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Effective reflection

developing a reflection tool

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Effective Reflection

Developing a reflection tool



Introduction

This is the ‘Developing a reflection tool’ manual. The manual provides points of reference for the development of a reflection tool for interventions and more general approaches in children’s services. A team can use the manual to get to work itself on creating a tool to give each other feedback on the quality of the implementation of the intervention or approach. This is important, as we know that the quality of the care provided is directly related to the outcomes for clients and that learning from one another contributes to that quality.

This manual is one of the products of the project ‘Effective Reflection: reference for quality control in youth care’ (*Effectieve Reflectie: handvat voor kwaliteitsbewaking in de zorg voor jeugd*), which is a collaborative effort of the research group Implementation and Effectiveness in Youth Care Services (*Kwaliteit en Effectiviteit in de Zorg voor Jeugd*), Altra Education & Youth Care (*Altra Onderwijs & Jeugdhulp*), Child protection services Amsterdam (*Jeugdbescherming Amsterdam*) and Spirit Youth Care & Parenting Support (*Spirit Jeugd & Opvoedhulp*). This manual goes with two others, including ‘Selecting, training and supporting supervisors’¹ and ‘Supervision with video recordings and role-play’². These manuals can be found at www.hva.nl/youthcareservices. The project has been financially supported by Netherlands Organisation for Health Research and Development (ZonMw) under grant number 729102005 (2015).

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1. Introduction

The aim of developing a reflection tool

The quality of the application of interventions in children's services and child protection is associated with the outcomes of these interventions. One way of improving the application of these interventions is by introducing a process of reflection on the implementation of the intervention as part of the support provided to professionals.³ In order to facilitate this reflection, a tool should be available with which the implementation can be mapped, so that feedback can then be given on it. The aim of developing a reflection tool is to provide a reference point for use in improving the quality and with it the effectiveness of the care provided.

Note to readers

This manual focuses on the development of a reflection tool for use in practice. The steps needed for this are covered in the manual. The process starts by determining the key elements (Chapter 2), making the key elements operational (Chapter 3), and designing a usable reflection tool (Chapter 4). An example of how the step was implemented in the project, 'Effective Reflection: reference for quality control in youth care' (*Effectieve Reflectie: handvat voor kwaliteitsbewaking in de zorg voor jeugd*), is given at the end of each chapter. The knowledge on which this manual is based is described in the last chapter (Chapter 5).

2. Determine the key elements of the intervention

What are key elements?

Key elements are the essential components of an intervention. The aim of the intervention is achieved by implementing these key elements. In other words, these elements ensure that the intervention produces results. For interventions whose effects have not yet been studied, these are the elements that are expected to contribute to the efficacy of the intervention on theoretical grounds. For interventions whose effects have been studied, these are the elements shown to actually contribute to the efficacy of the interventions.

Identifying key elements

The key elements of interventions are generally included in a manual or description of the intervention and the efficacy/application is supported in the accompanying theoretical substantiation. In addition, in recent years, many systematic literature reviews have been conducted on key elements of interventions that respond to similar issues (such as externalising behavioural problems) or are focused on the same target group (such as parents with parenting questions). These literature reviews⁴ provide great insight into the key elements when the aim is to achieve a particular goal in a specific target group. We know that parenting skills training programmes must contain three elements to change the parenting behaviour of parents. These elements are: learning to use positive interactions with the child (complimenting, being enthusiastic, following the child's interests, giving positive attention), learning to apply emotional communication (active listening, helping children to describe and express their emotions) and learning through practice, also and especially with one's own child.

There are three steps that can be followed in order to identify the key elements of an intervention. These steps are also described in part in the Toolkit for VideoFeedback⁵ in youth care.

Step 1

Collect all the available material from the intervention (trainers' manuals, workbooks, theoretical substantiation, video recordings, etc.). Also look at the systematic literature reviews (if available) concerning key elements related to the specific goal and the specific target group on which the intervention is focussed.

Step 2

Talk to the professionals who carry out the intervention, the developers and other responsible parties about the essence of the intervention being carried out. Use the written material about the intervention for this.

Answer the following questions:

- What is the goal of the intervention?
- What will you use to achieve that goal?
- Which behaviours, principles, procedures and techniques are essential in this?
- Which competences must professionals have in order to properly implement the intervention?

The key elements of the intervention surface in the process of answering the questions above. It can be useful to make a breakdown according to the categories of the key elements. You can often break down the implementation of an intervention according to the following categories:

- Use of the specific components of the intervention,
- Structure of the meetings with the client or clients,
- Didactic skills (what will you use?),
- Supervising the process including with groups (process skills).

