ERASMUS PLUS DIALOGICAL APPROACH

Dialogical Approach Toolkit / Project results 3

Aim:

To provide tools and methodologies to enhance integrated,multi-professional and people-centred teamwork at the institutional, organizational and professional levels.

Description:

Starting from elements that emerged in project results 1 and 2 regarding

Governance Group and tutors, project result 3 will focus on crucial tools to get these actors to act in order to implement dialogical processes in different settings.

Contents

1. Introduction

In this document, we are providing a review for a dialogical approach in welfare services and organisational development processes. The document consists of a concise literature view and a short introduction to some anticipation dialogue practical tools, which can be used as examples of dialogic work.

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."

The word 'dialogue' is very often used nowadays when we are understanding the need for collaboration and the leadership strategies are changing towards a more communicative and sharing culture. Originally the term dialogue stems from the Greek *διάλογος (dialogos*, conversation); its roots are *διά (dia*: through) and *λόγος (logos*: speech, reason). Therefore, the original meaning of the word "dialogue" is alternate speech between two or more people. Latin took over the word as *dialogus*.

Anyhow communication is seen in organisational strategies very often as a phase that has its place at some part of the process. In this project the mindset is based on the idea that communication, collaboration, and dialogues are the most important method in implementing and achieving goals, taking care of the working culture and welfare, and answering the present and future challenges.

2. About dialogues

Dialogical approach is a way of thinking together with other people to find new solutions and possibilities to act in worrying situations, development processes, complex and wicked problems. Dialogical approach is a way to handle these situations openly together. Anticipation dialogues, which are trained in this project, have their roots in family therapy and dialogical philosophy. Anticipation dialogues mean focusing the process into a good future or situation where the worries have come smaller or vanished. Another dialogical working method, open dialogues, that have been developed for mental health services (also in Finland), is based on the same background, but the differences come from structure. Anticipation dialogues have a structure, and the facilitator is taking care of the process proceeding. Open dialogues don't have that kind of structure and they are based on reflection. But these both have a lot of similarities and are both based on networking, which means creating a supporting network that consists of not only professionals from different sectors but also supporting people the client or the process owner wants to invite. Network is supposed to guarantee the polyphonic way of working.

Dialogue means a way of communicating. Being dialogical in a broader sense is a multi-voiced worldview and understanding of how we think and are in relation to other people. In the dialogue, different points of view are evoked, and new options are sought. The participants of the dialogue increase their understanding of themselves and others in the dialogue. The dialogue emphasises mutual listening, where people can understand the views of others and listen to themselves, due to its nature of alternating and not overlapping what people say.

The central principles of being dialogical are

● being heard

● having faith in the other person

● an experience of hope

● creating trust

● tolerance of uncertainty

● curiosity about the otherness of the other.

(National Institute of Health and Welfare, 2022)

Dialogical approach is not a tool or method that we can "take from the shelf" when we want to test something new or when difficult challenges force us to cooperate. It is not only a question of thinking and acting dialogically, but also polyphonically, which means thinking dynamically, in terms of *anticipating the responses to our actions*, as well as thinking in terms of anticipating *the responses of other people to each other* (Shotter, 2008, 520).

The polyphonically oriented thinking together requires us to loosen our own attitudes to make dialogues possible:

"Dialogue, on the other hand, is a conversation where the participants build

on each other's contribution. In a dialogue, participants are willing to let go of their pre-set ideas and listen to the contribution of others and, thus, are open to ideas generated as a result of this joint interaction which would have otherwise gone unnoticed. In other words, your opinion is not final, but a step towards the ultimate outcome. The aim of dialogue is to gain a new insight, a new understanding of an issue. However, it does not seek consensus, but to appreciate how others think. Thus, the secret of dialogue is that no one will know where it leads. Therefore, dialogic methods are ideal for acting appropriately differently."

(Eriksson & Arnkil, 2009, 36).

When dialogical situation and space are created, a common strength and capability working and creating things together is possible and this free flow of inquiry and meaning allows new possibilities to emerge. This capability exists in every community, but in most organisations, it is dormant, and dialogue allows it to be awakened. (Isaacs, 1993, 25–26.)

