



Members' experience in a community of practice regarding self-determination of people with intellectual disabilities

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Introduction

Caseworkers face several challenges when it comes to supporting the self-determination of adults with intellectual disabilities (ID) (Wong & Wong, 2008), which is the dimension of the quality of life the least developed for them (Chou & al., 2007). Therefore, the use of a community of practice (CoP) is an avenue to consider for improving professional practices by fostering the transfer of knowledge and having a positive impact on the self-determination of adults with ID.

Theoretical Framework

Community of practice

CoPs are groups of people who come together to share and learn from each other (CEFRIQ, 2005). Three dimensions are essential for CoPs: mutual engagement (the exchanges that link people together), joint enterprise (important goals and objectives for members) and shared repertoire (terms and concepts making sense or created by the members of the CoP) (Wenger, 1998). The CoP evolution model, developed by Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) and Langelier & al. (2005), has five stages: potential, unification, maturity, momentum and transformation. The length of the different stages varies between CoPs, but it takes on average several months to reach the stage of maturity (Langelier & al., 2005).

Dynamics of mutual aid

Moyse Steinberg (2008) and Shulman (2011) describe nine processes that support mutual aid and group engagement: sharing data, «all in the same boat» phenomenon, strength in numbers, mutual demands, the dialectic process, individual problem solving, discussing a taboo area, rehearsal and mutual support.

Objectives

Although the scientific literature supports these three pillars forming the CoP, these have rarely been the main subject of major research. Furthermore, few studies have focused on understanding processes for mutual engagement, the cornerstone of CoPs.

Main objective

Explore the caseworkers' perceptions of their mutual engagement in a CoP regarding self-determination of people with ID.

Specific objectives

- 1) Explore participants' perceptions of the dynamics of aid that they anticipate in the first year
- 2) Describe the mutual aid dynamics implemented in the first year of the CoP's existence.

Methodology

This case study includes a one hour semi-structured interview prior to the first CoP's meeting and one at the end of the first year, conducted among volunteer members of a CoP regarding self-determination of people with ID. Systematic observations were also made during all the meetings to document the phenomenon experienced by the members of the CoP. The OOSAG (Jeniss & al., 2017) was used to record relevant information about the group's evolution. The verbatim of the interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis (Paillé & Mucchielli, 2016) with the QSR Nvivo software.