As well as making a breakdown into categories, for certain interventions it can also be practicable to work out the key elements for each phase. After all, many interventions distinguish between different phases which a professional goes through with the client (such as introduction, application and conclusion). Different key elements can be used in different phases. If these elements clearly differ from each other in different phases, a grouping by phase provides clarity.

When identifying the key elements, it is important to carefully consider the specific characteristics of the intervention for which you are making a reflection tool. How does this intervention differ from other interventions, and is this also evident from the collection of key elements?

Step 3

Make a document on the essence of the intervention which became apparent in Step 2. Present this document to others familiar with the intervention. Ask those people as well as those involved in Step 2 the question:

- Is the document complete? Does it include all of the essential elements for the implementation of the intervention? Does it include elements that are not essential and should be removed from the summary?

A systematic and thorough approach applied to identify key elements is to use the basic principles of a Delphi method. This involves the key elements (and sometimes their operationalisation in behaviour indicators) being presented in writing to a broad group of involved people, who respond in various rounds in order to agree on a final identification of the key elements.⁶

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The Altra and Spirit tools focus on a component of the method (the coaching session), with the key elements divided into the following categories:

- 1) Building a relationship / creating a safe learning environment (alliance)
- 2) Using techniques / didactics
- 3) Targeted approach / structure

The Child protection services Amsterdam tool focuses on the family (systemic) session and the key elements that occur in it. In addition, Child protection services Amsterdam has a tool that can be used to provide insight into the overall implementation of the method.

2. Operationalise the key elements

The reflection tool is intended to look specifically at the implementation of the intervention, live or by means of video recordings. Therefore, it is important that the key elements are elaborated as specifically observable behaviour. In other words, how can you *see* that a professional is properly applying a key element? In order to make the operationalisation as complete as possible, you should describe the following for each key element:

- The definition
- A brief description of the key element
- All behavioural indicators (specifically observable behaviour) associated with the key element
(i.e. which techniques, behaviours should you ‘see’ in a care provider when he/she implements the element?)
- Examples of the behavioural indicators.

When operationalising the key elements, it is important to consider the difference between treatment adherence and treatment competence. Treatment adherence concerns whether the key elements are fully, partly or not used. Treatment competence concerns how ‘well/competently’ the key elements are used. Both are important to be able to reflect on the quality of the implementation of the intervention. You should therefore determine how you see that a professional is using a key element, and how you see whether a professional is using the key element properly. Giving examples can provide direction in this respect.

Just as in the case of identifying the key elements, a Delphi method can be used to operationalise the key elements in a thorough and systematic manner.

The definition, description and examples should be included in a manual for the reflection tool, so that everyone who uses the tool can use it as a reference.

Another way of operationalising key elements

Key elements of an intervention can also be selected in another way than that described above. If there are video recordings of the application of the intervention by the professionals, these

recordings can also be used as a starting point. By carefully observing the videos, it can be deduced what the professionals do specifically to use the key elements. This form of elaboration can also be done by observing professionals who apply the intervention.

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The principles of the Delphi method were used in all three cases in the Effective Reflection project. For Altra, the key elements were developed into behavioural indicators in various sessions with the teams. The question asked repeatedly was: how do you see this? For Spirit, an initial proposal for operationalisation was made on the basis of relevant literature, and this was presented to a number of professionals in the field regarding clarity. A supervisor then provided feedback on the unambiguity of the statements and the categorisation into substantive components. For Child protection services Amsterdam, the key elements of Intensive Systems-oriented Case Management and their operationalisation were determined by research based on the Delphi method⁶, with trainers, developers, managers and professionals being consulted.

3. Incorporate the key elements into a usable reflection tool

After identifying and operationalising the key elements of the intervention, it is important to arrange them in a document in an orderly way. After all, a reflection tool is intended for use in practice, and must therefore be easy to apply in practice. A number of steps that can help shape the tool are detailed below.

Determining the scale

Either a dichotomous (yes/no) scale or a Likert scale (increasing) can be chosen for the scale of a reflection tool. A dichotomous scale differentiates less well between the different observations. This kind of scale can only show whether someone has or has not applied a key element properly, but for multiple supervision sessions it is not sensitive enough to demonstrate improvement or form the basis for discussion on this. This is why the Likert scale is recommended to gain insight into changes in the application of the key elements over a certain period.

Determining the level of detail

As stated above, the key elements can be divided into categories (see Chapter 1) and various behavioural indicators can be defined for each key element (Chapter 2). Instead of looking at whether all behavioural indicators are being implemented properly, it is better to look at whether a professional is doing enough to achieve the goal of a particular category or a particular key element. Discussing with other professionals which behavioural indicators, for example, are being used without the ultimate goal of the key element being achieved, can provide insight into where improvements could be made. It is very important to clearly describe in the manual what the golden rules are for each category, i.e. how to finally determine whether the implementation of the entire category or the key element is satisfactory.

