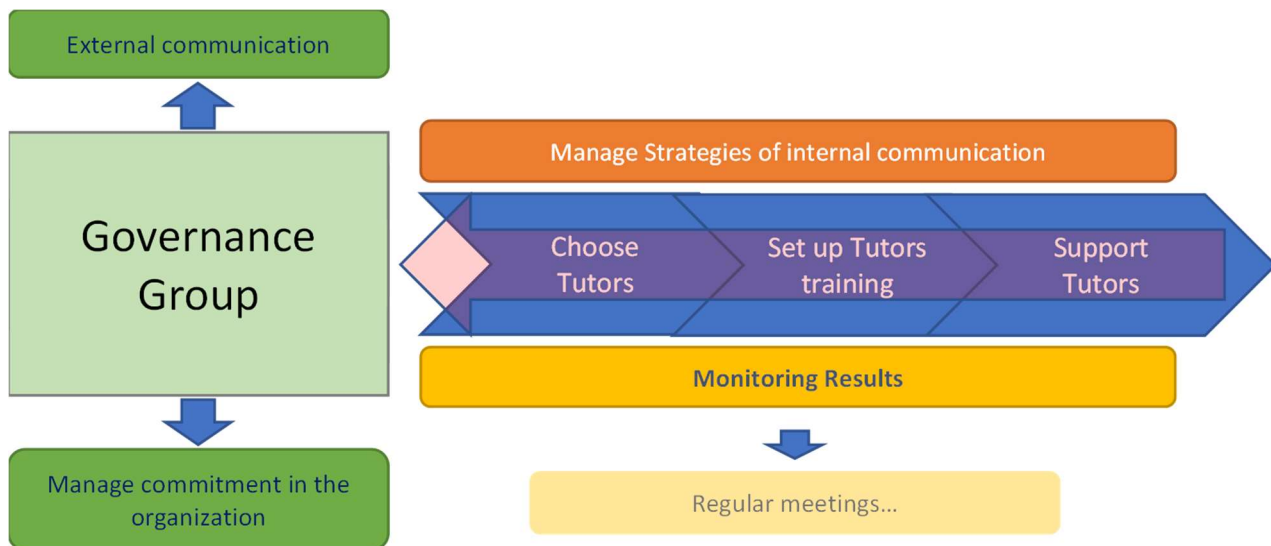


Figure 2: The activities of Governance Group

4. Where implement Dialogical Work

The implementation of Dialogical Work is a kind of organizational cultural change. So it is very important to calibrate this process of change. In some cases, it may be appropriate to start using dialogue in one process and then expand it to the whole institution. In other cases, it may be appropriate to use this approach only for specific processes. In other cases, it may be possible to involve the whole institution right away.

This depends on the characteristics of the organisation and the possibilities of the Governance Group to influence choices in terms of change and behaviour at work.

When choosing the perimeter of the dialogue environment, certain questions could be asked, for example:

Are our activities multidisciplinary?

Are our activities fragmented?

Is there a unique language (administrative, technical...) in our organization?

What is the motivation for the change we want to implement, is it about performance or organizational climate?

As we said, the dialogic approach adds particular value in multidisciplinary contexts, where communication and understanding are hindered by different languages and subcultures. It can therefore be very useful to start, in building a dialogic environment, from a context where the quality of work can greatly benefit from the development of dialogue and listening.

Conclusions

Different paths can be chosen when defining and building a Governance Group. Very important seem to be the characteristics of the organisation, which make us choose which people to involve in the Governance Group. This is to obtain the right commitment and facilitate new practices that are not strictly technical or specialised and therefore might not be immediately accepted by the organisation's top management.

It is clear, however, that training is also appropriate for the people who make up the Governance Group.

In particular, dialogue work not only redefines the way people work in heterogeneous groups and contributes to improving the organisational climate and people's well-being, but also has an impact on performance. Performance can be measured and become a communication tool to the organisation and its management in support of dialogic work.