



Training course Senior Service Worker

Networking in home and community based settings for elderly

Communication in networking

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4. Communication in networking

Communication is regarded to be one of the core tasks in networking. The main task of senior service worker is to manage network communication. They link the wide range of actors in the field, their different resources, interests and priorities. The objective is therefore to create an open communication culture which allows a process of learning together.

It is characteristic for network meetings that large groups work together. Usually internal meetings are organized as discussion rounds and exchange groups for a larger number of members. For these network meetings special methods as “Open Space Technology”, “Future Search Conference” and “World Café” are suitable and have proven their effectiveness.

4.1. Communication as success factor in networking

Communication is regarded as core task in networking. On one hand this comprises external communication, public relation and effective public image. Various instruments are appropriate to strengthen public interest and maximum awareness of network activities: active press work, websites, online marketing, newsletter for interested persons, image films, local campaigns and events. Network management has to coordinate this public image among all network partners very carefully.

On the other hand the internal communication is very important for success, because it has a strong influence on network identity. It's well known that a good atmosphere in cooperation and a culture of working together strengthens the identity of networks. Also quick wins, positive public image and particularly a win-win-situation for each partner are important for network identity. Internal communication is the most important success factor in networking and the following text is focused on this topic.

Within a network we find a wide variety of starting points, interests and priorities. These diversities have to be linked for the common objective. It's obvious: nursing professionals from a religious denomination have different interests than nursing professionals from a private commercial care company. Another example: there is a great difference between the



expectation on infrastructure between a self-help organization of dementia patients and the local administration. Despite the differences at the same time all partner have the common goal to support elderly and to offer services for independent living in the community. Network management has to identify potentials for competition (with regard to customers, funding) as early as possible and to agree on network rules for dealing with conflicts and problems within the network.

If a network includes volunteers this special feature has to be considered in communication. It's necessary to find the right balance between their knowledge, ideas and talents and the goal of the network (see also Module 7).

Experiences in the field show that successful networks have good internal communication structure and personal contacts face-to-face. If network partners promote joint projects they develop substantial synergy benefits.

Abbildung 3: Mitglieder AK „Älter werden im Bremer Westen“



Reference: Netzwerk: Soziales neu gestalten (2008)

The graphic above is an example for networking in community based work for senior citizens in Bremen/Germany (Netzwerk: Soziales neu gestalten 2008). The members of this working group called "Getting older in the Western part of Bremen" have really a broad scope and include inpatient and outpatient care institutions, service housing for the elderly, institutions

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for health, social, culture and leisure activities, local churches, counselling points, local boards and elderly council etc. All these partners join their forces to improve the quality of life for elderly by community based services. This work group is part of a great network of stakeholders in social economy in Germany.

Reflection task: Please have a look at the network members in the graphic: what different interests do they have?

4.1.1. Network culture

Successful internal communication needs a common network culture. This network culture is based on mutual confidence, commitment and transparency. It's helpful to have an agreement about basics and rules of cooperation because this improves networking and allows continuous self-reflection of the partner.

Characteristic for network culture is a combination of openness and structure. This allows strong commitment and at the same time great self-organization, flexibility and high ability to face new challenges. Experiences in the field prove that emotions as mutual confidence have a higher impact than formal rules.

Opportunities for communication

Network moderators should create various opportunities for communication between network partners to improve the cooperation. It's important to:

- take turns in organizing regular meetings
- share information continuously
- maintain personal contact within the network
- ensure continuity of network members
- have a clear delimitation of roles and responsibilities
- monitor rules and agreements regularly



For network communication all types of events are suitable which promote the special network culture. Openness to dialog and willingness to compromise ensures success of networks. Sometimes the lowest common denominator really improves process. Networking managers should consider this balance between loyalty to one`s own account and to the common interest of the partnership.

Large group events

Network events take place regularly or whenever the situation demands them: network meetings, work meetings, conferences, group meeting or partnership meeting, seminars, workshops. In networks usually large groups of people (30-100 persons) come together for meetings. The following text describes the basics for moderation of large group events.