Being in a dialogue doesn't mean only thinking together and brainstorming things together. The polyphonic attitude requires also respecting the otherness. Very often we see other people compared to ourselves, valued, or rejected on that basis, and define the world and its elements by closing them into my circle of understanding. Emmanuel Levinas is using terms of Same and Totality to describe this attitude (Levinas, 2012, 33–40). Facing another person also creates a responsibility between people. When another person is inviting us by speaking or with other expressions, she/he is waiting for a response. For the word (and, consequently, for a human being) there is nothing more terrible than a lack of response (Bakhtin, 1984, 127). By accepting the invitation with our response, we are also acknowledging the existence of another person. This is respecting the otherness.

By practising a dialogical approach, we can learn how to help the workforce to better handle emergency situations.

3. Early dialogues and mirror neurons

In training of the dialogical approach and tools we always come into a moment, where the participants realise the core of it. It is verbalised very clearly and simply: "I must learn to listen." This is a thrilling moment for the participants and the trainer. This realisation includes lots of information about reaching a touch to a very personal matter. It is also a touch to a skill that we all have, but we have forgotten it or learned away from it.

This comes back to the basic experience of life, our dialogical self. We are developed in a relationship with other people right from the beginning – and even earlier before our birth – and this continues until our death. In that sense we were not born as an individual and we cannot exist alone.

Most parents and caretakers have experienced how their babies in the first months of life appear to complement them in a finely tuned interplay of mutual fulfilling and follow-up of gestures and expressions. Even in the first weeks after birth mother and child can achieve such coordination of expressions and movements in a sort of circular dance of mutually completing and interwoven bodily motions. (Braten, 2009, 190.) In the first relationships and from that now on, we are learning also by our mirror neurons. Shared intersubjective we-centric state, which is mirrored by the mirroring mechanisms, are essential for newborns and infants to attach themselves to the social world, but increasingly it also has a different meaning, when it provides the self with the ability to simultaneously identify with and differentiate from one another (Gallese, 2011, 1–9).

By understanding this basic human essence gives a better possibility to enter also other core elements of dialogical approach: respecting the otherness, getting interested in other peoples' thoughts and learning to be responsive. Or learning to know that a human being wants to talk only about his or her own affairs. As a matter of fact, we could talk about the "gateway to theory of dialogues" at this point.

4.   Wicked problems and complex world

By globalisation, digitalization, borderline change or fading, cultural change, and the sharing economy, problems have become ambiguous and complex. They are sometimes difficult to even define. The traditional logical-rational approach is in trouble when things are fuzzy and not always controllable or measurable.

The Finnish Government has described the complex situation this way:

> *"In an increasingly complex environment with wicked problems, things need to be approached more as phenomena than as well-defined assignments. This approach challenges the traditional hierarchical and silo-like organisation. That requires a dynamic organisation around the phenomenon. Complex phenomena are not recognizing administrative boundaries, but their causes and mechanisms require a more comprehensive approach. This requires a strong cross-administrative culture of cooperation across organisational boundaries."* (Valtioneuvosto, 2019.)

When problematic situations are complex and difficult to define, they are called "wicked problems". Problems with clear boundaries and descriptives can be called "tamed problems". That does not mean that they are easy.

Jeff Conklin is describing wicked problems this way:

1.   You can understand a wicked problem only by becoming familiar with the context.

2.   There's no distinct beginning or end for a wicked problem. You can only chase a good enough solution within the framework of resources.

3.   The solutions for wicked problems are not either right or wrong. They are just better or worse.

4.   Every wicked problem is unique.

5.   Every solution for a wicked problem works uniquely on one problem.

6.   You can't define the solution set for wicked problems.

(Conklin, 2006.)

According to the theory of wicked problems tamed problems are logical, algorithmic, and technical ones. You only need to have sufficient information to solve them. You can use previous experiences and expertise in making choices. Draft decisions are prepared by experts in the field.

The nature of wicked problems is complex and ambiguous. These are very often unique situations, where previous experience is not necessarily useful. Neither previous solutions can be used. It may be so that the wicked problem can't be solved at all, or it is so difficult to define that you must settle for the situation you can't finish solving.

In a global and complex world, problems are increasingly wicked and not helped by the traditional "problem-based" model and thinking. The situations are complex and broader phenomena. Even systems thinking is not enough, if systems are described as algorithms that interact with each other.

