FROM AWARENESS TO AUTHORSHIP: USING THE INTERVIEW TO THE DOUBLE AND OTHER ETHNONARRATIVE METHODS TO FOSTER TRANSFORMATIVE ACTION

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Abstract:
The paper examines how some of the inquiry methods developed by the practice-based approach to the study of knowing and learning in organizations can also be used to trigger transformation and change. Building on the results of a participative intervention in the Italian healthcare sector, we argue in particular that practice based methods allow professional and practitioners to become aware of their practices and regain the authorship of their professional conduct. The process of individual and collective exploration thus becomes a form of emancipatory reflection capable of fostering transformative action.

Keywords: practices, auto-ethnography, ethnonarrative, writing

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several authors have advanced the idea that organizational reflection should be interpreted as a public and social activity aimed at opening new opportunities for action (Schon, 1983; Reynold and Vince, 2004; Boud, Cressey and Docherty, 2006; Raelin, 2007). According to this view, individualized, inward looking reflection is incapable by itself of exposing and affecting the institutionalized assumptions and logic that regulates organizational action. Private introspective reflections thus risks to be a sterile effort, given that individuals alone are seldom in positions to make substantial organizational changes (Nicolini et al, 2003). While the starting point of reflection is likely to be some form of internal dialogue, this has to become at some point also an external conversation. As Reynolds and Vince suggest, “reflection continues on into the engagement as one becomes absorbed in practice. The internal dialogue can be enhanced and bounded by external dialogue that induces and then refines it” (Reynolds and Vince, 2004, p. XI). Reflection should therefore be interpreted pragmatically as conversation with an existing practice in condition of social interaction. Surfacing and representing practice through discourse but also writing, video analysis and other innovative techniques becomes thus a way of generating surprise, dissonance, and contradictions which in turn create an opening where new possibilities for action can emerge (Nicolini and Eikeland, 2010).
It is this type of approach that we intend to pursue and enrich here. Building on the results of an action-research intervention in a health district in Northern Italy, our aim is to examine how some of the inquiry methods developed by the practice-based approach to the study of knowing and learning in organizations (Nicolini et al. 2003; Nicolini,

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2010) can also be used to trigger transformation and change. We argue in particular that practice based methods allow professional and practitioners to become aware of their practices and regain the authorship of their professional conduct. This in turns requires to alternate cycles of thoughts and representations around the current work practices (*becoming aware of their own practices and meanings at work*) with cycles of action and changes (*becoming "authors" of their own workplaces*). Central to our approach is the idea that narrative and ethnographic tools, understood both as practices of analysis and writing, are critical to sustain the joint inquiry of researchers and organizational actors (Barus-Michel et al. 2002; Waddington, 2004; Fetterman, 1989). The process of individual and collective exploration through writing, mapping, and the collective conversation with the results of such representational practices thus becomes a form of emancipatory reflection capable of fostering transformative action.

The paper is articulated as follows. We start by briefly reviewing the existing work on the use of ethnographic and auto ethnographic methods as ways to foster reflection and development. We argue that because of their nature these methods are particularly apt at preventing reflection to become mere introspection. We then outline how these tools were used as part of an action-research intervention conducted in 2008. In the paper we briefly outline how the methods were employed and the rationale for doing so. We then discuss both their strengths and limitations, arguing that they should be seen not as standalone tools but as part of a coherent practice of working through practices. We conclude that when coherently used as part of a coherent design, the approach and tools utilized allow for the richness of the tacit and situated knowledge to surface and to become a resource for organizational reflexivity and change.

2. REFLEXIVITY AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT

The idea that making practices visible constitutes an effective way to trigger reflection is not new and has been around for several decades. Schön's notion of the reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983) was particularly instrumental in promoting this view. According to the author, all practitioners are able to reflect on their ongoing experience and learn from it *through what he calls reflection-in-action* (Schön, 1983). Reflective practitioners are thus actors who learn how to examine their professional experiences, perceptions and roles through a careful reading of the ways they represent their practice to themselves and to others (Watson and Wilcox (2000), p. 57-58).

Schön's ideas spearheaded the notion that reflective practices should not be conceived as a form of introspection and/or as a personally private process/activity. Rather, reflection should be considered as a process that needs "to include others in the examination of experience in our lives" (Reynolds and Vince, 2004, p. XI). As Watson and Wilcox (2000, p. 64) put it, "in studying our own practice and in our professional development capacity, we find it useful to gather colleagues together and to ask one another: What do you do? Why do you do it? What happens when you do it?" For those practitioners who have had plenty of work experience but fewer opportunities to reflect on that experience "having to answer such questions is a challenge to think more deeply about their experiences". Collecting and reading our conventions of practice offers thus "a methodology for self-reflection that can foster this level of understanding."(ibid.) This in turn requires experiencing a "rich pause" where it is possible to develop awareness about the routines, practices, and meanings of what we do in our daily work. In sum, the "visibilisation of practice" allows the mirroring between practitioners, thus enabling a conversation around the way we do things and respond to the demands of the task at hand.

