

COMMUNITY-DEVELOPMENT-FRAMEWORK:
REFLECTIVE FRAMEWORK FOR PRACTICAL PROJECT
WORK IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
TO SUPPORT THE PARTICIPATION OF OCCUPATIONAL
THERAPISTS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS



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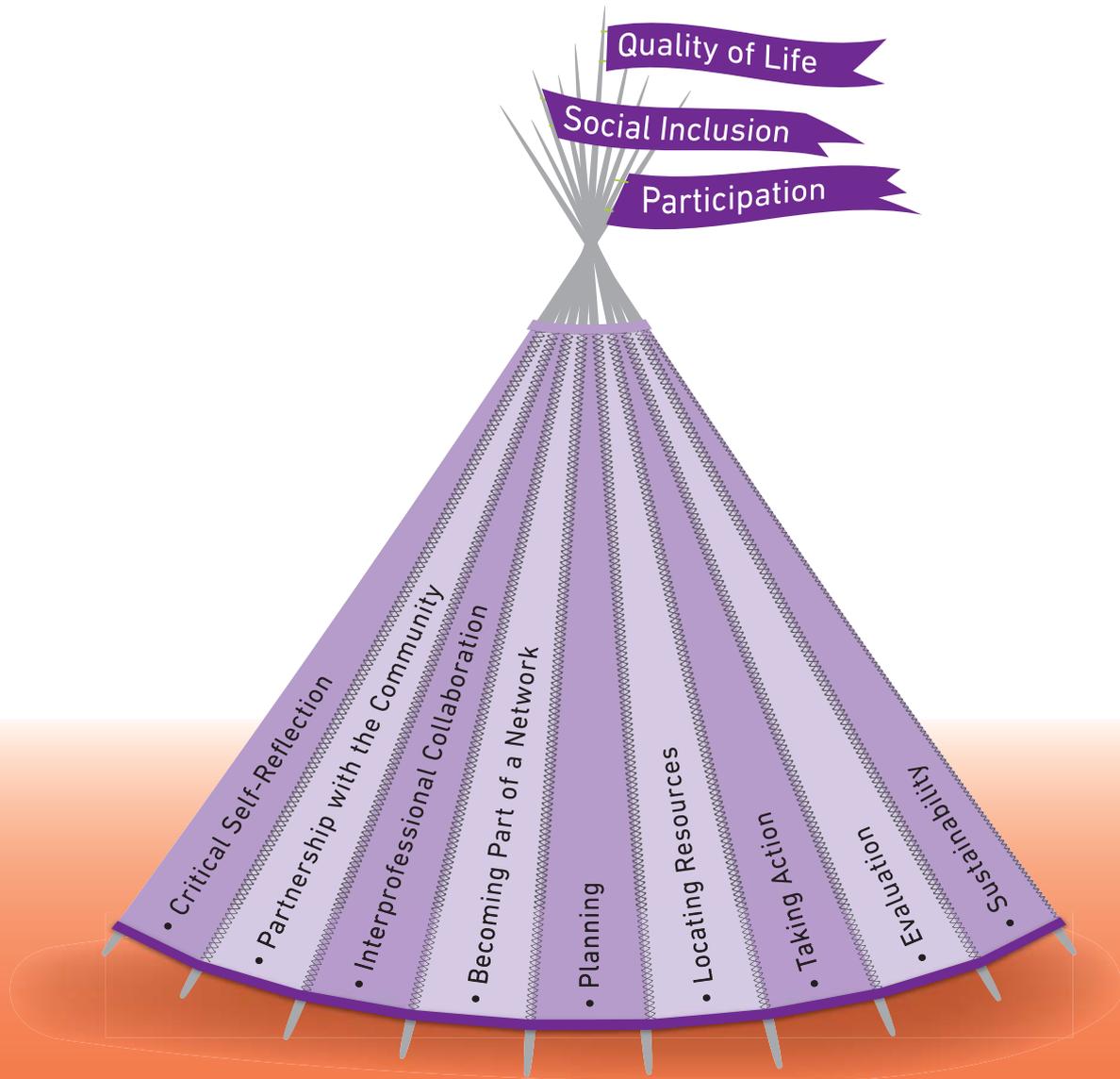
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1. ILLUSTRATION OF THE ASPECTS OF THE COMMUNITY-DEVELOPMENT-FRAMEWORK



