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Reflection on building appreciative memory

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The pathways embarked upon in a reflective practice approach presuppose a constant focus on the narratives, processes and shifts that occur along the way. These elements are not always expressed and do not always become objects for systematic reflection. The risk, for both participants and facilitators, is that of losing the sense of the lived experience. The need to avoid losing the memory of these events and to enhance and build upon them led us progressively to an awareness of the need for a new instrument that would help us in this work of archiving and developing stories, processes and shifts that we were experiencing as participants and facilitators within an EU-founded project called Reflect-OR. The dimensions that this instrument has enabled us to explore concerned the development of an appreciative memory, a way of representing experience and creating a space for relationships that remains stable over time. We called this weaving/mapping instrument – which in effect consisted of more than one instrument – \textit{reléchange}.

**Keywords:** storytelling; appreciative memory; meta-narrative; narrative space; creativity; innovation transfer

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‘What could I bring away with me from that story? While at the same time trying not to lose my own stories along the way, because I realised that at the beginning I was struggling to remember all the things that had happened, maybe some of these stories could help us to progress a little, to evolve our work’.

Figure 1. Reflection of participant.
Introduction

In the practice of reflection, various tools are used to encourage the development of individual and group pathways for reflection, both during and/or after the action (Stroobants, Chamber, & Clarke, 2007). These instruments are designed to foster reflection on lived experience or the creation of a new experience and can be based on storytelling and/or writing (traditional and digital/electronic).

Meta-reflection on these pathways is often achieved through a facilitator, who can assume different roles within and out with the organisation in which the pathways are conducted (trainer, in-house teacher, human resources development officer, external consultant, colleague). These few steps have certain implicit features: the organisational context is a given; roles are clear; the system of rules is, as far as possible, set out; the professional qualifications, division of labour and career pathways are clearly defined, as are the goals, method and instruments. So what is going wrong?

Our experience, as described in this paper, is part of a European innovation transfer project. The aim, therefore, is the transfer of an innovation, represented by a certain methodological approach, with a view to encouraging a certain type of process of reflection on professional practice (in this case the methodology is both the means and the end). The organisational context under consideration is the one generated by the project itself: an interorganisational temporary organization (cf., in this special issue, *PAAR-Time. The relationship between temporary and non-temporary organizations in the development of participatory, appreciative action, learning and reflection experiences*), or Two or more non-temporary organizations collaborating to accomplish a joint task with the duration of the collaboration explicitly ex-ante fixed either by a specific date or by the attainment of a predefined task or condition (Keni, Janowicz-Panjaitan, & Cambré, 2009, p. xiv).

While the project’s goal is innovation transfer and the organisational context has the characteristics set out above, we fully realise that the organisational cultures of the non-temporary organisations under consideration tend to be much stronger than any intervention, external or internal, designed to promote innovation. Unless, that is, the intervention is structured more as a process of adoption from outside and less as an individual and organisational learning process (Consoli, 2002).

The need developed in the course of various reflective practice experiences, including the one relevant to the Reflect-OR project, to identify ways through which the verbal and oral narratives produced within reflection pathways could be made consistent, persistent and resistant to the inertia and routines produced by the organisational culture concerned.

The idea was to construct recognisable narrative spaces with their own specific identity within the project pathways and organisations concerned. Within these spaces, the narratives should be able to go on existing and developing. This need, linked to the question of innovation, understood as a learning pathway, means, first and foremost, acknowledging the double power of the innovative method: that of fostering the innovation and stabilisation of that same method:

The narrative mode enables us to make concurrent and multiple reconstructions/representations of the world since its validation criterion is plausibility. Indeed, it is through narration that a situation acquires meaning for oneself and for others because it is by narrating that we construct the categories that give a name and a meaning to the events narrated. In reality, the extraordinary power of narrative knowledge lies in the link which people establish, through narrations, between the exceptional and the ordinary, when
they attempt to establish explanations, justifications and interpretations of common everyday facts. (Czarniawska, 1997, p. ix)

This double movement of the narrative mode – the innovation and stabilisation of practices – does not occur automatically. It is, rather, a process that must be co-managed by a group of participants and the traces of its effects should be sought in narrative empirical evidence. They should be exploited and made legible and intelligible.

