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Reflective Practice in Social Work

The mistakes on social intervention

Theory and practice.

Part 1

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Summary: *to understand*

1. **Reflection** and reflective practice
2. **Mistakes** between learning and damage
3. Rationality, **intuition** and mistake in social work



**Unit 1.
Reflection and
reflective
practice**

A skilled practitioner – theoretical background

Reflection and reflective practice are widely considered the basis for a skilled practitioner. The debate on this issue has been enriched by ideas from authors like Dewey, Freire, Polanyi, Schön, Argyris, Archer and many others. From different perspectives (philosophical, psychological, educational, sociological) they have given the theoretical background to understand how we can learn while doing.

Main theoretical approaches on reflexivity

Knowledge

- John Dewey
- Michael Polanyi
- experiential learning (Carl Rogers and David Kolb)
- Donald Schön

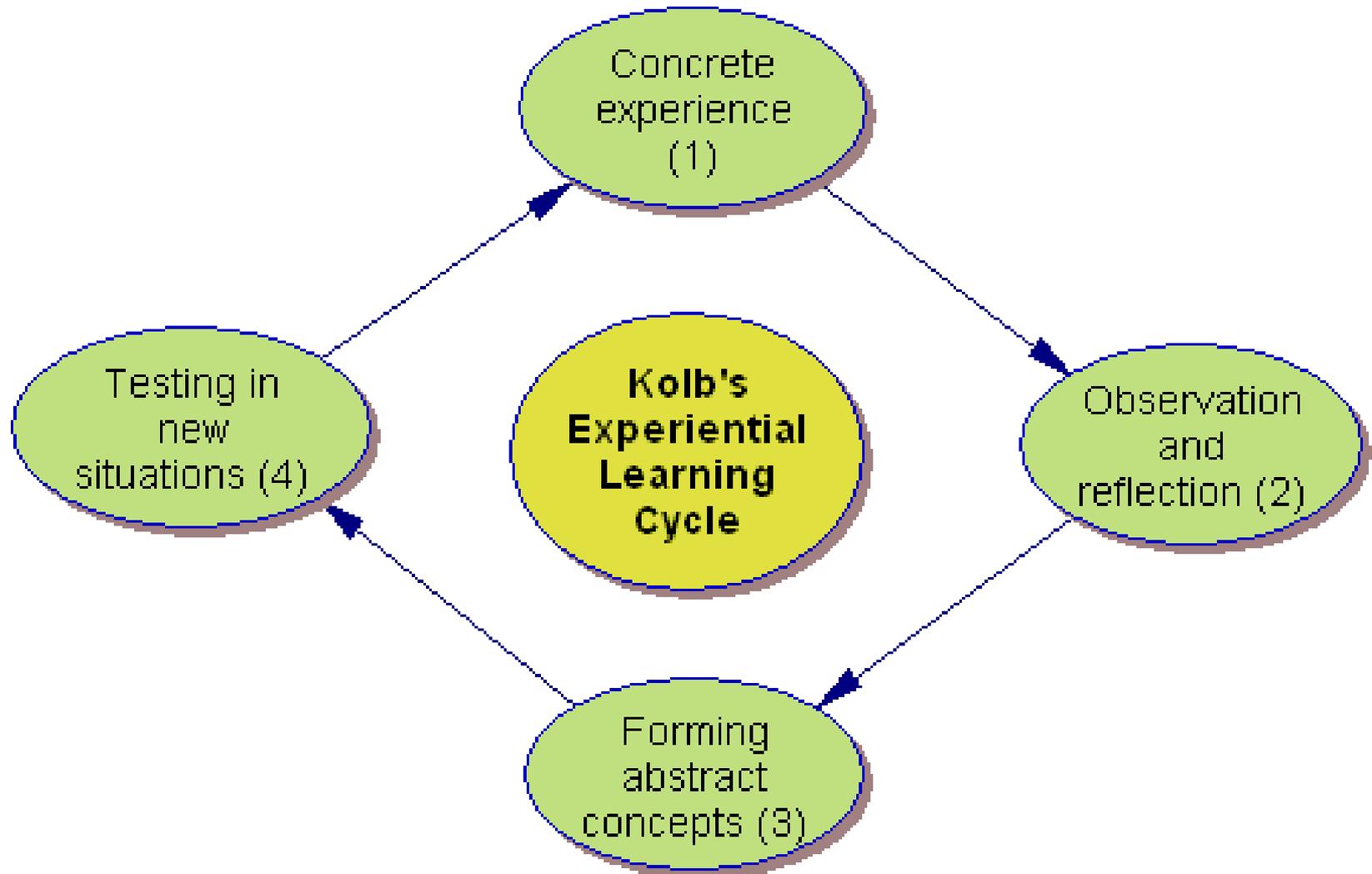
Society

- Jürgen Habermas
- reflexive modernization (Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens...)
- Margaret Archer

experiential learning - Carl Rogers

- founder of person-centred therapy
- cognitive learning
 - of limited importance for the individual as it is based on academic knowledge and is not focused on learner's needs and desires
- experiential learning
 - meaningful for the person because it is directly related to his/her life and experience

experiential learning – David Kolb



Donald Schön

- «The reflective practitioner» (1983)
 - knowing-in-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action
 - Vs. «technical rationality»
- = form of knowledge resulting from the application of scientific theories and techniques based on deductive processes

reflective practice ← ERA cycle

- Experience
 - what happens to the people
- Reflection
 - processes enabling people to learn from these experiences
- Action
 - undertaken because of the new gained perspective