Participation issues or occupational needs of the community

2. EXPLANATION OF THE COMMUNITY-DEVELOPMENT-FRAMEWORK

The nine elements of the reflective framework, which structure the process of community development, are based amongst others on the course material on community development published by Henderson, Summer and Raj in 2004, and the specific reflections and experiences that were made in the context of university projects using a community development approach at Hogeschool van Amsterdam (the Netherlands), University College Ghent (Belgium) and HAWK University of Applied Sciences and Arts Hildesheim (Germany). A first draft of the framework was discussed with colleagues from different (mainly European countries) at the 2012 COTEC Congress in Stockholm (see Zinkstok et al. 2012). Since 2012 the Framework has also been used in the annual interdisciplinary “International Student Workshop on Community Development in Health (and Social) Care” (see Engelen, Schiller, Zinkstok 2014). In 2014 it was introduced in a presentation at the WFOT Congress in Yokohama (cf. Zinkstok, Schiller 2014). Until spring 2015, the collection of feedback and results from discussions with colleagues regarding the framework’s applicability and the experiences of our students who used the framework in their practical projects were collected. It played an important role in establishing the final version of the framework.

In order to introduce the Framework and its theoretical background in more detail, articles were published in a Belgian, Dutch and German professional publication for Occupational Therapy (see Zinkstok, Schiller, Engelen 2016; Schiller, Zinkstok, Engelen 2017; Zinkstok, Schiller, Engelen 2017). The first published version of the Framework appeared together with a separate introduction in *Jaarboek Ergotherapie 2016-2017* (Zinkstok, Schiller, Engelen 2016). This is the English translation of the slightly revised end version, which is identical with the Dutch and German end version.

The different parties involved in a project, which work together on the basis of equality, are centrally located in the reflective framework: including members of the community, leaders of organisations, key figures, stakeholders, professionals and volunteers.

Although some elements of the reflective framework can be considered as steps following each other in a logical sequence, community development does generally/on principal not follow a linear or chronological order. Instead, a cyclical or iterative process, i.e. a process for arriving at a decision or a desired result by repeating rounds of analysis or a cycle of operations, is characteristic of this approach, the aim of which is the continual improvement of the chosen approach – on the basis of dialogue and reflection. Some elements are pursued simultaneously, whilst others are regularly repeated, and others need to be looked at anew again and again (cf. also the Occupation Based Community Development Framework by Galvaans & Peters 2014). However, based on the experiences with projects that use a community development approach, it can be inferred that establishing a partnership with a community is normally the first step. This first important step in the process is typically time-consuming, as the professionals and the people in the community need to get to know each other (and establish mutual trust). Experience shows that gaining an appropriate impression of the need for change in a community and of the perspective from which community members look at and discuss their problems takes time.

Each aspect of the reflective framework receives its specific structure from the dialogue with the members of the community. The principle of community development is using a bottom-up approach in the social scientific understanding, i.e. the aims and needs of the community guide the process. The professionals have

an enabling/strengthening and supportive role and only act as experts if this is what the community wants, e.g. if one of its members wants to acquire specific knowledge or skills necessary to implement a certain idea or initiative which can contribute to the well-being of the community.

The surface on which the different elements of the reflective framework and the community meet symbolizes the fact that the elements can only show the desired effects in the interaction of all the parties concerned. This eventually leads to achieving the desired outcomes connected with participation, gaining of occupational opportunities, social inclusion and quality of life. The professionals participating in this process shape the interaction, proceed on the basis of equality, listen closely to what the community considers their needs and directions for solutions and contribute their specific expertise (in the form of knowledge transfer and skills training) if the community has a need for it.