As part of the European Reflect-OR project, we attempted to build new methods through which to keep track of this movement, the component parts of which are represented by the movements of individual and group narratives. We called this method reléchange. The idea of using the word reléchange is to indicate the restitution pathway as created in the Reflect-OR workshops. This arose from the need to find the most comprehensive term possible to bring out the different angles of the restitution process.

On the one hand, the word reléchange underscores the idea of change, one of the pillars of the PAAR process. In this sense, reléchange ‘monitors’ change, takes into account the evolution of the individual and of the working group, conveys an understanding of how far we have come, where we started from and how far we can go. And on the other hand, the word draws on the meaning given by Senge (Senge, 1998) to the verb ‘to relate’. Reléchange is, therefore, not as a simple collection of stories told, but is an elaboration that helps us to give a meaning to those stories and to learn from the stories within our own living and working environments, at both the individual and group level.

Reléchange, however, also evokes a French term, relais, which, before the advent of cars, stood for each of the stations where the mail coaches could change their tired horses. The term was later transferred to the telegraphy field, where it stood for the devices that enabled messages in Morse code to be transmitted from one station to the next.

Reléchange was conceived with this spirit in an attempt to encapsulate the reflections, stories and ideas created by and emerging from the group and transferring them to paper without losing the sense of the path travelled, the creativity of that path, and the individual and collective moments encountered upon it. It was an operation, therefore, not merely of recording meetings. There was always an attempt to give something more, to re-transmit to the station of departure all the richness of the original message, enhanced by new impulses, new food for thought, new ways of saying things, so that the restitution would always work as the starting point for the next meeting:

Alongside the role of facilitator the critical importance of the role of the ‘restorer’ emerged, as a positive figure. Normally, at the end of the meetings we produced agendas and to-do lists. But these do not restore what really happened, the added value of space B with respect to space A. This method enables not just continuity but also a development, a narrative; it introduces a specific viewpoint. It is a less charismatic role than that of facilitator, but one that is probably more innovative.

Reflection by a CIOFS project participant (see Figure 1)

In this paper we will take into account this reléchange construction/weaving and the meaning it has acquired at three levels: individual, group and organisational (within each context and project), in light of the meta-reflection characteristics generated.
Reléchange: a kind of storytelling between memory and change

In 2009, the journal *Organization* published a special issue dedicated to the relationship between storytelling and change, entitled *Storytelling and change: An unfolding story* (Brown, Gabriel, & Gherardi, 2009). In the introduction to the issue, the storytellers wrote that from a review of the literature on the topic, storytelling practices appear to be non-linear and to belong to different, fragmented, distributed and collective themes. These are all insights that have contributed to research on, and theories of, change in organizations and processes of organising (Brown & Jones, 1998; Currie & Brown, 2003).

The close connections between storytelling and change research have frequently been observed (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Carr, 1986; Humphreys & Brown, 2002a, 2002b). The editors go on to state that both storytelling and the research on the subject of change have at their core the notion of temporality and are intended to describe, understand and explain complex processes in which different actors act in different contexts, which unfold in conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity:

> Whether stories are interpreted as constituting, mapping, encouraging, managing, upsetting, preventing or inviting change, they are an ever present feature of patterns of becoming, always evocative of actual futures and possible worlds. They are the means by which executives manage and the disaffected resist, they inhabit the boardroom and the unmanaged interstitial spaces in which those effected by power express their fantasies and their disquiet. Stories are, often concomitantly, aids to memory and ways of forgetting, diagnostic tools and distractions, means for social control and expressions of liberation, hegemonic and subversive. In all these ways, and others, stories are key to our conceptions, theories and research on change. (Brown, Gabriel, & Gherardi, 2009, p. 325)

*Reléchange* responds to the need to adopt a different point of view to encourage a different representation of the process and of the individual contributions produced through creative storytelling. A standpoint that is not external to the ‘reality’ of the situation but that is not internal either to the human mind, that is neither merely objective nor merely subjective, merely quantitative or merely qualitative. It springs, therefore, from the attempt to offer a mobile, process-driven point of view. The epistemological assumption is that of considering lived experience in the context of the Reflect-OR project. A project made up of actors, cultures, actions and relationships, as the fruit of continuous interactions between its component elements, in which the tensions between individualisation and differentiation, on the one hand, and adoption and participation on the other, assume forms that are not entirely known or foreseeable.