The focus on practice and its visibilisation becomes especially important in view of the emerging notion that who practitioners are and what they do is, in effect, the result of the nexus of practice they are involved in. To the extent that for understanding ourselves we must pay attention to the practices that shape our lives, conversation with our practices becomes especially important as their very ordinariness has the power to shape us in ways we do not always attend to (Watson and Wilcox, 2000, p. 63). The nature of practice, however, poses a further challenge to the effort of producing reflection for developmental purposes. Practice needs in fact to be brought to the fore, made visible, articulated, and turned into an epistemic object in order to enter discourse. Articulating practice therefore requires work and activity. Triggering a conversation with one's practice cannot hence be conceived only as cognitive effort or even as a mere communicative activity. Reflection should rather be conceived as a practical endeavor obtained with and through others. Reflection is thus always a form of *practical reflexivity* obtained a) through reflecting upon representations of our practice in view of giving order and meanings to new situations and expand the horizon of our possible ways of being (Bruner, 1990); and b) through a dialogical and relational activity -where the aim is to unsettle conventional practice (Cunliffe, 2002; Shotter and Cunliffe, 2002; Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004). Triggering reflection requires hence the development of practical tools sensitive to all these dimensions.

3. AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY AS A TRIGGER FOR REFLECTION

Bruner (1990) argues that creating stories is a human and natural response for making sense and comprehending the events in our lives. Building narratives offers thus both a process and a format to capture the understandings of people's worlds and practices, as stories constitute "the primary form by which human experience is made meaningful" (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 1). Narratives in fact connect what appear to be independent and disconnected elements of experience into a whole (Polkinghorne, 1988; Watson and Wilcox, 2000, p.60). By the same token, however, narratives also offer a way to deconstruct the dominant ways of making sense (and organizing) by offering alternative views. In this sense, story-making is at the same time a potential tool for sense-making and sense (re)making, a practical method that can be used to foster an attitude of practical reflexivity.

The narrative tradition offers two main ways to achieve this. Practices can in fact be revisited either through the *eyes of others* or *one's own eyes*. The first is the case of ethnography and other observational methods. Ethnographic methods are particularly attuned to capture practice and its context through thick description (Geertz, 1973). Such descriptions can then be fed back to the practitioners to trigger self discovery and self analysis.

The second ways requires instead that practitioners revisit their practices through *their own eyes* using narratives that they produce –that is to say, using auto-ethnography. Practitioners becomes in this sense narrators of their own practice. As Hansen argues, "narratives provide meaning by describing and creating the relationship between ideas which we act on. A narrative plot connects a series of actions and provides the rationale and expectations regarding those actions. Narrative theory stresses the role language plays in these processes, focusing on how people use discourse to build understandings and representations, make sense of their work lives, and to organize, interpret and influence each others' actions." (Hansen, 2006 p. 1049-1050)

In this paper we are interested in particular in ethnonarrative auto ethnography through writing. Writing constitutes in fact a still largely untapped resource for triggering public

reflecting, given that most of its applications aim at self inquiry and self investigation (Boud, 2001).
From an ethnonarrative stance, however, both text and context are built according to the personal and organizational cultures. The reflective attitude should then look both at the individual perspective as well as at the local context of construction and meaning making. Ethnographic methods should thus be used thus both to capture the object of reflection (the practices) and to examine how context generates meaning. The ethnonarrative approach is characterised by taking into account "the immediate situation [of] in situ work of construction where implicit assumptions guide both the production and interpretation of action, driving discourse to take particular forms." (Hansen, 2006, p. 1063).
In our context, this implies that the kind of writing employed will constitute the kinds of reflection enacted. Reflection operates through writing but also *as* writing. "Flat, literal, instrumental and technical-rational writing will produce similar styles of reflection and reflective subjectivities" (Bleakley, 2000, p. 12). An adequate style of writing needs to be found that stimulates cognitive, intuitive, affective dimensions that can provide a deep understanding and self-insight linked to the work (Bolton, 1999).
Journal writing, for example, can be viewed as a form of self-expression, a record of events, or as a way of learning. In fact, it is a form of reflective practice, that is, "a device for working with events and experiences in order to extract meaning from them" (Boud, 2001, p. 9).
Writing for reflection means taking the unprocessed, raw material of experience and shaping it as a way to make sense of what has occurred. It involves exploring often messy and dense events and situations, focusing on the different elements that constituted them.