A community development process in occupational therapy is related to/refers to a community's occupational and/or participation issue. The occupational therapist bases his or her approach on the assumption that it is meaningful to regard occupational issues from the perspective of occupational justice: every person has the right to execute occupations in accordance with his or her performance ability and his or her occupational needs. For this reason we recommend using the strategies and reflective processes introduced in this reflective framework together with the "Participatory Occupational Justice Framework" (Whiteford & Townsend 2011).

A tent was chosen to visualize the reflective framework, as this can – symbolically – be erected in the place where it is needed, i.e. where a community is ex-

periencing an occupational or participation issue. The possibility of relocating a tent symbolizes the flexibility evinced by a community development approach. In the same way the posts of a tent are placed in a carefully thought-through manner, to give the tent stability, two or more elements are purposively linked to strengthen the process of community development as effectively as possible. The individual tent squares are strongly linked to each other and represent the need for collaboration regarding the establishment of shared objectives, the formulating of a shared vision, how to tackle the occupational issue and the practical joint organisation of the approach. At the same time, this refers to the fact that the community needs to feel responsible for its problem and the solution, if the process of community development is to have a chance of success.

Within each element the professionals who participate in a project using a community development approach can ask themselves various questions which help to clarify one's own role(s), motives and activities. These are listed in the following chapter, together with specific suggestions for the individual elements.

3. THE COMMUNITY-DEVELOPMENT-FRAMEWORK AS A REFLECTIVE FRAMEWORK: QUESTIONS AND STRATEGIES TO STRUCTURE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY INTERVENTIONS

CRITICAL SELF-REFLECTION

In a project based on a community development approach occupational therapists must not only pay attention to the motives, needs and knowledge of the other parties involved in the project, but also be aware of their own motives, their association with the community and their own potential to contribute to a process of change.

- What are the reasons for the planned project?
- Why do I want to work together with this community?
- What are my reasons for collaborating with different parties?
- Do I have the same or other interests as the community?
- What can I learn from this community and who am I responsible to?
- How am I associated with the community? How do I identify with it?
- Which knowledge and skills do I already have or do I need (additionally) for this specific community?
- What do I feel responsible for?
- Does this project require any volunteer commitment on my part? Am I prepared for this?
- Can I detach my personal attitudes and interests from my professional work?

PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY

It is important to be careful with the potentially misleading term “community.” In practice occupational therapists much more often collaborate with individual members of a community, who can play (or would like to take on) different roles, than with groups who belong to a community. The questions need to be adapted accordingly, e.g.: How can I get in contact with individual members? In which order? How can persons get involved who are hard to reach?

Reflect on your own ways of being a member of different communities - this may help you to understand more clearly the inner workings of a community and the roles of its individual members.

Consider that it takes time to get to know a community and to create a relationship with it. The way occupational therapists ask themselves the questions listed below is therefore highly dependent on the context. Furthermore trusting each other takes time. Mutual trust is an important prerequisite for working together based on equality, for entering a collaborative relationship and developing a joint perspective regarding the needs of the community and possible directions for solutions.

- What are the characteristics of this specific community? What do I already know, what do I need additional information on? Where can I get the information from? Is this potentially problematic?
- What are possible ways of getting in contact with this community? What are the pros and cons?
- Which key figures, (community) organisations, stakeholders etc. can help me gain access to the community?
- How can I learn about the community's views and needs? Are there any unobtrusive ways of doing so (e.g. by observation, participation in activities, casual conversation...)?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the community? How do community members see the community? Which values do they have?
- How can I support the community in identifying what influences their actions and occupations at the community and at the individual level?
- How can I address certain observations related to questions of occupational injustice and social exclusion in an appropriate way?
- What approach is appropriate in this situation in this community? Is a more directive or non-directive approach, a top-down or bottom-up approach, a more active or a more passive role appropriate for me? (When) is it appropriate for me to assume the role of an expert?
- How can I best inform the community about occupational therapy?

INTERPROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION

In projects following a community development approach, occupational therapists do not only interact with members of the community, but also frequently with actors from different areas: with representatives of organisations, with professionals from different disciplines (with different degrees of familiarity), with volunteers etc. It is in the interest of the (members of the) community that they collaborate with all these people in a meaningful way. This is why it is important for them to have or gain good knowledge about the competences and expertise of other disciplines and that they are, conversely, able to identify their own role as an occupational therapist and clearly convey this to everybody concerned. This role can be different, depending on where exactly you are in the community development process.

- What is the added value of including an occupational therapy perspective compared to the contribution of other professions?
- Do I need to explain my (potential) role as an occupational therapist (and if yes, how) or is it already known?
- Do I know the “professional culture” of the members of other professions? Do I know their goals, interests, tasks, their understanding of their professional role, their approach and their procedure?
- When and how do I meet other professions? Which opportunities for collaboration are there or could be created?
- In which situations can I make use of my skills as a mediator between various disciplines and build bridges between the medical and the social discourse?
- How can I draw attention to questions of occupational injustice?

BECOMING PART OF A NETWORK

Processes of change are more successful, the better a process of change is understood by the environment. This applies to individuals, to groups and to the community.

- How can a supportive environment be created?
- Which partnerships (task groups or working groups, neighbourhood initiatives, round tables etc.) already exist or could be useful? Is it desirable to get involved in them?
- Which networks already exist? How can the project be linked to them? Alternatively: How can a network get created?
- How can the community get in contact with existing service facilities, organisations and initiatives in health and social care which can support their plans so that their chances of reaching their community aims will increase?
- Can mission statements of existing organisations, guidelines etc. be used for orientation?
- How can the existing infrastructure best get used?

PLANNING

The planning phase is about establishing goals, planning (occupation-based) interventions, deciding on strategies, tools and evaluation measures. It is important to clearly describe the initial situation of the community: What are its strengths and which issues and challenges is it confronted with? Noting the source of the information, this is put down in a document, which is made available to the members of the community. Based on this initial situation, reflecting on the desired situation (> goals) and about the way to work towards it (> activities, use of resources) is possible. This picture of perceived needs can then be approved and/or altered in discussions with the community.

- What is the aim of this project?
- How can I make sure that the community itself continues to feel responsible for the issue to be addressed?
- Which social or health issues are to be addressed? Which improvements do we strive for?
- Which methods of facilitation should be used to learn about the wishes and goals of the community?
- Can I use the ABCD (Achieving Better Community Development) model (cf. Barr & Hashagen 2000)? If yes, how can I best do this?
 - How do I work together with the community so that a shared overall concept of the possible interventions is created?
 - How do I ensure that everybody will proceed according to this overall concept?
 - How do I ensure that the existing resources the community already has or can gain access to are used?
 - How can I create opportunities for community members to play a direct role in the process?
 - How can I ensure that the community has ownership over the outcome?
- Which methods (questionnaires, interviews, dialogic communication, focus group discussions, diaries/log books, observations, photo voice, world cafés...) can I use to involve the community and return the information gained to it? Are the set goals reachable? Can they be divided into small steps that lead to a feeling of success in the participants?
- Which community development strategies do the interventions follow:
 - capacity building
 - establishing community partnerships
 - empowerment?
- Do I want to influence the local social and health care system? If yes, how?
- Which opportunities for meaningful occupation can be created?
- Which forms of evaluation are appropriate?

LOCATING RESOURCES

Occupational therapists make strategic use of their professional self and their personal self to gain access to resources of specific persons or health and social care facilities. Accordingly, they decide depending on the context how strongly they want to emphasize their professional background and degrees or academic titles. In some situations it may be more important to focus on the development of equitable relationships with community members and other participants.

- Which social capital does the community possess?
- Who do I need to establish contact with and in which way do I communicate?
- Who can the resources of the community get activated?
- How can resources outside the community get mobilized (in the local, regional etc. context)?
- What types of funding and sponsoring exist?
- What is required to be able to apply for funding?
- Which consulting services exist to provide the support needed?
- Which parties could be involved in a grant application so that the project becomes eligible for funding?