In complex systems that are configured to provide answers to increasingly complex questions (from the world of guidance and outplacement in times of economic crisis to care services for the elderly to high-reliability systems, and so on), what is produced through social interactions becomes the strategic yet mobile element of organisational systems as well as the force constantly driving those systems to question themselves. From the field of medicine, to IT, to social services, and even to dance, practitioners increasingly find themselves having to address the ‘uniqueness’ and ‘complexity’ of situations for action that involve a continuous rethinking of the processes, instruments and modes of planning, selection and action. In this relationship of uniqueness with respect to the object, which is at the same time critical and strategic, professional knowledge is put to the test by the complexity of practical situations. What place does all this have in organisations?
This uniqueness seems to break into the relationship between practitioner and the object of the professional action whenever we see a growth in demand for quality in all spheres of life, including those of knowledge-production. This increase in demand for quality occurs when the ‘client’, ‘user’, ‘stakeholder’ or ‘citizen’ becomes the object of an overturning of the relationships between practitioners and beneficiaries and becomes part of the process of defining needs, designing the product/service and evaluating its efficacy. The ‘client’ becomes the object of a reflective project through which organisations and practitioners redefine their decision-making processes, practices and identities. This is even stronger in the new professions or non-regulated occupations such as the world of guidance counselling, for which competition and the free market place the client at the centre of their strategic and identity-related decisions more than is the case in the traditional professions and occupations.

This change places the complexity of the objects of the professional action in the foreground and opens up to discussion the relationship between the practitioner, the object of his or her action, and knowledge and the way it is constructed, exchanged, recognised and shaped in specific organisational contexts. But above all it brings into question the professional relationships between actors with expert knowledge and actors with other knowledge, and imposes a need to rethink artefacts, knowledge, processes and activities. Professional experience increasingly becomes synonymous with the capacity to intervene in situations perceived as ‘difficult’, ‘unprecedented’, ‘peculiar’ or ‘innovative’, or to act in situations in which ‘minority relationships’ occur to which lower probability estimates are associated and in which actions are taken in conditions of great uncertainty. Within these processes, action becomes dense with investments (emotional, cognitive, strategic) and is capable of creating its own meanings (Melucci, 1998; Schön, 1983).

Reléchange is based on a different approach to storytelling: one that is designed to build upon a specific type of narrative; a positive narrative that is appreciative and open to change. This construction is based on the narration of a particular type of individual experience. Those perceived by practitioners as positive and successful, albeit unprecedented, episodes that have sprung from singular, difficult situations with the goal of favouring their memory and helping develop the ability to remember not just negative but positive episodes too. We have seen that the construction of an appreciative narrative space requires a specific timescale, the timescale necessary for the development of an appreciative memory and a lexicon open to development and the opening up of stories. Reléchange envisages the creation of a collective weaving/mapping of the stories narrated and reflections developed individually and in groups. This weaving/mapping is able to take into account at one and the same time any peculiarities and specific contextual and recurrent aspects, and is intended to co-construct a collective positive narrative knowledge.

Scientific thought and its reporting methods developed through an attempt to de-subjectify knowledge and objectify the world, producing dualisms such as the separation of subject and reality, observer and observed reality, observing system and system observed and defining as scientific that knowledge produced through specific protocols of study, observation, description, analysis, synthesis and communication. Such protocols confer certain characteristics such as objectivity (i.e. transparency) and free it from the actor or actors producing it and from the specific context in which it is produced. Reflective narrative thought (Cortese, 1999) tries, instead, to overcome these dualisms, and therefore bridge the divide between ‘observer and observed’, ‘subject and object’, ‘quantity and quality’. It lays the foundations for a process-based,
circular knowledge based on systems of continuous retro-action between subjects, contexts and instruments, considering social reality as a reflective construction that occurs through these relationships, including the intervention of the trainer/facilitator.

A central question in the development of reléchange is the identification of pertinent methodologies and techniques with respect to individual organisational contexts and situations.