The networking manager is responsible for organization, content, structure and moderation of the event. The benefits of these large group events are that all participants are involved simultaneously and work highly self-organized. If there is high intensity of communication between the network partners there will be high chances of implementation of ideas and projects.

4.1.2. Moderation cycle

Josef Seifert who developed the “**Six-Step Moderation Cycle**” is one of the most famous experts in large group moderation (Seifert 2014; Seifert 2015). This cycle cuts “the handling of the topics into small time slices and processes them `step by step`.” (Seifert 2014). It enables the moderator to reduce complexity and to channel tendencies of self-organizing on the one hand and focusing of attention and solution-orientation on the other hand.

Seifert designs this cycle as a “meta-rule” for the organization of the common work. Each step has its own target and a suitable set of methods.

The large group moderation methods “Open Space Method”, “Future Search Conference” and “World Café” are based on this Six-Step Moderation Cycle.



Six-Step moderation cycle by Seifert. *Reference: Seifert 2015*

Senior service worker needs a specific method knowledge to moderate the communication process in networks. In the relevant literature for network moderation it is highlighted that the network moderator should put special attention to the atmosphere to promote mutual acquaintance, awareness and understanding. Therefore the first meeting has to be planned carefully because network members need time to become more familiar with each other. Suitable methods for the kick-off meeting are “one-page-profile” or a special matrix. At the beginning of the common work the moderator has to illustrate the resources of the network partners, the overlaps and intersections. Result of the first meeting should be a working basis to agree about tasks and responsibilities in the further work process. Sometimes networks use a “letter of intent” or develop essential guiding principles for the network.

4.2. Selected methods of large group moderation

Large group methods

The following text describes methods of large group intervention which have been proven suitable in praxis. Most of the large group methods have been developed in Anglo-American environment and are currently used to address challenges in organizations and communities. They are designed to help people collaborate effectively by thinking and acting from a whole-systems perspective.

We choose the methods “Open Space Technology”, “Future Search-Conference” and “World-Café” because practical experiences show that they are especially well suited in community settings with diverse interest groups.

Large group as “sociotope“

This format is based on the concept of participative and self-organized learning. It follows the principle of “more is different”: this means that the size and diversity of groups offers potential for creative ideas, energy for innovation and chances of being implemented. In this respect the group is a “creative field” for individuals, resources and shaping the future together.

How to manage a jazz band

Moderation of large groups is compared with the management of a Jazz Band (Burow et al. 2002). A good band needs a conductor who is able to synthesize many individual pieces into one giant work of the highest virtuosity of all members.

If one follows this metaphor the role of moderator can be described as a manager who's task is to enable both: the individuals and the group. He gives impulses to action, supports and accompanies the group to achieve the objectives and results. Sometimes the moderator is called an “ice breaker” or a “motivator”. He is the one who amplifies the resonance and ensures that the group “plays by the rules”.

Principles

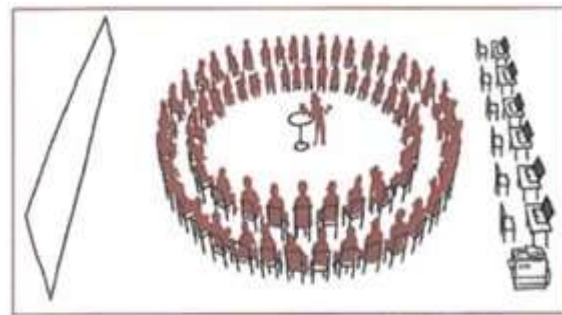
There are some characteristic principles for moderation and controlling large groups (Burow et al. 2002). These principles can be used as orientation or guideline for the moderator and the group and should be coordinated, reviewed and modified during the work process:



1. Voluntariness
2. Responsibility
3. Learning from experience
4. Self-Support
5. Awareness
6. Synergy
7. Process orientation
8. Transparency

4.2.1. Open Space Technology

The originator of the Open Space Technology is Harrison Owen who developed this method in the eighties, inspired by experiences with the „village palaver“ in Liberia and the daily ritual of coffee breaks in Western societies. This



This method brings all partners of a network together to share ideas and visions. The quite loosely structured environment engages them to discuss various topics with each other. The open space setting merges the special energy which is inherent in the group. The moderator has to define the process rules, principles and boundaries with careful respect to the perspective of the diverse actors in the network.

