Chapter 10

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ABSTRACT
Inter-institutional or inter-functional network collaboration at work increasingly provides new challenges for professionals. A developmental network intervention based on the approach of Developmental Work Research was conducted in the field of Social Services for Divorced Families. The objective was to examine cross-functional limitations through joint reflection of examples of clients’ trajectories and to discuss possibilities for developing client-oriented network collaboration between services. With the help of interlocutory analysis, the professional concepts in use were tracked in sequences of intervention discussions. The analysis reveals how “hybrid concepts,” defined as concepts in use in the professional environment and re-used as intervention tools by the researchers, could support joint reflection by the professionals on the current limits of their collaboration. It also reveals how “professional concepts” may serve as resources to mediate client-services’ and service-service relations. Finally, conditions and challenges for designing activity theory-based interventions for promoting client-oriented network collaborations are sketched.

INTRODUCTION
While network collaboration is an increasing trend in work life, there is demand for developmental interventions for networking and boundary crossing purposes. The original interventionist versions based on Developmental Work Research (DWR) (Engeström, 1987) such as the Change Laboratory (Virkkunen & Newnham 2013) were not designed to tackle the complex setting of multiple collaborating activities. Applications have later been developed for networking or boundary crossing purposes between activities (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007; Kerosuo 2006;
The context of this chapter is a short two-workshop intervention carried out in order to promote client-oriented network collaboration between distinct professional functional units in social work. The empirical case comes from the field of Social Services for Divorced Families (SSDF) in Finnish social work services, which are facing pressures to change both in funding and service quality. Improving collaboration between specialized services is envisioned as a way to overcome current limitations. The case study involved three municipal functional units of social affairs, Family Counseling (FC), Family Law Issues (FLI) and Child Protection (CP), consisting of professionals with different backgrounds, goals and functions, but all supporting or dealing with the same clients.

This paper is the result of long-running collaboration between two groups working with and on developmental methodologies at work: the Finnish Developmental Work Research team (DWR) and the French Activity Clinic team. Cross discussions on theoretical and methodological frameworks and on results have been going on for ten years in different settings, including symposia in international conferences and a special issue on Dialogue and Interaction in Developmental Methodologies (Kloetzer & Seppänen, 2014).

The goal of this paper is to push this collaboration one step further by conducting a joint analysis of data collected during a Change Workshop intervention. This paper therefore joins one internal researcher (the first author) who directed and conducted the intervention process in a DWR tradition from beginning to end, and one external researcher (the second author) from the Activity Clinic tradition, also experienced in developmental interventions and the analysis of dialogues in developmental interventions, who followed and commented on this intervention process. The two researchers engaged collaboratively in a detailed analysis of selected data, which will be presented in this paper. The investigation of the intervention data combines DWR with interlocutory analysis, as developed by the French group of the Activity Clinic (Kostulski & Kloetzer, 2014).

In the first part of this chapter, we present the need for increased networking and the case studied, i.e. the municipal organization of social work with divorced families. We then describe the developmental intervention carried out in SSDF. We particularly explain the design and use of one method, using hybrid concepts of ‘worry’ and ‘green areas’. In the second part, entitled Mediations in cross-functional social work, we interpret and analyze in detail one episode of the intervention discussion in which the mentioned ‘method of worries’ was used. The findings show the professional concepts that were uncovered by this developmental method. Although the professional concepts found were efficient mediations between each service and their clients, cross-institutional mediations to support the inter-functional collaboration of professionals were lacking in the episode analyzed. We describe the critical findings concerning the difficulty of professional concepts to mediate cross-functional collaboration, as well as their potential for cross-functional mediation. In the third and last part of the paper, we sketch and discuss ideas and challenges for designing and facilitating developmental, activity theory-based interventions for promoting cross-institutional or cross-functional, client-oriented collaborations. Moreover, we reflect upon the benefits of the joint analysis which used resources of both DWR and interlocutory analysis. Questions for future research will be posed at the end.