3.1 Beyond introspection

One of the reasons for paying particular care in selecting the style of writing used to foster an ethnonarrative stance towards reflection is that the investigation of our own practices can easily relapse into personal introspection. We see introspection as profoundly different from public reflection. Introspection responds in fact to an expressive logic and a view of the individual as a vessel where by deep interior states are awaiting to be exposed (Silverman, 2007) the idea is that "what happens between our ears is a purely a private matter" (Silverman, 2007, p.44), rather than a social construction and regulation of own experience. The attempt to generate a reflexive attitude is thus always exposed to the risk of becoming an endeavor of "inward looking-at-our-owns-belly-button", which is not particularly useful when change and learning are needed.
The risk of turning reflection into introspection can also be explained using some well know concepts from the psychodynamic tradition. The reflexive/reflecting exercise allows to become aware of important emotional aspects of being at work. In psychological terms we can define this as the wish-fulfillment and satisfaction of drives and instincts. If this is not structured or directed to a project or to a planned activity, the risk is to lose the meaning and the direction of the reflection itself. Freud theorized this in terms of the sublimation, a process whereby energy is structured instead of lost. The aim of reflection is not (only) giving people the chance to vent their emotions, because people would be soon again at the initial point of need. Rather, the effort is to look for data and details of the daily experience in order to transform the future. This makes it possible the passage from an "expressive state" to an action plan.
In sum, the challenge is to find practical ways to canalize the energy unleashed by reflection into action (Reynold and Vince, 2004; Mezirow, 1991; Pedler, 1991). We argue that this requires making learning and reflection collective rather than primarily

individual processes (Burgoyne and Reynolds, 1997; Reynolds, 1998) and identifying methods to pursue the objective of emancipation and the object of transforming the social world (Kemmis, 1985; Vince, 2002). In the following paragraphs we discuss a particular set of methods that allows the transition from awareness to authorship in the reconfiguration of practices in professional contexts.

3.2 Doing auto-ethnography through the interview to the double

A very powerful- reflective tool that allows to operationalised auto ethnography without falling into introspection is constituted by the "interview to the double" (Nicolini, 2009). The "interview to the double" is a projective technique that requires interviewees to imagine that they have a double which will have to replace them at their job the next day. The informant is then asked to provide the necessary detailed instructions which will insure that the ploy is not unveiled and the double is not unmasked. The "interview to the double" generates a series of instruction that provides valuable insight into the daily material practices carried out in the workplace and the moral and normative dimension of practice sustained in interaction by the local community of practitioners (Nicolini, 2009). The instruction can however also be used to "re-present" the practice. Giving instructions is a common everyday activity and giving instructions and advice constitutes a conversational activity ordinarily conducted in a variety of settings. In this sense, the instructions generated by the interview constitute a persuasive way of writing practice. It is this second strength of the methodology that we put to use in our cases study. Instead of conducting face to face interviews, the participants were asked *to write* their own instructions away from the training setting.

The participants in our project were thus asked to follow the following prompt: *"Imagine you will be replaced by a double that will do your job tomorrow. Please instruct him/her (what to do, ways of doing things, suggestions, attentions, recommendation…) for he/she will go to your workplace tomorrow morning. You will do that in order to a) make him/her comprehensible what he/she has to do from the beginning to the end of the day; b) nobody should discover that this person is not you."* The socialisation and dialogical phase would happen later when they would return to the group and make their instructions available for others to discuss and appreciate.

This method of investigation presents the advantages typical of other writing tools: it deepens the quality of learning, in the form of critical thinking and developing a questioning attitude; it enables learners to understand their own learning process; it increases active involvement in learning and personal ownership of learning; it enhances professional practice or the professional self in practice; it enhances the personal valuing of the self towards self-empowerment; it fosters reflective and creative interaction in a group (Moon, 1999, pp. 188-194).

Differently from journal writing, however, where the aim is to record, process and re-form experiences (Boud, 2001, p. 11), in the "instructions to the double" the writing exercise represents an effort to capture events, including the apparently insignificant details of the practice, its richness and detailed expression. The first data gathering (the details) is thus conducted without intentionally introducing interpretive filters. Only afterwards, by reading and analyzing the practice details, an intentional interpretation effort is explicitly introduced in the activity. Unlike other approaches (see, for example Clot, 2001) writing is thematized as learning exercise only when it is socialized in a collective forum through social reading and discussions. Interpretation, discussion, free associations of thoughts, in the way we conduct this method, happen thus at a group level. By sharing the reading activity with others in a group, it is possible to relate new information to that which is already known; to understand what emerges accordingly with cultural aspects; to seek relationships between new and old ideas, and between perspectives from different positions, etc. While these reflective processes, when undertaken in isolation from others, risk leading to a reinforcement of existing views and perceptions (Boud, 2001, p.14), when conducted in a collective forum become powerful tools for producing insight and novel perspectives. By sharing written instructions (which often describe the same activity) and reading it together, trusted colleagues assist each other in finding new meanings and raising questions for all to ponder about. The process of sharing written instructions allows both the author (the instructors) and the readers (who act temporary as doubles) to gain insights into their own practice.