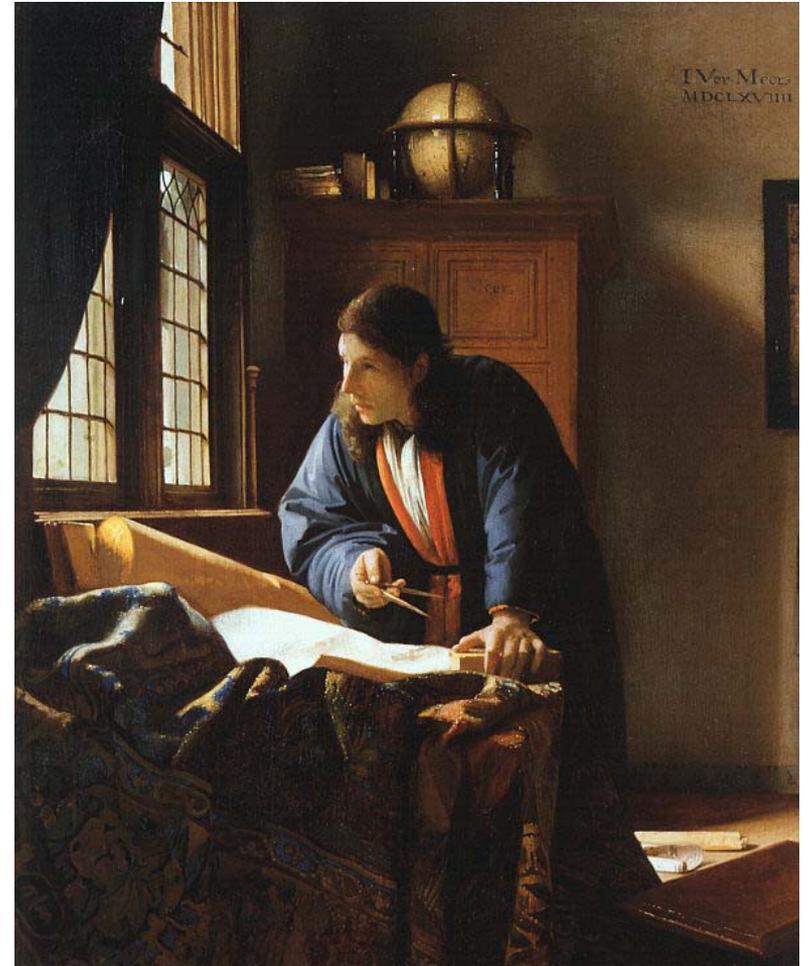
Reflection and reflective practice

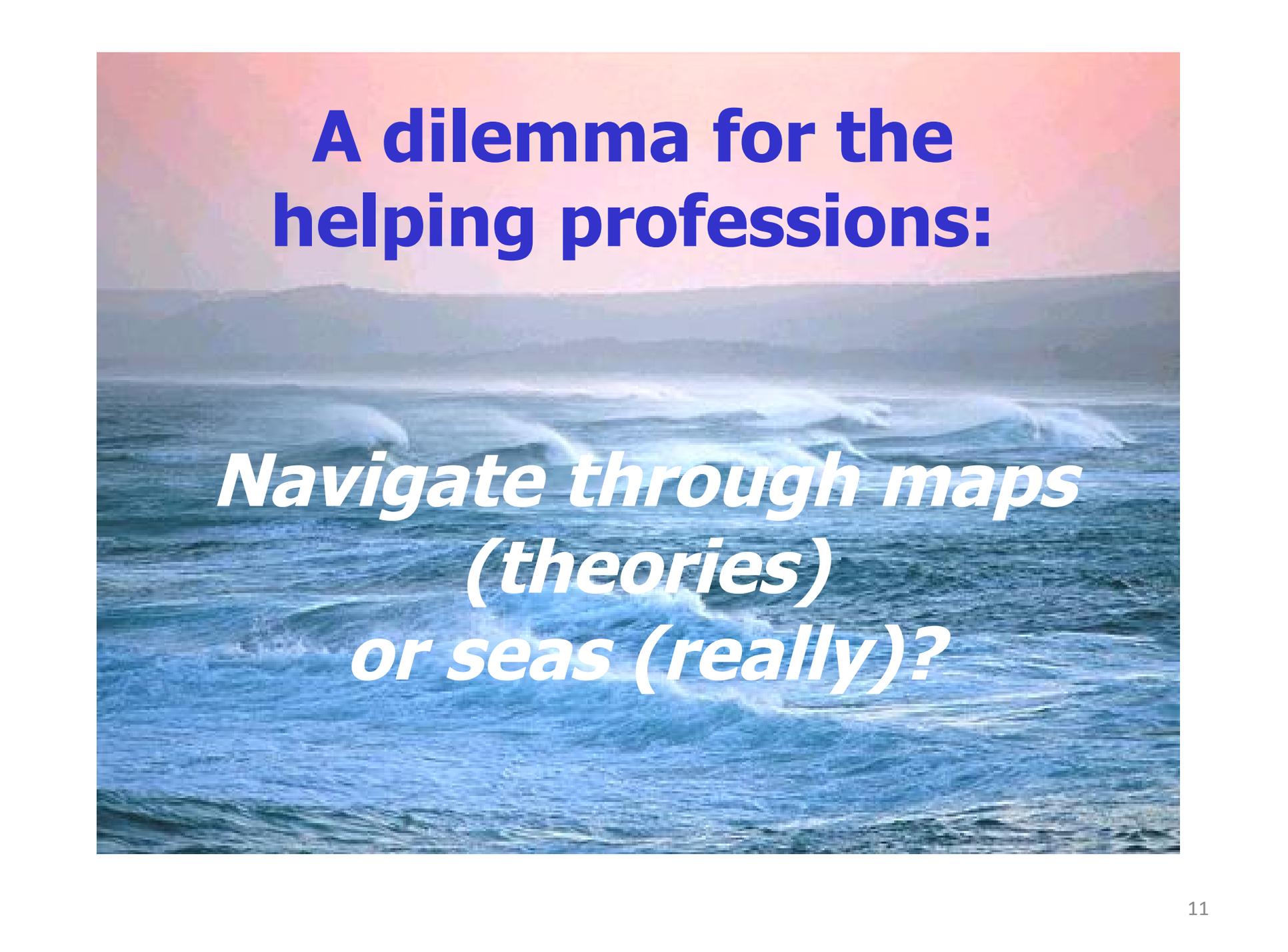
Theory vs. practice?

The reflective practitioner (Schön):

- knowing-in action
- reflection-in-action
- reflection-on-action

Jan Vermer, The geographer (1668-69)





A dilemma for the helping professions:

*Navigate through maps
(theories)