TAKING ACTION

In this reflective framework for community development, the most important strategies to apply are capacity building, establishing community partnerships and empowerment. Within each of these strategies thorough planning is required regarding the activities which can be undertaken by the different parties involved in order to undergo the desired process of change and to reach the community's goals. Many activities of the professionals involved are characterized by supporting and enabling the members of the community, so that they can gain the knowledge and skills to bring about desired changes themselves. Whichever activities you decide to conduct depends on the wishes and resources of the people with whom you are implementing the project.

- What types of activity are appropriate for the context and for the persons I work with?
- On which level am I trying to achieve empowerment: the level of individuals, groups, organizations or the community as a whole?
- Which community actions are necessary or desirable to strengthen the community? How can individual community members best get involved in the beginning process of change so that they will participate in the relevant activities of the community?
- Which professional role is appropriate for me in different contexts so that I will contribute to the process of change?
- How can I promote or facilitate the participation of the community or its individual members in meaningful occupations – especially regarding occupations that they have been excluded from?
- How can the various tasks and roles and the responsibilities associated with them best get distributed amongst the persons involved in the project?
- How can I make strategic use of my professional skills, e.g. by coaching (active) members of the community, volunteers or colleagues in the tasks they have set themselves?
- At which moments in the process should attention be given to questions of literacy and information transfer?

EVALUATION

- How will the chosen community development strategies be coordinated?
- How will the joint collaboration be structured?
- How will important institutions or organisations be involved in the process of change?
- Is it necessary to adapt certain activities or contexts for the members of the community? If yes, how could this best be done?
- How can I use my professional and personal self strategically in order to enable equitable power sharing between health services, services in the community and services users to create opportunities for meaningful occupations in the community?
- How can I collaborate with the community to re-orient health or social services so that they sufficiently support the participation opportunities of community members?

For the evaluation it is important to ask all the parties involved in the process of change about their experiences, their expectations and their perceptions of the results that have been achieved. After the decision has been taken to implement an activity or intervention as well as after its implementation, the effectivity of this activity or intervention should be reflected. In this sense evaluations lead to the reflection of subsequent activities or strategies that have led to specific results.

- Does the respective activity lead to the desired outcome or the desired direction of change? Does it make sense to perform the activity or intervention or should another activity be used?
- How can I make sure that the agents involved in the process of change continually gather information for the evaluation and evaluate and reflect on the outcomes of the activities performed together?
- How can I ensure that the approach used (forms of action, interventions, strategic activities) is regularly evaluated to reach the goals agreed upon or the desired changes?
- How are the project goals in their entirety evaluated?
- What do we learn from the reflection on the efforts of everybody involved in relation to the ultimately achieved outcome? To what extent were the financial means sufficient and to what extent did they influence the result of the processes of change?
- What do the results of the evaluation mean for future projects?
- How can the evaluation results best be documented?
- How can the evaluation results best be disseminated?

SUSTAINABILITY

Projects following a community development approach often have a long-term perspective. On the other hand, financial support or funding is often only granted for a short period of time. This is an important reason to consider questions of sustainability right from the start of the project: How can the project be continued when funding expires? Which prerequisites need to be fulfilled so that the project can really be continued then?

- Which processes of change and long-term activities can emerge from the project? Who can make a reliable commitment to them?
- Which support does the community need once the project phase is finished? How can this support get organised?
- How can I make my own experiences and growth of knowledge available to others?
- Does the community want to initiate a follow-up project? For whom is this meaningful? How and through whom can a follow-up project be realised?
- How can the community get prepared for the termination of the project or the leaving of the supporting professionals?
- How can I best prepare myself for the termination of the project or for leaving the community?
- What are my conclusions regarding my own learning experience working together with everybody involved in the project?
- How can I contribute to developing a long term vision on how participation, health, quality of life and occupational justice can be improved in a community?

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