

## **IVRIS-method**

### **A methodology of collaboration for producing ways of sustaining collaboration**

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The methodological approach adopted within IVRIS project takes inspiration from the experience of “Change Laboratory” (CL)<sup>1</sup> which is a methodology developed by Yrjö Engeström (1987) and his colleagues (Engeström and Sannino, 2010; Engeström et al., 2015; Nummijoki et al., 2018); Sannino and Engeström, 2017; Virkkunen and Newnham, 2013) at the Center for Research on Activity, Development and Learning (CRADLE), at the University of Helsinki. The method originates from cognitive psychology and in particular from Cultural and Historical Activity theory (for an origin of the method see Virkkunen and Newnham, 2013).

At the center of attention of CL is collaboration and work activities and intervention methods. The method focuses not on how is work but rather how it can develop. And in this CL identifies a methodology to do intervention in work activities.

In this approach there are some different methodological steps which consist first in mapping the activity and the situation. The starting point is a problematic situation and the role of researchers is to help participants in identifying possible contradictions, tensions or disturbances connected to that problem. Once these contradictions - and therefore the problem at the origin of the contradictions - are defined, it opens up a space for development and innovation (Gouveia Vilela et al. 2014).

The central idea is that practitioners change the work and that researchers help out in accompanying the process. Researchers may produce hypothesis of a solution which is then experimented, changes and developed by the practitioners according to their experience. The specificity of the methodology compared to other methods of action research is that practitioners work at the development of the solution and not just at the implementation of a solution elaborated by the researchers (Gouveia Vilela et al. 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> We took inspiration also from other methodologies, such as Auto-confrontation croisée” (Duboscq and Clot, 2010), which also applies on Change Laboratory.

In other words, the overall idea is that change is not something coming from an external unit – ready made external solution - but through a process of reconceptualization of the object of the activity by the participants themselves as a learning process.

In this there is also an idea of empowering participants and of being the main actors of change.

In this process the researchers-facilitators and local participants work together in order “to foster forms of transformative agency understood as the participants’ capacity to take the future of their activity into their own hands” (Virkkunen and Newnham, 2013: X).

A central element of the method the so called double stimulation, which means that practitioners are confronted with some mirror data, that is data collected by researchers in order to let emerge internal contradiction within the “organizational unit” at stake and then, on that base, to suggest some concepts on which participants may work in order to imagine and design possible and desirable futures re-organization of their unit (or to reformulate the object of the activity).

This methodology has appeared since the beginning particular appropriate in the case of IVRIS as participants had already a certain level of awareness of internal contradictions and the group was already in the logic of producing/backing some transformation.

#### **IVRIS-method in practice**

According to the above-mentioned methodology, and in order to gather “mirror data”, preliminary interviews have been conducted with different persons involved, at different degrees, in the process of introduction of a specific welfare technology.

Then a cycle of workshops has been organized where most of the people previously interviewed – in addition representatives of organizations for older people have joined -

have been invited to interact and exchange on a set of materials (in particular interview quotes collected by the IVRIS research staff on the practice), to analyse actual work practices (disturbances, bottlenecks, contradictions but also strengths) and to develop new ideas and tools for changing practices.

#### **IVRIS Checklist as the result**

Throughout the workshops one of the main ideas that emerged was that when talking about welfare services for older people too much focus is given on technical tools/solutions (“prylen”), while the focus should rather be on work practices (arbetssätt), on their reconfiguration and on improving collaborations.

On this regard, in the literature it has been recognized that in today complex organizations what is missing is not specific competences but rather the

capacities of putting all the different competences together in a coherent and purposeful way.

In this framework, the idea of developing a checklist has been advanced as a tool which may help in considering which are the different elements of the practice which should be taken into account in the process of re-organization of the *arbetsätt*.

The idea of the check list is to tackle the complexity connected to work activities with a simple principle of “not to forget”. The checklist have already been used in highly complex organizational contexts such as the medical sector (Gawande, 2011) or in the reorganization of social services (Community Lab, 2017). In other words, the aim of the checklist is to keep together all the threads of a practice, which may exceed one unique organization, as it is in the case of the provision of welfare services.

Based on the first inputs which have emerged in the first workshops, a first example of a checklist has been proposed by the researchers and then completely revised by practitioners throughout the later workshops.

<https://ivris-checklist.web.app>

## References

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