Reléchange in the Reflect-OR project: experience, discovery and lessons learned

The reléchange narrative within the Reflect-OR project is intended to reflect the spirit of discovery and learning-by-doing that has characterised the progressive inclusion of restitution in the reflection on operators’ practice. We therefore had the idea of structuring this section as if it were an interview, seeking to bring out through few, but significant, questions, the sense and meaning that reléchange has had in our project’s pathway made of several workshops in person. At certain points of the interview we decided to insert participants’ reflections that were important to us in acquiring an awareness of the sense and use of reléchange. The figures we decided to include during the interview provide an example of the method and style of the reléchange. At the end of each of the questions we showed a word-cloud that makes it possible, in our opinion, to establish the key elements of the discourse. The decision to use the interview format arose from an underlying idea that has guided us in constructing this article: the interview is at one and the same time a method for developing a conversation on the meaning of lived experiences and a way to lead people to reflect (van Manen, 1990):

First question: How was the idea of building an instrument different from the usual form of report born?

The idea was born from the need to find a narrative language that would enable us to recount what guidance counselling practitioners were experiencing. We asked ourselves how we could visualise the pathway, track the path we were following, stone after stone – reléchange after reléchange – with its ups and downs, its diversions, it own signposts and landmarks. We realised how important it was to reflect on the stories being told and the elements we were learning during the meetings not only ‘there and then’, at the end of the day, but over time, retracing after each meeting the road we had followed. And so we thought reléchange could provide the opening for each meeting, a time for reflection in which we said: what stage are we at? What did we say to each other last time? What pathway are we following?:

What could I take away with me from that story? While at the same time trying not to lose my own stories along the way, because I realised that at the beginning I was struggling to remember all the things that had happened, maybe some of these stories could help us to progress a little, to evolve our work.

Reflection by a project participant from the Chamber of Commerce system

A first element we feel should be underlined is this need to not lose the component parts of the pathway, to trace out an appreciative and participatory memory of the experience. But what do we mean by appreciative and participatory memory? How is a memory of this type constructed? The value of written memory is acquired with the passing of time. Whenever an episode that is significant to us occurs, it seems impossible
that we will forget those details; lose sight of the reasons that led us to act in that way; not remember the exact order of events. As we gradually accumulate significant events, we increasingly struggle to distinguish the specific elements of each story, the story is turned into a slogan – often a negative one such as ‘don’t trust’ or ‘the only person you can rely on is yourself’. We lose the complexity of the event, its wealth of details. In this respect, *reléchange* helped us to construct an archive of stories and processes, to develop a positive memory of the individual and group pathway that had been laid down and followed.

The *appreciative* nature of this construction lies in the progressive awareness that learning stories does not just mean retaining the memory of your own stories. It also means giving value to the contribution made by others’ experience. The development of an appreciative eye was one of the key elements distinguishing the entire pathway (cf., in this Special Issue, *Co-constructing an appreciative collective eye. Voices from Reflect-OR project experience*). *Reléchange* was most certainly one of the vehicles for this important learning experience (Figure 2). The *participatory* nature of this type of memory emerges transparently from *reléchange*. There is a continuous alternation between individual and collective moments of reflection, between stories that start from the experience of the individual and are transformed through maps or diagrams.
into moments of reflection and learning for the entire group (Figure 3). The possibility of moving harmoniously from the individual to the collective dimension enables the group to develop a wisdom which is located at one and the same time at the individual and collective level and which affects the relationship with each actor’s own professional role, with the organisation, with colleagues and with users.

Alongside this element linked to the development of an appreciative participatory memory, we feel we should underscore that in our pathway, *reléchange* also played an important role as a tool for reflection on the process. At the beginning of each of our Reflect-OR meetings, participants had an opportunity to retrace the road followed thus far, to lay down the common thread (*fil rouge*) of the process, to reconsider the experience narrated by the stories – thus introducing an experience re-framing dimension (see Figure 4). We told the operators several times that restitution was the snapshot of a moment in which a certain type of story had been told, in a certain context, in a certain individual, group and organisational time span. It was therefore necessary to rethink and retrace the experience that emerged from the stories to understand how to follow the pathway and what actions-for-change should be brought into play. We left *empty spaces* in the restitutions in which ideas, reflections and comments could be included. The aim here was to convey the idea that the process did not end the moment the restitution was handed back, but that, rather, it started again at that very

Figure 3. Classification of the group’s stories by four areas of reference. Another way to understand what to reflect on.