The success of Open Space lies in the simplicity of this method. Anywhere from 30 to 1000 people can organize themselves and produce results which go far beyond the initial expectations. No large group method has put the principle of self-organization or the belief in people's potential into practice as consistently as Open Space.

The leadership team greets the participants, who sit in a circle, and gives a rough outline of the central theme. The facilitator then introduces the subject matter. The agenda is to be produced on a board about 15 metres long, at this stage totally empty. It is merely divided into separate sessions. Participants who would like to raise a topic relating to the central



theme are now invited into the centre of the circle. They take the microphone and announce their topic. They then write it on a large sheet of paper and hang it on the bulletin board. Next, the market place is opened. Everyone goes to the bulletin board and writes down where he or she wants to work. The topics are available to choose in each of the roughly 90 minute sessions. One topic may have 50 people interested in it, another only 2 or perhaps even no one. The few rules of the game are as follows: "Whoever comes are the right people". "Whatever happens is the right thing". "Whenever it starts is the right time". "When it's over, it's over". Each person can come and go when they feel it is right for them. Groups are encouraged to put together a report at the end of the workshop.

The workshops begin. Everything is voluntary and anything is possible. Each person makes a contribution where he or she wishes it. Anyone who decides that they cannot contribute or are not learning anything in the chosen group simply goes to another group. As a rule the group results are not presented in a plenary session. Rather, the topic initiators produce, during the conference, a written report on their findings. A series of laptops is set up for that purpose in the plenary space. By the end of the conference all the reports will have been completed and copied. The conference participants read the reports and sometimes prioritize them together. Often working groups of people who are willing to work further on a topic will emerge.

Adapted from: www.frischerwind.com/open-space-technology, (01.09.2016)

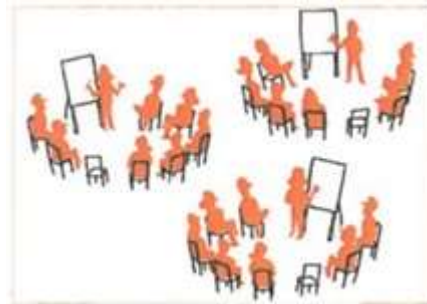
Application possibilities

The open space technology is suitable particularly at the beginning of a large group work. Usually it's used as entry into the networking. In community settings for elderly the method is quite suitable because of its simplicity and its open structure, particularly if you consider that sometimes elderly have problems to express themselves or to talk in front of a large group of people.

Reflection task: *You plan to host a network meeting about living arrangements for the elderly. Please discuss the reasons why this network meeting organized with the Open Space Technology could be attractive for volunteers in the quarter.*

4.2.2. Future Search Conference

The method Future Search Conference was developed by M. Weisbord and S. Janoff at the beginning of the 1990s. Based on the concept of action research the participants collect and analyse data from the past and the present to define a common vision for the desired future. This method is widely used for shaping the future in organizations and communities. The moderator guides the group through a structured process and enables the group to have meaningful discussions and to take responsibility for the results. Future search conference is an ideal tool for groups with a heterogeneous composition who wish to create a shared knowledge base and, building on this, to plan for the future. The future concerned may be that of an issue, an organization or a company, but also that of a community or region.



The central principle of the future search conference is as simple as it is radical: bring the whole open system into one room. Open system means firstly those people who have some connection to the issue. The whole system, however, also includes a time dimension. The participants, numbering from 30 up to 200 or even more, jointly and simultaneously examine their issue through time, from the past through the present into the future. In this way “the whole system” becomes tangible and understandable. Interrelations become clear, and shared visions and a shared emotional basis emerge. In the final stage of the conference, solution approaches and steps toward a future that everyone desires are developed on this basis. In the future search conference, interests which are apparently widely divergent can within a very short time be combined and turned into a workable basis for the future.