Working as professionals we are trained to diagnose problems, design solutions, and solve them. In the case of tamed problems, we can endlessly hone the logic, algorithms, and technical implementation of the solution. To solve them, it is good to have enough information to support decision-making, to use previous experience and expertise in making choices. But what if no solution is found or no agreement is reached? At the individual level one can start talking about a worry.

Worry is a subjective experience that arises from a lack of self-action and combination of needed support. Worry cannot be transferred to another person. Based on the contact information, the person with worry, will be able to talk to the person who can act. The best result is achieved when a person with worry speaks with a person who can help.

The greater the worry, the more dialogue is needed.

5.   Dialogical approach for developing organisational work and leadership

Dealing with complex problems requires holism and bringing the concepts of leadership, collaboration, operating culture, communication, and networking to the centre.

The core of cooperation is the way of thinking together. According to the definition of a dialogue, thinking together requires reflecting one's own attitude to hear another perspective. An experience of being heard is a prerequisite for thinking together. During dialogical training the trainees are trained to facilitate situations that produce such an experience.

Communication is a challenging task. We think we are communicating when we are giving information or reporting or delegating. Very often we are communicating without listening, so it is a one-way interaction and a subject-object relationship. The communication process looks interactive, but it still needs receiving the message and recognition of the participant's experience. Reciprocal communication is a subject-to-subject -relationship.

Because the global - and local - world is unstable, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, there's no other way to understand it and find useful solutions that process the cases together with dialogical tools and ways of working, to share the good practices and competences and to make the learning approach a key operating principle. Only a dummy wouldn't do it.

To be successful, networking and network-based cooperation requires leadership that supports and enables it, as well as an administrative culture based on equality, inclusion, trust, transparency, and equity. Dialogical working culture is also the working culture of administration and managers. Dialogical leadership develops in dialogues and during dialogical processes.

One aspect of the dialogical approach is the controlled crossing of the border between knowledge and non-knowledge or lingering at the border. It is very easy to listen and hear a talk about something you don't know very much about. Similarly, it is even more relaxing for a speaker to talk about something that is in the realm of the best knowledge for himself. At this point we are not in dialogue yet. The dialogue begins when the participants of the conversation want to listen to each other with the intention of changing their own thinking. A professional can consciously place himself in a non-knowing position several times a day. It is important to linger long enough there. To linger so long that you can recognize the other person's willingness to accept different ideas. The professional must be sensitive to recognizing the situation from where we can move forward together and move to the level of knowledge.

6.   Governance group to support dialogical ways of acting (PR1)

The Governance Group (GG) is a working group, which is responsible for governing the implementation of dialogic work and monitoring its progress in the organisation. Decisions that are made are the result of the dialogic work in the GG.

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 organisation 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 organisation as necessary

Tom Arnkil (Arnkil, 2019, 37–50) has described principles of co-creating dialogical spaces. It is not aimed as a framework for GG only but all other actors, too. He says, that internationally common tasks are:

1.   arranging the physical place to make it appropriate for dialoguing,

2.   making sure there is adequate time and that it is "distributed" in a dialogue-favourable way,

3.   including the significant persons and helping them to join in the social space of presence,

4.   encouraging the open mental space for respectful curiosity and empathy,

5.   preserving dialogical discourse jointly with the others in the encounters and averting authoritative discourse.

The first actions for GG have been planned according to these tasks. We have to remember that this is only the very beginning of the process. Every time GG meets, it is necessary to act dialogically and have common experiences. Then you know better, what you are supporting and what you can expect from workers.

7.   Competences of dialogical tutor (PR2)

Based on 'Project results area 2' five complementary competences can be determined for the dialogical tutor. These competences are described in the PR2 report:

1.   Innovation driven

2.   Demand driven

3.   Collaborative working

4.   Interactive learning

5.   Knowledge creation

Dialogical tutors will be trained into these skills:

1.   Capability to use 'Taking Up One's Worries' -tool in dialogical positions.

2.   Capability to use 'Dialogical spaces' -thinking in GG and other meetings.

3.   Capability to use dialogical meeting techniques.

4.   Capability to present dialogical approach in events.

8.   Tools for tutor and governance group

Anticipation dialogue refers to a way of working and a method, which has also been referred to as recalling the good future, future dialogue, and network counselling or network dialogue. The aim of the anticipation dialogues is to clarify the cooperation of different parties, combine network resources and expand operational possibilities. Anticipation dialogues are a way to implement joint meetings of different networks so that the participants find ways to coordinate their joint activities and they can be used in psychosocial customer work as well as in planning and strategy work.