A category that may not have been raised when identifying and elaborating the key elements is the 'overall quality' category. This kind of a category can have great added value for reflection and learning. It concerns reflecting on how the professional did in general during the recorded session. Possible questions are: how did the client come in and how did he/she leave? Was

anything achieved in general during the session? This kind of category can be included at the very end of the reflection tool.

General information

A short and clear introduction to the reflection tool is essential to ensure proper use. It must be clear to professionals what the aim of the tool is, how they can use it and where they can find more information. The inclusion of answer boxes for certain subjects helps to produce a quick overview to show by whom and for which clip the reflection tool was used. Components may include: name of professional, name of client, purpose of session, name of supervisor, completion date and details of the associated video recording.

User friendliness

Finally, it is good to test the user friendliness of the developed reflection tool. This can be done by having a number of people who were involved in the development of the tool fill it in on the basis of a video recording. This will quickly show where possible improvements can be made and which information is needed prior to the use of the tool. It also provides information on the distinctive capacity of the categories or key elements and whether their size is manageable.

4. Train the users of the reflection tool

The introduction included in the reflection tool gives the supervisor and the professional an initial impression of how the tool is used. However, in order to use the reflection tool in practice in a proper and careful manner, the supervisor must be trained in the use of the tool. The supervisor will lead the process in which the professionals discuss video recordings with each other using the tool as the basis. The ‘Selecting, training and supporting supervisors’ manual¹ describes what this training might look like.

The reflection tool can also be used by organisations for annual or more frequent evaluations of the implementation of the intervention or approach in practice. The use of the tool for this purpose ensures that actual scores are assigned for each category or key element.^a In order to do so reliably, the following steps are recommended.

Know the content of the intervention

A precondition is that the person who will be using the tool to evaluate the implementation is trained in the intervention or has in-depth knowledge of the intervention. After all, the ability to recognise the key elements in video recordings, form an opinion or enter into discussion on the use of the key elements requires an understanding of these elements.

Read the manual for the tool carefully

As mentioned in Chapter 2, it is important to include the definition, description and examples of the key elements in a manual. This manual serves as a reference for the supervisor and professionals but also as a primary source of information in training users of the tool.

Practise

In order to master filling in the reflection tool, it is important to practise with each other. One way of practising is described below:

^a During supervision, scores are not necessarily assigned to the implementation of the categories and key elements. The primary focus of the supervision is the discussion of the implementation. See the ‘Supervision with video recordings and role-play’ manual² for more information on the use of the tool for supervision purposes.

1. Have several people view a video recording independently of each other and score it with the reflection tool.
2. Then watch the clip together.
3. Explain how the scores were assigned and discuss this with each other.

It is good to do refresher training together every now and then in order to continue to use the tool properly. By incorporating such training sessions in a structural manner, new users can join in to practise. Someone can be appointed to ensure that everyone is using the reflection tool properly and to organise an evaluation annually or every two years to keep the content of the tool up to date.

5. Sources

The content of this manual is based partly on knowledge gained in the ‘Who helps the care provider?’ (*Wie helpt de hulpverlener?*) project. The ‘*Wie helpt de hulpverlener?*’ project was a collaborative project between the research group Implementation and Effectiveness in Youth Care Services of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences and Altra Education & Youth Care (*Altra Onderwijs & Jeugdhulp*), and Spirit Youth Care & Parenting Support (*Spirit Jeugd & Opvoedhulp*). The project resulted in a practical guide⁷ and a toolkit⁵ part of the content of which has been incorporated in this manual. Knowledge acquired during the doctoral research of Pauline Goense⁸ and information obtained from interviews with experts of the Parent Management Training Oregon (PMTO) intervention from PiResearch (Amsterdam) were also used.

The sources used are listed below, following the numbering in the text.

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Colophon

This manual is the English version of a Dutch manual, developed by the research group Implementation and Effectiveness in Youth Care Services in collaboration with Altra Education & Youth Care (*Altra Onderwijs & Jeugdhulp*), Child protection services Amsterdam (*Jeugdbescherming Regio Amsterdam*) and Spirit Youth Care & Parenting Support (*Spirit Jeugd & Opvoedhulp*). This manual is part of the project ‘Effective Reflection: reference for quality control in youth care’ and could not have been developed without the contributions of all parties involved in the project. I would like to express particular gratitude for their efforts and contributions.

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