The shift here is between a "zooming in" and "zooming out", comparing the "there and then" of the writing with the "here and now" of the reading (Pope, 1995, p. 184; Nicolini, 2009), through a process of co-construction of meaning that produces powerful insights in both. This in turn can become the trigger for further transformative action. Description, diagnosis and transformative movements are thus all encapsulated in a single practical endeavour.

4. THE CASE

In 2008 a health district in Northern Italy asked for an action-research intervention directed to a hundred of middle managers involved in the management of different services, some of them that were in the middle of change and reorganization, some others that were stable but in need of training and development. The request came to the Catholic University of Milan (where two of authors of this paper come from), and expressed the wish to provide the managers with an opportunity to be supported as well as the wish to help the HR department to adopt best practice in training and knowledge development activities. The stated object of the intervention was to develop the ability to detect, elaborate and evaluate the practical knowledge already of the professional groups involved; the promotion of a new professional culture based on learning from the experience, inside specific operative contexts and referring to real problems; and the development of sustainable and participative ways for sharing knowledge and practices.

After some negotiation, it was agreed that the initiative would unfold in terms of the development of four communities of practices, one for each of the different sectors of the organization involved. These were: the community hospital (medical assistance and nursing); the community nursing service; the nephrology department (nurses only); and the drug addiction and mental illness department. The communities would sustain professional identity, help knowledge sharing among the practitioners and trigger change. For each sectors approximately 20 managers interested in attending the project were enrolled and participated in the project.

The intervention lasted one and a half year. It comprised different phases: 1) a first open conference for introducing themes and approaches in dealing with knowledge shaping and knowledge sharing; 2) a phase aimed at involving and enrolling those who were interested; 3) a series of seven monthly meetings facilitated by two consultants/researchers to sustain the groups' search around practices and the reflection for bringing changes about; 4) a plenary conference to end up the program and 5) a regional congress to show the results of interventions (title: "Promoting and developing communities of practices and learning communities in health organizations".)

For reason of brevity, here we limit to report only about the work conducted with the nephrology department (the examples of the work artefacts gathered in the work, and made visible for this paper purposes, come from this group). We focus in particular on the main phase of the intervention, phase 3, where we utilized a series of ethnonarrative tools to visibilise practices and shift from diagnosis to change (action-research).

The intervention in the nephrology department consisted of two major blocks of activities: a first cycle of work to visibilise and represent the current work practices (becoming aware of their own practices and meanings at work); and a further cycle of action and changes (becoming "authors" of their own workplaces). We started with a first reconnaissance phase, aimed at establishing relationships, mapping and focusing the professional practices and refine the development of diagnostics capabilities. During this phase we also asked participants to write up a set of instruction to the double describing their own work activities. This was followed by a second phase that processed the description of the current work practices. The processing phase was instrumental to foreground specific problems related to the practices at hand. This led to a third phase centered on planning action and work redesign. The aim here was to develop hypotheses for change, learning and different ways of conducting the existing activities. The aim of these activities was the production of an action plan that the group would use to introduce tangible changes in their own work practices. The plan would make people authors in and of their own work contexts. The action plan was to be discussed with the overall community in a plenary ending event.
Each of the phases was supported by a specific methodological tool aimed at involving and accompanying the participants in the different aspects of the process.

4.1 How we used the "Interview to the double"

The "instructions to the double" was used in the *reconnaissance* phase, at a time when participants needed a sort of "role exchange" for best capturing the practices and living rules in their colleagues' departments and units of the same organization.
The risk of utilising this kind of tool in organizational contexts is that people can easily reject it. Because the written task is carried out away from the workplace, there is always a sort of resistance to what may be constructed as teacher –pupil relationship ("this seems to be homework"). The quality of the outcome is also a risk: the outcome of the exercise can be either rich and thick data or poor and thin descriptions. One of the conditions for a successful use of this method is the level of trust developed in the relationship among researchers and participants. A sort of alliance is needed, for people being able to express themselves in a serene mood.
We collected a large amount of rich and thick data, coming from the 98% of our participants. The commitment was strong and testified the capacity of the tool to be highly significant without being perceived as invading. Participants reacted positively to the tool as they soon realised its capacity to foreground the richness and knowledgeable nature of their daily activity. As one participant put it *"our tools have no value in the abstract, but they get meaning only if taken inside the real context"*.
Box 1 reports a fragment of one of the set of instructions.

