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“Self Evaluation for Professional Social Work: building an instrument with Italian field social workers.”

With this paper I intend to present the work done in Italy with almost one hundred social workers, belonging to different institutions (Health Public Agencies, Local Authorities, Private Voluntary Agencies), which aimed at define criteria to evaluate the quality of the professional interventions, through the construction of a self evaluation questionnaire.

In the last decade we observed a spread of all the themes linked to assessment and evaluation in Social Services, starting from Agencies of the Health sector over the Social ones, and nowadays it seems to be commonly recognized that evaluation has to be a stable component of professional and cultural attitudes.

This awareness imposes that each actor has to be able to express and explicit its concept of quality professional activity, to predefine and indicate what are the criteria and the indicators with which the daily professional practice can be evaluated. We are aware that the concept of quality is complex, multidimensional, variable and related to different social and cultural context, connected to institutional and organizational variables.

In this complexity, social workers in Italy have rarely tried to articulate what can be recognized as good or high quality and we believe that it is vital that social workers engage themselves in the challenge to ‘give name’ and ‘value’ (evaluate) to their actions, in order to enhance intra-professional recognition and possibilities of acknowledgment by other affine professional groups.

For these reasons we proposed a “training course” dedicated to enhance a positive attitude on evaluation and to build an instrument for self evaluation of each owns professional quality.

The worth of this experience is that it was the group of social workers that choose and indicated both the criteria and the indicators of what they thought to be a ‘good professional’. We construct the set and we guaranteed the methods with which the course could develop and attain the result (defining the questionnaire of self evaluation).

On the level of the content, we choose to indicated only three meaningful dimensions (technical-methodological; organizational and relational). Social workers had to list 8-10 criteria that could explain the concept of ‘good quality’ for each dimension and then had to find 1 or 2 indicators for each criterion.

The questionnaire included four parts: one for each dimension and a fourth one for the final self evaluation: a synthetic judgement, hypothesis on origin and raisons of critical items.

In my contribute I’ll present the different steps of the course which allowed the groups of social workers to identify elements of good quality, which were the following. Sharing common understanding about evaluation, listing other actors (‘stakeholders’) which are interest to social

work and sort out their good and bad stereotypes through positive and negative adjectives; using a real case identifying strengths and weaknesses of the professional intervention, applying the SWOT analysis; on the base of these materials, list a 'Decalogue' of ten criteria (and indicators) for each dimension.

Secondly I'll present an example of a final questionnaire and, thirdly, a first comparison between the questionnaires done by the three different groups of social workers, highlighting commonalities and differences.

We proposed this course in four different context in three region of Italy, all participants were field social workers belonging to the same organization (Health or Social Service) but engaged in different services (children and families, drug addiction, disable adults and children, elderly). Recently we are proposing this work to the Regional Social Work Board of Lombardia (North Italy)

As points of discussion I'm interested in sharing comments and observation on:

- other similar experiences of self evaluation
- recognition of the three dimension as meaning full for social work quality