Notes: Figure 3 represents a collection of stories of a working group. We have chosen, throughout the whole project, to highlight some significant indicators related to the role and to the profession of guidance workers, such as me and organization, me and colleagues, me and clients. The classification has allowed us to go deeper in each of these chosen themes.
moment, as though the facilitator were once again throwing the ball back into the operator’s court.

In our pathway it was not important whether the time when the experience was rethought was or was not interspersed by ‘in-person’ meetings with the practitioners. Indeed, reléchange was both a support tool for immediate reflection and an instrument to consult, rediscover and rethink over time. In this respect, we were struck by a comment by one of the participants:

I didn’t look at the restitutions from one meeting to the next. However, when we got to the end of the process I felt the need to go back, to retrace our steps through those same restitutions.

Reflection by an ECAP project participant

Second question: Has reléchange been a useful tool only to practitioners or for you as facilitators too?

Reléchange was and is a learning tool for all of us. While on the one hand it enabled participants to follow the common thread of the process, for us as project facilitators it was most definitely a tool for coordination and monitoring. We want to start from two brief narratives:

The role of restitution also had a coordination effect, of weaving and unravelling (Pénélope in reverse²), of focusing on the contribution made by each – including their contribution to the contribution made by each. This put right – in a discreet way – the latency that was felt at one point.

Reflection by a CIOFS project participant

I experienced this very much as a gift that gave me access to the common thread, which enabled me to continue beyond the contractual definition of the project.

Reflection by a CIOFS project participant

One of the critical questions that accompanied this project concerned the difficulty of constructing a participatory appreciative memory during the time span of a European project, i.e. two years (cf., in this special issue, Temporariness in appreciative reflection). How to maintain the idea of a process when the ‘in-person’ training

Figure 4. Key words that emerged underling the key elements from the first question.
moments are chronologically distant? In a reflection pathway of this type, conceived and designed to be a continuum, albeit one that in practice follows the rhythm imposed by specific events and meetings, the facilitators’ role of coordinating the process becomes complicated and often risks proceeding unevenly, with participation peaks in the run-up to the ‘in-person’ meetings and troughs in the intervals between them. Even though these intervals provide a space in which to reflect and to rethink the process, an important factor both for facilitators and for guidance counselling practitioners, they can instead be interpreted as a lack of coordination (as indeed they sometimes are) or lack of interest on the part of facilitators in the dynamics of the participants:

‘The reason why I personally liked the pathway proposal is that it gave me a guarantee almost immediately that we would work under close-counselling arrangements. To some extent, all reflective practices require you to reflect on the experience without presuming to bring in content from outside. As you know, there is nothing more irritating for a trainer than to be given obligatory content in a training project. We also like to work on building the training requirement rather than on the content itself [Figure 5]. It is good to be involved with the projects on which we intend to work. So a structured, clear and fairly strong method as procedure – which, however, is used taking content that emerges entirely from the group as a starting point.

Reflection by an Ecap project participant

In this respect, reléchange is a coordination aid, a sort of invisible coordination tool that is able to maintain the common thread of the process and the stability of the relationship, even during the intervals or when there is a lack of proper coordination – which can happen even in the presence of the facilitators.

The second key question concerned the monitoring and evaluation of a PAAR process. How can I monitor the learning of a PAAR process? How can I evaluate whether or not learning has taken place? There is no lack of monitoring and assessment tools in the training field, but they rarely succeed in encapsulating the idea of process. Very often they are an evaluation, a reflection on a learning experience in a given place and at a given time, too easily influenced by the external environment, by the individual’s emotions and above all too much ‘in the moment’ rather than ‘between the moments’.