Box 1

Instruction to the double n. 1

Dear Double

Be in Biella and try to park by 6 a.m. My favourite place is Repubblica Street. If it is not possibile there, go to Orfanotrofio Street. Be calm, no worries, do not think: try to accomplish every single duty, and with your colleagues you will have kind and polite relationships.
While you are walking, find the badge in your handbag, then punch in and enter. Go to the changing room, say "Hi!" to the colleagues you meet, then go up at the second floor (don't use the elevator).
Oh, when you are in the changing room, say "hello to everybody!", then change your clothes, go in front of the mirror and comb yourself with coloured hairgrips.
Second floor: here is the kitchen. Put the bag in the wardrobe, take with you the mobile only and your USB key.
Look at the board to see which department you are assigned to.
When you start your activities, pay attention to:

- Wash your hands with disinfectant soap (you will do so every time you do something)
- Switch the moinitors on and prepare the medical record for you five patients
- Start the priming
- Consult the patients' record for then uploading the data and the last dialysis course
- Prepare your documents for the following shift
- Book you tray for lunchtime
- Then pass through the other departments to aslk if they need any help.

After that, you find some colleagues of yours for a coffee in the kitchen (no sugar, your cup is the one with the yellow handle) and for some chatting while waiting for the doctor.
7.30 a.m.: go back to the room for dialysis hanging. Invite patients to enter, help them clean the arm and go to beds. Then ask: "who is the first?" When you get close to the first patient, ask him how is he, then operate in the speedest and most delicate way.
If you have any problem, aks the doctor's collaboration.
Always say "please" and "thank you" o everybody.

4.2 Drawing and feeding back the instruction in a map form

The thick description were analysed in two steps, first by the researchers and then by the groups.
First, the research team conducted an inductive analysis of the vast amount of text produced through the "instruction to the double". Using a grounded theory approach, we indentified the following categories:

- The explicit and implicit ***rules*** every practitioner referred to
- The use of formal and informal ***artefacts***
- The ***critical*** and most delicate ***aspects of the work***
- The ***actors*** involved, and their roles
- The ***practices*** described and the practices that identify the "system of action" in the organization (more specifically: the practices that make people comfortable, the ones that create turbulence….)
- The ***spaces*** for socialization and exchange of ideas and practice
- The typical ***verbs*** of action (the verbs that define my daily actions)
- The ***boundaries***
- The work ***integration aspects***

- The ***relational*** aspects (with the patient, with colleagues, with the top management…)
- Aspects of relational and ***communicational style*** (for example: "be honest", "Say 'hi!' to everybody", and "smile!"…)
- The ***ethical issues*** (attention paid to the patient, control over the patient's comfort…) and the ***aesthetical issues*** (the predisposition for feeling and perceiving, as, for example, the suggestion: "come peaceful to the service, you will use what you perceive")
- The patients' representation

Following previous work by Nicolini (1999), who found that representations produced by researchers are often more effective than those produced by the practitioners, we then constructed a number of maps (one for each community of practices involved in the project) that represented the different aspects of the work and its tacit dimension. The content of the instructions were organised in clusters (we connected elements into a network) to reflect the categories emerging from the overall analysis. The maps were then fed back to the participants who used them to discuss and compare their original set of instructions. One of the maps is reproduced in Figure 1.