Network facilitators are widely used to support a change in the community's operating culture. It is not their job to tell what is right or wrong in the community. Network facilitators help community members listen to each other's thoughts and tell each other what solutions they would have for issues in the near future. Network consultants can help community residents talk about their own initiatives or provide feedback in a dialogue. In this project, the tutor is learning the first steps of network dialogue facilitation and will be capable of facilitating with dialogical tools, which are mentioned in this chapter.

Tutors will be trained to use these anticipation dialogue tools (or ways of working):

- listening dialogically

- helping to speak by formulating suitable questions

- making dialogical public notes

- taking up one's worries

- dialogical meeting tools

- dialogues on good practices

- dialogical panel discussion

The dialogical tool taking up one's worries means that a professional brings up his or her own concern with, for example, a client, guardian or subordinate and asks for help to alleviate it. The important thing is that the concern is addressed respecting the other person, appreciating other opinions and will be done politely. Cooperation (with the tutor and all the participants in dialogue) and trust are built, issues are discussed respectfully, openly and courageously.

Taking up one's worries -tool consists of three phases:

1.   Intending to take up your worry by thinking about the case with questions: What are you worried about in the child's/adolescent's/client's/worker's situation? What will happen if you do not take up the issue? How worried are you?

2.   Preparing the meeting with the help of a form and its questions: In your opinion, what are the areas where clients or coworkers feel they receive support from you? Do areas exist where they might find you threatening? What are the resources you have been able to identify, and how could you communicate these? What could you do together and/or separately to improve the situation? How do you intend to take up your worries and express your wish to cooperate? Anticipate what will happen during the discussion. Anticipate possible results of the discussion in the near future. What would be a suitable setting and a suitable time to meet to discuss the difficult issues?

3.   After the meeting, evaluate it with questions: How did you take up the issue? How did you feel before voicing your concern? How did you feel during it? How did you feel afterwards? Was it as you had anticipated, or was it completely different? Were you surprised? How do you view the actions to help the child/adolescent now? Are there grounds for optimism? Are there things that still worry you? What are you going to do to diminish your worries?

Often, communities hope to hear from others about their good practices. Good practices are brought into shared thinking, allowing the recipient to benefit from the thinking of a more experienced expert in the discussions. A model of good practice dialogue has been developed for these situations.

Good practice dialogue consists of the following phases:

1.   The representatives of the organisation are giving a few minutes of presentation about their good practice in a way they like.

2.   After the presentation, the tutor asks the audience to form discussion groups of a few people. They will have a shared moment and together they have to formulate a question to the presentative. At the end of this moment every discussion group will read their own question one after the other.

3.   The representative will give another monologue to the audience, which includes all possible answers.

4.   Tutor asks the audience to form discussion groups again. In this short brainstorming session participants are asked "How could my organisation use this good practice and how could it be improved, adapted and tailored to the new context?"

5.   At the end of good practice dialogue, if there is time left and somebody wants, participants can do a minute of reflection and tell everybody their new idea that came up today.

Groups with several participants, the tutor can organise the group into an inner circle and outer circle layout. First, it is time for the inner circle participants to discuss for a moment while outer circle participants are listening. Then roles change a few times before there is time to talk together.

This kind of steps above are suitable when the tutor organises evaluation dialogues, hearings of residents or follow up -discussions. You just have to use words, which are correctly related to the situation.

Dialogical panes discussion is suitable for a group of 40 or more participants.

1.   Tutor asks the audience to have a dialogue with the nearest few participants about what they would like to hear the panellists discuss.

At the same time panellists have the dialogue together, where they decide which theme they start with.

2.   Then the tutor asks the audience to tell the panellists their expectations briefly, in one sentence. It is recommended to write these ideas on the flip chart paper.

3.   Tutor asks panellists to start their discussion on the topic of their choice. And then, of course, it is possible to talk about the ideas the audience wants to hear.

4.   After a while. Tutor asks reflection, comments or more questions from the audience. It is appropriate to listen to five or six people before panellists can have another turn.

5.   You can continue this as long as time has passed.

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