One reason for the success of the future search conference is the method of working. The participants work from 1 and ½ to 2 and ½ days in constantly changing groups of eight in the same room. Sometimes they are put together in a random mix, sometimes grouped in a targeted way. They work through their tasks step by step and present and discuss their findings in the plenary session. They learn from one another with their heads and with their hearts. Through the structured phases they develop a sense what is really important.

Adopted from: <http://www.frischerwind.com/en/future-search-conference>, (01.09.2016)



The Future Search Conference is structured in six phases:

1. Where are we coming from? (Looking back into the past)
2. Which new developments we have to expect? (Field analysis)
3. We are particularly proud of... We regret that... (Assessment of the present)
4. What is our vision? What do we want to create, to develop together? (Creating common vision of the future)
5. What are our essential similarities? (Definition of the common basis)
6. What is our immediate objective? Which measures we want to take? (Implementation)

Application possibilities

Practical experience shows that this method is quite suitable for the community based work with elderly. In retrospect the elderly can talk about their experiences, their ups and downs in daily life and their view on issues of the community. This perspective allows a general overview, a panorama of the community. Sometimes participants bring along some goods with personal meaning and personal memorabilia (photos, documents etc.). Thus, individual memories are stimulated and joint experiences are discovered. Based on the shared history the group is enabled to plan a common future.

Reflection task: *You want to organize a Future Search Conference in the quarter where your nursing home has been established for 20 years. This Future Search Conference has the topic “The future of our quarter”. Which local actors will you invite? Why do you choose these actors as key persons?*

4.2.3. World Café

The World Café was developed by J. Brown and D. Isaacs in the 1990s. It's a simple, effective and flexible format to bring a large group of people together, to promote an open and intimate dialogue and to link all ideas which are in the room. The method is based on the idea of the ambience of a Café: People come together in an informally, freely atmosphere, have a cup of coffee and chat.

The World Café events are designed according to 7 principles (The World Café Community Foundation 2015):

1. Set the context
2. Create hospitable space
3. Explore questions that matter
4. Encourage everyone's contribution
5. Connect diverse perspectives
6. Listen together for patterns and insights
7. Share collective discoveries



In the World Café a specific issue can be clarified in a very short time in groups of 20 to 200 or more people. The short duration (2 to 3 hours) and often surprising results obtained explain the popularity of this method. The method has a simple basic structure. The participants sit at tables, usually with six places, which are covered by paper tablecloths. Coloured markers are provided on the tables. Each participant has one of two roles: a host or a guest traveller. Throughout all the discussion rounds the hosts remain at their tables and ensure the guests sketch, draw or write their thoughts and opinions on the tablecloth and network among themselves. At the end of each discussion round the travellers switch the tables. Following each changeover the hosts sum up for their new guests the essence of what emerged in the previous session at the table.

Generally, the participants engage in discussion for about 20 minutes at a time and switch tables three times. The setting developed in advance determines whether there are three related questions or a single question is posed. The important thing is that the question(s) should be simple clear and as open as possible. After three discussion rounds, the most important findings from each table are collected and recounted in the plenary session, if need be written down and prioritized on a central list or recorded otherwise. The rapid nature of changeovers and networking by the participants mean that workable answers crystallise in a very short space of time.

Adopted from: <http://www.frischerwind.com/en/world-cafe> (01.09.2016)



On the website <http://www.theworldcafe.com> you find detailed information and special tools to organize World Café events.

Application possibilities

World Café events are very suitable if a large group of network partner comes together. This method cannot be used for problem solving in implementation of concrete measures because the aim of a World Café event is not to agree on a list of certain measures. In practice it has been already proven for use in lecture events. After a lecture the audience can be stimulated by coming into contact with each other and discussing the topic.

Reflection task: *You host a World Café event in the quarter. Topic of the event is „Cohabitation of the generations in the quarter“. What are the questions that matter?*

Conclusion

Successful networking needs effective communication between the various actors and partners. To promote and increase network communication special large group methods are used. Best practice shows that particularly those approaches are suitable which allow an open learning process and ensure mutual benefit. Senior Service Worker increase networking communication if they nurture the special network culture and host meetings with methods promoting contacts face-to-face.



Literature

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