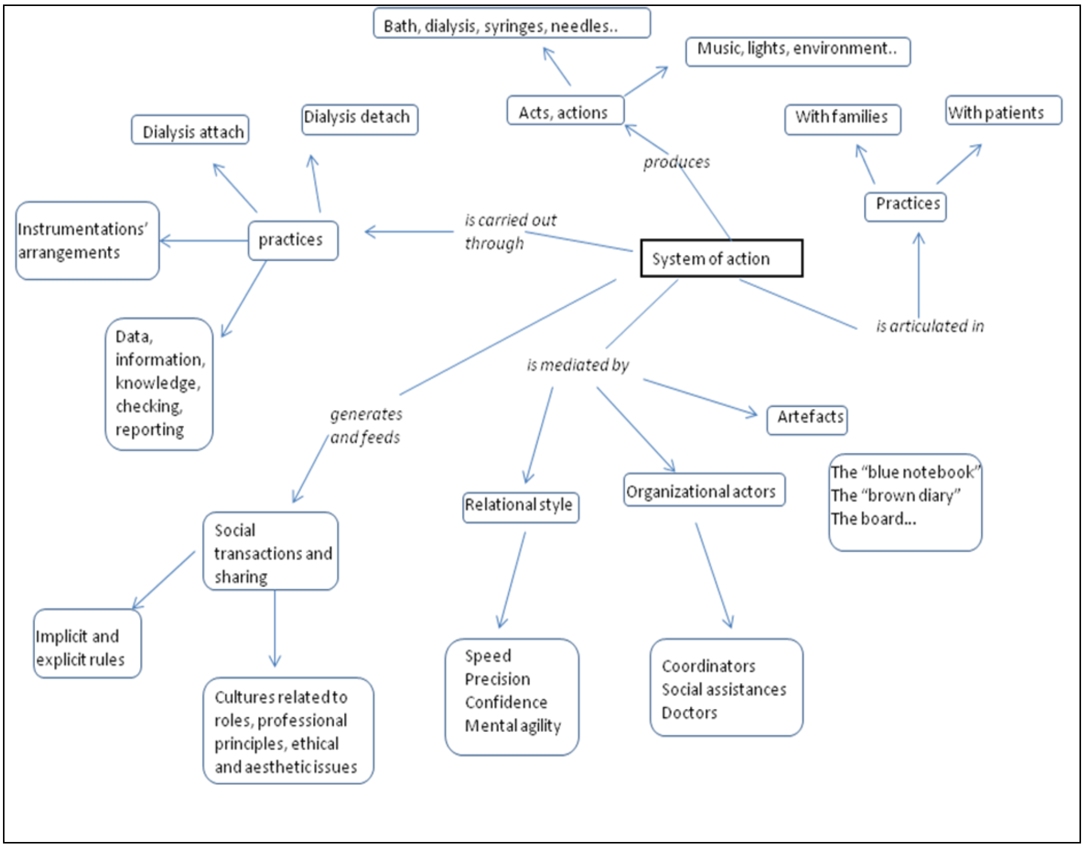

Figure 1

The choice of using a map, firstly moving from an initial individual product, was well received as it was interpreted as a way to make the data more visible and usable by the whole group. The network diagram highlighted the connections between common aspects of the work and shared practices, and triggered discussion around their current efficacy and potential changes.

Participants actively commented and interacted with the maps as testified by some of their comments collected during the discussion:

“ I would highlight the “relational style” factor, in our profession, which is characterized by the fact the we have to interpret the needs even before they have been expressed. It is a maternal attitude”

People went back and forth between the map and the instructions, thus recovering the richness of the initial exercise without been burdened by it (which would have happened if participants were exposed to the original texts, amounting to dozen of written pages). The participants actively interacted with the maps, which were often modified as a result.

“We can surely negotiate the position of this factor in the map. I mean, we can do this with the people who are present now. With the rest of our colleagues (the ones who are absents today) we need to verify later: their comments could be helpful and could integrate our vision”.

“If the map presents an image of ourselves, please put this other element clear: the user, the end user. It seems to me that we forgot to mention it!”

This level of synthesis and mapping provides people with the chance to recognize themselves and their world as presented through an external eye (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Self mirroring happens in two directions, so that people can recognize themselves and the others, developing reflection and building the idea and the representation of the other. We argue that the process of mapping profits from being researcher-driven. If an external eye tries to return to the participants what he/she understood of a complex picture (a situation, a workplace, and a bundle of practices), the advantage is that participants feel he/she has been understood, and commit themselves to the discussion.

4.3 From reflection to re-planning and action

The next step, aimed at progressing from the *processing* phase to the *action and re-planning* one, was based on the effort of re-organize the issues highlighted in the maps and emerged during the discussion and prioritize them (i.e. deciding what main problems and questions needed to be undertaken for transformation and improvement).
For this purpose we introduced a third tool that we named the “Cross- section Tool”. The tool that constitutes a powerful “organizer for reflection” allows to position in different areas the agreements on the common perceived problems.
In our case, we asked each professional group to discuss the problems and critical practices they wanted to take as a target for their improvement activities. Every group committed itself to a discussion around the representations of the emerging practices with the aim to highlight their critical areas or spaces for changes.
The “Cross-section tool” (figure 2) has four quadrants on which to spread the perceived professional problems.