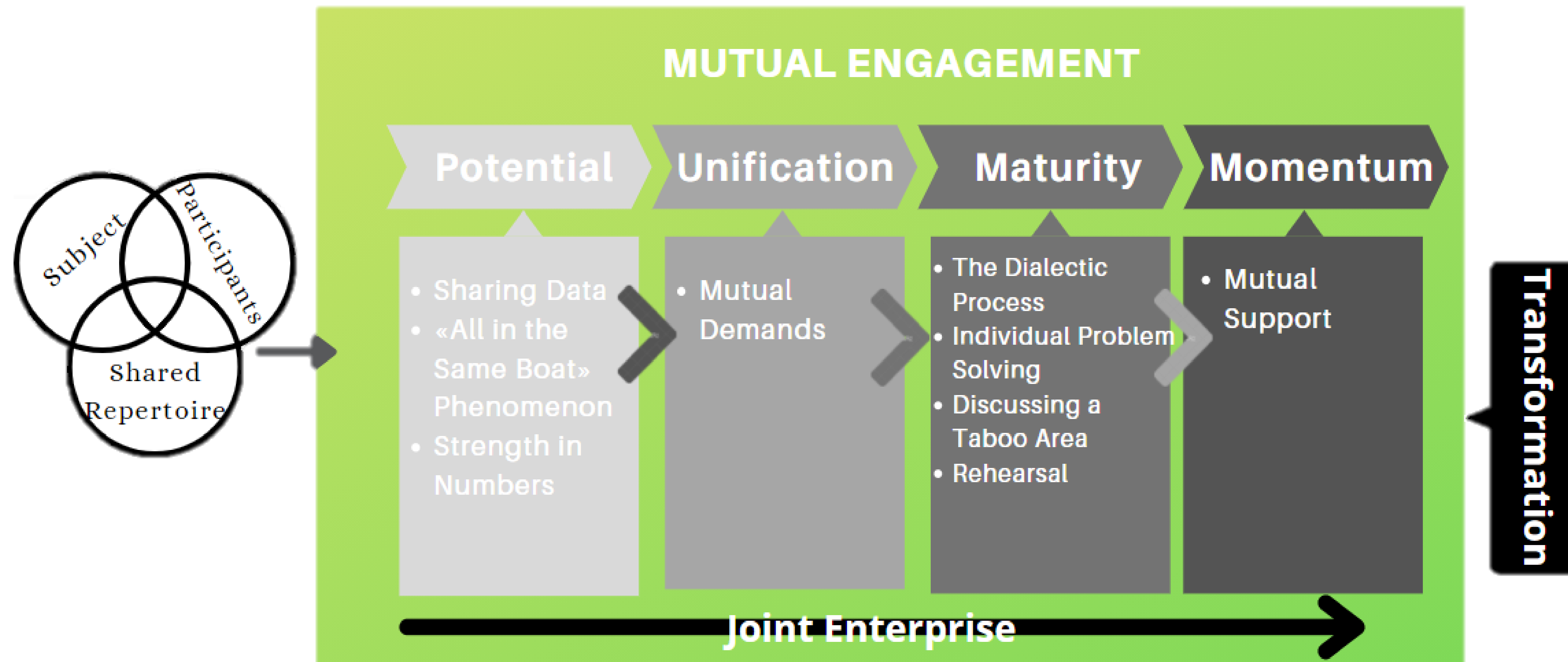
Results and Discussion

Objective 1

The analysis of the verbatim from the interviews done before the first year of the CoP highlights the dynamics of mutual aid anticipated by the members, thus meeting the first objective of this research. Here they are in descending order, going from the dynamic most reported by participants to the least reported: sharing data, "all in the same boat" phenomenon, the dialectic process, strength in numbers, individual problem solving, mutual demands, discussing a taboo area, rehearsal and mutual support. Various elements related to the context and the methodology help explain the differences observed between the dynamics of mutual aid anticipated and those actually experienced by the members such as: the self-determined functioning of a CoP, which makes it less predictable; and the stages of development of the CoP which have evolved more slowly than expected by the members.

Objective 2

The thematic analysis of the verbatim obtained during the interviews done after the first year of the CoP made it possible to develop a modelization explaining the dynamics of mutual aid to be fostered in order to develop members' mutual engagement, depending on the stage of development of the CoP.



From the outset, the COP participants all showed a great interest in the subject - self-determination of people with ID. The subject is sufficiently unifying and broad to solicitate the participation of members in the CoP, as argued by Langelier & al. (2005). On the other hand, the subject must be specific enough to bring together people sharing a repertoire of precise practices (Wenger, 2005). In this study, the chosen subject made it possible to bring together people working in intervention, from near and far, with a population with ID or ASD. In addition, CoP participants reported characteristics common to members: openness, proactivity, listening, respect, interest in the topic and curiosity. It is therefore through the interaction between the components of the subject, the participants and the shared repertoire that the CoP can be put in place.

During the potential stage, the workshop leader should circulate the information among the members. They have to feel that they have common interests, challenges and goals, that they are in the same boat. They also need to see the opportunity to benefit from the expertise of others. At the unification stage, by establishing this climate of trust, members will be more comfortable making demands to the group and defining a work objective, becoming a joint enterprise. Once the objective has been negotiated and the members are working to achieve it, at the maturity stage, these conditions can promote mutual engagement between the members: having a space to discuss taboo subjects, to confront ideas, to solve problems and to complete tasks that they would not have done on their own. And finally, offering emotional support when the pressure on the CoP evolves and members question themselves, is also an avenue to consider for fostering engagement.

Conclusion

The data generated by this study therefore allows a better understanding of the functioning of the CoPs, in particular at the level of their animation, their implementation, their updating and their optimization in the health and social services network. In addition, motivation also seems to be a concept closely linked with the engagement, an avenue to be considered for a future study. Ultimately, this professional development modality animated in such a way as to generate mutual engagement among the members of the CoP, could improve the support practices for the people with ID, thus promoting their self-determination.

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