As the narratives of this pathway have taught us, the effort to monitor and reconstruct the learning process is not something that facilitators alone – who are responsible for providing the output material of the project or group pathway – take upon themselves. It is also an explicit request by the participants who find themselves, when they reach the end of a pathway, with a need to understand what they have learned and to themselves monitor the change that has taken place. In this respect, reléchange allowed us to focus continuously on the little stones making up our path. It teased out elements of monitoring and evaluation directly from participants’ experience and stories without the need to import external survey tools or define the role of evaluator and evaluated.

Another learning element for us as facilitators was to learn to represent the experience of a project hinging on reflective practices – on something, therefore, that is difficult to represent. We tried to do this first of all through style (Figure 7). The restitutions indeed sought to maintain the spirit and sensations produced during the meeting without adding any other elements, without intervening on the stories in an invasive manner, but merely reshaping the reflections within a clear
Figure 5. Identifying the elements of the stories that the group wants to tell through a selection/deletion process.
Notes: Figure 5 illustrates the process that led the participants to select the elements of the stories they wanted to tell. To choose some significant elements of a story gives an identity to the stories both at the individual and collective level. Through a process of elimination / selection, the participants defined what kind of stories they would tell the group. The process of constructing the panel of significant elements made us reflect on the meaning of a story as individuals, as practitioners and as a group.

Figure 6. The emotional elements that emerged from the stories organised as post-its of key words and areas.
Notes: Figure 6 shows a way of representation of the issues raised by the stories of the group. Through the identification of keywords we have photographed and mapped, as in this case, the emotional elements of the stories. The mapping helped us to define not only the key elements of stories, but also the typical features of guidance workers’ role and profession.
Reflective Practice

methodological framework in such a way as to provide a different perspective of the things said. We were interested in bringing out the materiality of our meetings with practitioners in *reléchange* also, by using images, diagrams, post-its, tag-clouds and so on (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Key words that emerged underlying the key elements from the second question.

Figure 8. Stories of ‘Me in relation to the client’ grouped by macro-area to help identify areas of change.
Notes: Figure 8 explores the episodes related to one of the indicators considered in the path (me and clients). The group, through a process of keywords’ grouping, defined the themes they needed to work on during the project, highlighting areas where it was necessary to develop reflection and a deeper dialogue between guidance practitioners.
Materiality was, in my opinion, one of the specific features of the PAAR approach in this project. This wasn’t just a case of using post-its or black/whiteboards or felt-tip pens. It was the act of re-appropriating the material dimension of reflection. It was the regaining of confidence with the classic aids to reflection – even just pen and paper – and putting them to the service of what we wanted to represent.

Reflection by a Reflect-OR project facilitator

Third question: What role did reléchange play in the facilitator-guidance counsellor relationship?

It undoubtedly played a role in stabilising the relationship of trust between facilitator and practitioner. Knowing that everything that had been agreed by the group during the meetings would not be lost, but would indeed be developed by a document and by a specific explanatory event, helped maintain a positive and appreciative climate in the group. It is sometimes the case in story-based training processes that participants get an impression of ‘donating’ their experience, including their emotional experiences, to the facilitator without actually taking part in a true exchange, as though they were not getting anything in return for their gift.

This message could then be picked up in an even more extreme manner by interpreting the learning as a one-way street going from facilitator to participant, with no return path. But if each of the moments, stories and reflections that are born from the process are restored to participants, the feeling is no longer one of an extortion. It is, rather, one of a shared and agreed and ethical construction of meaning, based on the awareness of being able to relate in a ‘safe’ space designed to foster appreciativeness and a democratic approach (cf. Reflect-OR Fieldbook).

An important moment in this respect occurred during the initial stage of the project, when a context analysis questionnaire was being prepared, created and returned. We reflected on the importance of creating a quantitative analysis tool that did not ‘fall from above’, from the facilitators, but was co-constructed with the guidance counselling practitioners. This was the first reléchange in our project in which we restituted the reflections, ideas and processes that emerged from this co-construction in the form of an agreed, appreciative and truly useful questionnaire. The co-construction of the questionnaire was the first step in the process of stabilising the relationship since it made their central role in the project explicit to the guidance counselling practitioners. In so doing, it laid the foundations for a relationship based on trust, listening and sharing between facilitators and participants:

Some CIOFS practitioners thanked me for the questionnaire because it made them feel they were being consulted on two things they deem to be very important. The first, how important it is to define the figure, the role, to ‘place’ the figure, to give recognition, while remaining free from any talk of professional associations and orders. And the second, to have been questioned on their perception of the work. They greatly appreciated this type of questionnaire. As with the stories, the questionnaire can also develop a methodological pointer indicating how questionnaires should develop: brief, focused, hinging on the key points for this category of practitioners. A shared and agreed process, with the questionnaire developed not by institutions but by people who actually do this job. Simplification, reduction, to succeed in hitting the target.