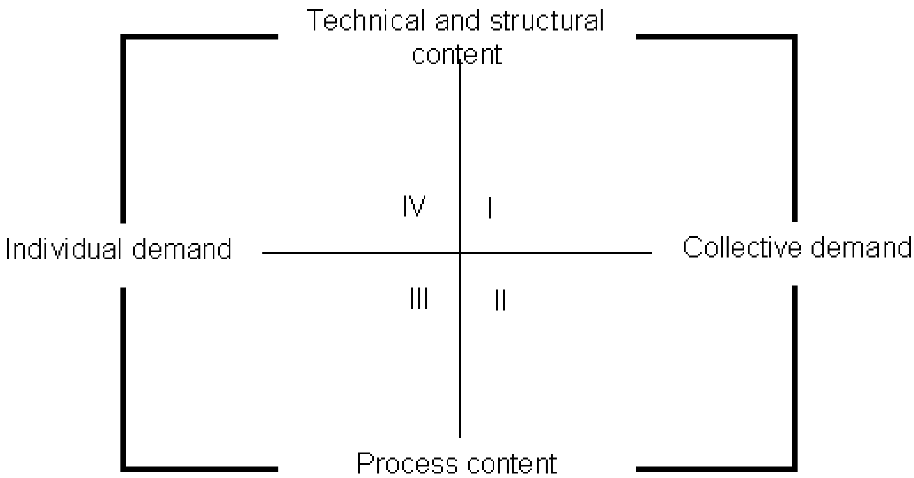

Figure 2

The four quadrants refer to different problem typologies according to the origin and the kind of difficulty experienced:
I. The difficulty comes from technical/structural problems (e.g. insufficient instruments for doing the job) and is related to a collective and organizational source. The group needs to look for technical solutions and to search for organizational innovation.
II. When a collective and organizational difficulty focuses mainly on process aspects (scarce integration, organizational fragmentation, insufficient communication etc), the need is to work for the improvement of a relational and social system, with the aim to develop valuable social connections in organizational terms (vertical integration, horizontal cooperation).
III. When the process contents concern difficulties deriving from individuals, the need is to redefine individual's professional and organizational role. This is the area of self-identity construction.
IV. When people denounce individual problems related to structural organizational dimension (difficulties in understanding, adapting, managing structural dimensions), the need is to develop and train for new technical and organizational competencies.
The Cross-section tool was a further opportunity for reflection as testified the following extracts from the discussion:

"Communication? This is a problem that links to time, tools, spaces….it is not just one factor, but a combination of many"

"I find it difficult to see as you all see. To me, this problem is "technical". Is this not for you?"

As in the extract above, participants argued about the positioning of items and issues raised. This work, in turn, paved the ways for a choice of the kind of problems it was appropriate to address first:

"We take problems for granted. I think a different kind of exercise is to raise the "right" problem at the "right" time and at the "right" position. For example: Mario, where would you put (in the graph) the fact that when I need your assistant I can never find her?"

The possibility to "position" the critical issues facilitated the emerging of spaces and areas for the intervention.

The advantage of this tool is that the labels utilized are easy to access, and their position tells about the aspects that influence them. Its main limitation is that this kind of tool simplifies the broader picture. Its value, therefore, is mainly in the capacity to unblock negotiation and thoughts around priorities in a professional community. The Groups used the tool to plan actions and future improvements. The planning for these action plans thus went beyond the training scopes of the intervention, becoming a self inquiring process aimed to change and reorganize their workplaces.
In the case of the nephrology nurses, the group decided to implement new communicational processes around its services and new information exchange about the patients. Another group decided to refine and adopt a new patient record, while a third one focused on developing a set of indicators that would make visible and account for aspects of the daily work that their usual time sheets were unable to capture (especially relational activities). The new practices developed, and the changes implemented, were then presented at a regional congress, open to all healthcare districts in the region.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 The logic of the sequence

In this paper we focused on the "practice of working through practices" used as part of the diagnostic and planning phase of an action-research.
The intervention alternated cycles of reflection on the current work practices (*becoming aware of their own practices and meanings at work*) with cycles of action and changes (*becoming "authors" of their own workplaces*).
In order to sustain the search of meaning around the professional practices in place, we used in particular the "interview to the double", a projective interview technique for producing representations of roles and of daily challenges perceived at work (Gherardi, 2003; Nicolini, 2009). This was flanked by other representational and reflection-triggering techniques drawn from the practice such as the mapping exercise, the cross-section tool and group action plans for the change, all derived from the organizational reflection toolkit (Reynolds and Vince, 2004; Boud et Al. 2006)
A distinctive feature of this approach is that unlike in traditional action-research project, narrative and ethnographic tools are employed to sustain the joint inquiry of researchers and organizational actors (Van Maanen, 1979; Denzin and Lincoln, 1998; Waddington, 2004; Fetterman, 1989).
The research indicated that auto-ethnographic tools are extremely useful to promote personal and collective transformation, but the transition from awareness to authorship has to be built progressively and strategically utilizing the different methods at hand. The endeavor is to shape a process of meaning making it both subjective and inter-subjective, where people are engaged in sharing the order of life they recognize as available, sustainable and knowledgeable in their daily work.
The setting and tools helped the managers to discuss their daily practices and improve the ways in which they approached critical incidents, coped with problem solving strategies and implemented new actions to improve their local organization of the work. However, the use of these tools alone does not guarantee that reflection will have authentic transformative implications.
In the paper we presented an ordered sequence that has an inherent logic, descending from the fact that different tools have different levels of possible purchase, and that they should be seen not as standalone tools but as part of a coherent practical toolkit for working through practices.

The first tool (the interview to the double) aims to collect practices and representations of the work. It does so in a written and shareable form; a second tool (the map) allows for the contents and grounded categories to emerge. In this way it puts in evidence the richness of the professional community. A third tool is then needed to help re-organize the data and find their usability in being directed to axis of change.
We claim that when used as part of a coherent design, the approach and tools utilized allow for the richness of the tacit and situated knowledge to surface and to become a resource for organizational reflexivity and change. In this way the challenge to become authors of their own workplaces can be taken up as an experience in which people exercise their language games and actions of everyday life to create new organizational worlds among many possible, using their subjunctive thought (Bruner, 1986) by transforming and viewing new practices of work.

5.2 Some necessary conditions to proceed from awareness to authorship

While the methods briefly described in the previous sections constitute a promising addition to the toolkit of organizational reflection, a few critical success factors are required for them to work. These include leveraging the power of language; providing appropriate scaffolding; supporting sociality, attending at the rhythm of the activity; and ensuring constant orientation and direction.

