

Externalization and mediation during Network meeting

We gave ourselves the challenge to write something about the use of speakerphone and interpreter in network therapy. The idea came up during a group session in the network conference in Banyuls, France 2011. Both speakerphone and interpreter was brought up as common obstacles for the network therapist, as aggravating circumstances for the conductor. In the discussion about ways to work around these obstacles the same pattern started emerge. The obstacles could be used in another way and seen upon as resources for the conductor and for the participants. So this short text is a sincere try to upgrade the named obstacles; speakerphone and interpreter, from being obstacles to be instrument of externalizations in the network meeting.

In network meetings, as in all situations where people meet, there come times when people

with different languages need to talk to each other, and the use of an interpreter is needed. This may be seen at as an obstacle, a difficulty or even something that make real dialog impossible. You can also look upon the use of interpreter in a meeting as an opportunity, as a figuration, a living and acting symbol of what is suppose to happen in the room; communication, dialog and understanding. There may be different views, argument and disagreement in the meeting but one thing is for sure; one person in the room has the role not take side and only concentrate on the language, the words, wich connects us in our communication. This person can be described as an externalization of the dialog. This person gives an anatomy to the process of the words transition, their way from one language into the mind of the interpreter, through the vocal cords into the room and to another language. The interpreter gives the language a body. The conductor use the interpereter to make mediation and communication possible. The interpreter is an enabler of the dialog.

In order to consider ideas of externalization during network meeting it is important to think about the therapist's objectives. A short description of the objectives in network therapy could be listed as following: to mobilize a network; to link the people; to induce network to activity. We can come to various ideas about on what phase of spiral and in what way we can realize some of our goals.

The idea about externalization as effective means to promote process can be realized in different way. It could be reflecting team, interpreter, maybe technical tools (speakerphone) and others. It can contribute to the mobilization of people and inciting their activities. At the same time it should be not to overdo, because, as any mediation, it can increase the distance between people. Thus, such methods possibly are more useful for changing at the individual level, but not so for intensive interaction process. So, possibly, at the stage of mobilization, when crisis or conflict makes interaction complicated, it should be helpful to use the various tools of mediation and externalization (reflexive group, an interpreter, a sound recording or letters of absent persons and so on) .

If you chose to look upon the use the interpreter as an externalization of the dialog, there may be some frames of the meeting that has to be attended. the use of interpreter will make something

with the time and the tempo in the dialog that need to be considered. The tempo will slow down and this is only for the benefit of the dialog. A slower tempo makes room, air and space for the inner dialog in every participant. The conductor can use this slow tempo to create, together with participants a reflective and listening friendly environment.

There are some aspects that must be considered when talking about conductor's opinion and conductor as link creator. On the one hand, the conductor can and must be connected to different opinions, sounding during the meeting. And at the same time there is a thought that he (she) must be neutral or impartial. On the other hand, too high a degree of "neutrality" may be similar to the "indifference" and can reduce the activity of the participants and the credibility of the conductor. Is it question of empathy? In network therapy we use the term multi-partisant. It means that as creator of links, enabler of communications the conductor needs to be enthusiastic to emphasize the process going on in the room. Like the little "BING" sounding when a link is made in a computer system, the conductor BINGS the participants when connection is made. If there is two conductors it will make it easier to be multi-partistants, using different perspectives and ambivalent research.

Experiences from Moscow and Norrkoping

1. For stimulating participant's reflection, we used to write the protocol. The person (team member) wrote down what was going on, and after some time, conductor of the meeting had asked him to read ("What happened here up till now? What things were sounded?"). A team member read out (minutes) the actual sequence and content of the speech, recording does not contain interpretations or judgments. Even when all participants speak the same language, it resembles the work of an interpreter and it has difference with work of reflecting team. We noticed that after that the participants got new ideas, or they started to bring senses in their own words, to show attitude, and there were other effects.
2. In case of absence of one of the participants (a father who was in correctional institution), we used the speakerphone. The conductor just asked many times - for whom father was talking and who can or who wants to answer (conductor made good process of passing the voices). This way was good to involve father as important person into common process.
3. In a meeting concerning the custody of a 1,5 year old girl both the young parents and their families and the social servants were represented. The young boy, who now also had became a father, did not have any of his relatives in the meeting. His stepmother, who was his closest kin, could not attend due to long distance. She had agreed to participate on speakerphone. After the break in the middle of the meeting, we called the stepmother. The conductor sat in the middle of the ring and held an interview with the speakerphone on a chair. The interview started with a detailed recapitulation of the meeting so far. After that the stepmother wanted to say a couple of things. The participants in the circle was concentrated on the speakerphone. Some of the things the stepmother said moved everybody emotionally. The conductor told the stepmother how the reactions in room felt like. Before the conductor hang up the speakerphone he asked the participants if the wanted to say something additional to the stepmother. Everyone in the circle wanted to add something. So as a closing ritual the conductor went from participant to participant with the speakerphone in his hands, and they all talked in to the speaker phone repeating the promises and hopes for the future.

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