Reflection by a CIOFS project participant

Another important point, which is linked to the comments already made on coordination, is connected with the difficulty of maintaining a relationship of trust over time. A relationship in which just a few meetings take place in person and which
Reflective Practice unfolds, almost entirely, in the intervals between one meeting and another, through telephone conversations or emails:

One of the aspects I appreciated in the project was the rhythm and pace, always well-spaced. We had about ten meetings, including with the trainers from the Rome team, in a year, and yet this was perhaps the first project I’ve taken part in that managed to keep us, all things considered, fairly active in the inter-session periods. I mean, we kept ourselves busy, the rhythms for ‘re-processing’ were there, the timing was right for reflection. Sometimes we used these intervening periods well, sometimes we could have used them even better. But things really did move forward even in the inter-session periods.

   Reflection by an Ecaps project participant

The participation format in our experience was characterised not just by the difficulty of combining events in person and periods ‘at a distance’, but also by the attempt to stabilise a relationship between a team of facilitators that alternates during the process and participants who could vary from one meeting to the next. Reléchange was also for us a useful tool to stabilise this type of complex relationship by forming a physical bond of trust between participants and facilitators (see Figure 9).

Conclusions

The idea of reléchange came into being in the context of the Reflect-OR project. It was based on a need initially, and above all, perceived by facilitators, to identify creative and participatory modalities to build a meta-narrative over the entire duration of the project, such as might foster a good balance between the need to build a collective memory of the process and the need to encourage innovation transfer. At the end of the project we can say that it was much more than this. As always happens, the participants, contexts and situations gave added dimensions to the initial need we identified and gave rise to a constant reformulation of their and our mutual expectations. They made it possible for reléchange to become a creative, co-constructed activity.

This activity made it possible to co-construct:

- the memory of each meeting and the individual and group reflections developed in it;
• an appreciative memory designed to enhance and build upon positive individual experiences;
• a collective appreciative memory that takes into account the different positions and points of view adopted by participants with respect to these same issues and which at the same time might foster a vision of the group as a whole;
• a collective participatory appreciative memory to foster the inclusion of all participants in the overall vision and value and build upon each individual contribution as a fundamental part of a collective pathway;
• a shared, agreed and distinctive physical narrative space, a space for ‘us’ with its own recognisable style and capable of lending legitimacy and citizenship to the reflections of all participants;
• an incremental narrative space that is capable of welcoming and being enriched by all those new participants/facilitators who might join the pathway from one occasion to the next;
• a bond of trust in which, in addition to reflections, stories and emotions, and the body too, the physical nature of words and space, facial expressions, the representation of doing as it is being done, are brought into play;
• a group, individual and process assessment tool with respect to the project goals, a tool also to coordinate the activities carried out by the facilitators, when these are different; and
• also to ensure the mappability of the pathway to foster the possibility of moving lifelong and life-wide in reflection with respect to the various points of the lifecycle of the experience lived together; in this sense, encourage processes for re-framing and the development of positive-action plans.

Notes
1. The concept of reléchange/reléchanger was coined and used for the first time by Annalisa Casino. A reference to the use of this term can be found in the reflections ‘Chi è e cosa fa il leader as a steward – reléchange- reléchange n° 1: Essere o non essere’ posted by Annalisa Casino on the POILab blog (http://poilab.splinder.com/).
2. The sense of the assertion is the opposite of the traditional figure of Penelope. In the Odyssey Penelope, waiting for the return of her husband Ulysses, she didn’t want to celebrate a new wedding. So every night she undid the cloth weaved during the day. In the same way, reléchange weaves time by time the story (the cloth) of our project’s path.

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References