Language: things, for being understood, need to be said (to oneself and to others). Language is the most powerful tool we have to think and to pass our thinking to some others. The “Instruction to the double” uses the language to develop a discourse, to talk around our own practices and to share them, levering on the fact that people can share, elaborate, combine and reconcile their social and daily taken-for-granted. Through this process, language provides the learning capacity necessary for individual and organizational reflection.
Reflection acts as a bridge between language and experience, providing a connection between personal reflection and the social nature of language linked to organizing (Kayes, 2004).
The issue is however how to use language in an appropriate way. For example: how many words are necessary to be helpful in a process? (theoretical saturation) The “Instructions to the double” presented a “necessary” level of words to allow the work to continue and to be transformed along other inquiry processes. The “right levels” of words happens when people recognize the “value of use” of what they are providing (pragmatic saturation). Value of use means for us the necessary details level to allow understanding: not too little words/descriptions to permit people to know each other, not too much for not annoying and for keeping colleagues curious of each other perceptions and views.

For nurturing reflection a key factor is **scaffolding:** the construction and sustainment of a proper setting and of proper tools. Organizational reflection cannot arise by itself. It profits by guidelines and by someone who leads the conditions for it to flourish not only at an individual level but at a social one.

Sociality: learning stems from the participation of individuals in social activities. Reflection is a socially situated, relational, political and collective process (Reynolds and Vince, 2004, p. 6). This sustains the idea of a critical reflection that can elaborate and extend the process of action allowing reflective spaces to reshape and to play with problems in order to innovate. The social aspect allows to best use the emergent data. For example, it is possible to discover that the reflexive practice is as much driven by personal as it is by contextual factors. Sociality calls for the idea of a reflective community. In our case, sociality played a precious role in utilising collaboratively our tools. Mapping was needed to put in order many different ways of representing practices, and had the first role of surprise people for its density and richness. Group discussion contributed to understand the details and the interpretation of it.

Rhythm (timing): every steps of the intervention requires a right timing, depending on cultural and organizational aspects, on people involved, on the story and situation in which everything is happening. There is a right time for using the lever of writing, and a right time to push for collective reflection (for example, only when trust has been built).

In our case, the first month was spent in "knowing each other", so that tools like "Instruction to the double" and "mapping exercise" were estimated as proper and effective tools. Only after the first three months it was possible to find agreement and the desire to jointly plan for actions. The wish to plan the future involves processes like "imagining", "wishing" and "implication", which are connoted by feeling and emotions that need closeness between people. (Giust-Desprairies, 2003) Every different group had it own time for deciding the passage from awareness to concrete actions.

Orientation/ direction: it is always necessary to lean to a practical anchorage. Somebody who facilitates and plays as a bridge and link between tools, methods, phases and evolutions is vital in such a path. The direction to be kept is change, improvement, innovation and effective movements.

In the case, the turning point, every time there was inertia into the reflection circle, was the question we asked: "OK, and now?" That was the fuel for inspiring an orientation to reflection, always looking for a practical outcome and a concrete effect to be searched.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we discussed how some of the inquiry methods developed by the practice-based approach to the study of knowing and learning in organizations (Nicolini et al. 2003; Nicolini, 2010) can also be used to support reflection aimed at transformation and change. We argue in particular that auto-ethnographic methods derived from the ethnonarrative tradition allow professional and practitioners to become aware of their practices and regain the authorship of their professional conduct. This in turns requires to alternate cycles of thoughts and representations around the current work practices (*becoming aware of their own practices and meanings at work*) with cycles of action and changes (*becoming "authors" of their own workplaces*). Central to our approach is the idea that these tools and methodological orientations become meaningful only when they conceive as part of coherent design.
When used in a coherent manners, theses tools transform reflection from an intimate exercise (and a mental state to be achieved) to an activity that links the community and the professional reference groups. Reflecting does not mean only "looking inside oneself", rather it means going out, opening, getting "abroad". Self discovering is necessary, but not sufficient for being able to look at the other.
The research indicated that while ethnographic and self-ethnographic tools are extremely useful to promote personal and collective transformation, the transition from awareness to authorship has to be built progressively and strategically utilizing the different methods at hand. While the setting and tools helped the managers to discuss

their daily practices and improve the ways in which they approached critical incidents, coped with problem solving strategies and implemented new actions to improve their local organization of the work, they also raised a number of issues. The use of these tools alone does not guarantee that reflection will have authentic transformative implications.
This is the challenge and the beauty of our being researchers looking for a truth which respects the complexity of reality and the requirements of the field, by always seeking to improve growing and empowering processes, co-producing knowledge with them, not upon them. There are no shortcuts, but only the cautiousness and the self-critical attempt to put in dialogue scientific and methodological reason with everyday organizational life.

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