or seas (really)?*

To navigate through the “seas” of human reality

- knowledge
- experience
- intuition

Processes of
reflexivity
connect these 3
components

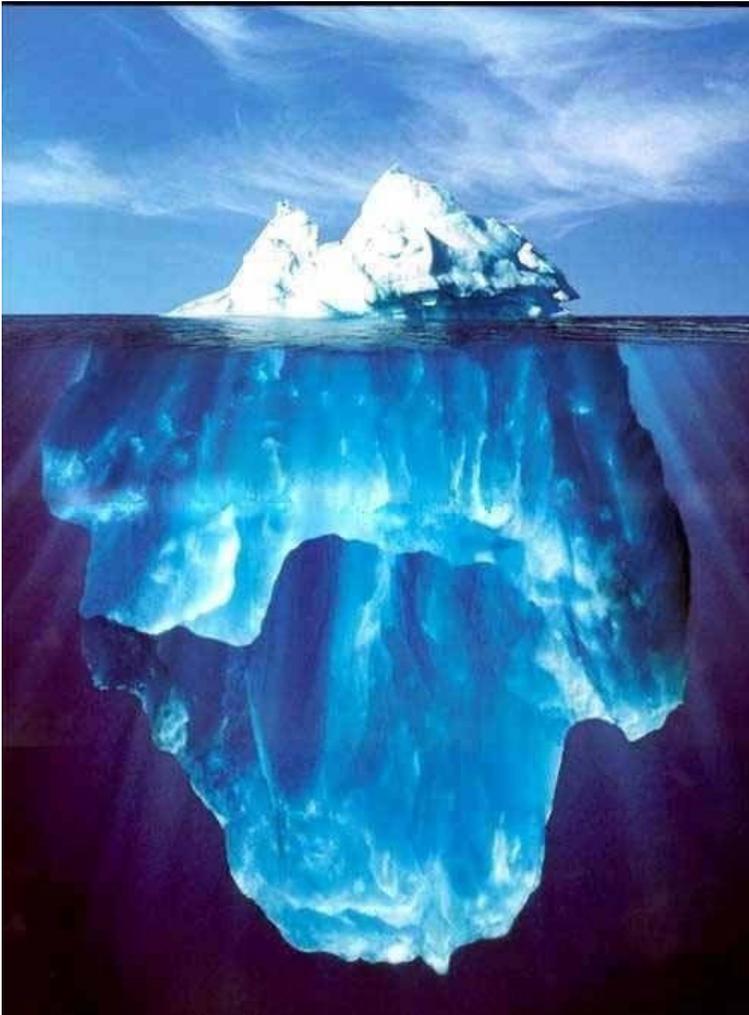


Nature of social work as scientific disciplines

- Practice orientated
- Synthesis for action
- Narrative (es. Little Red Cup)
- Stricteness but without perfect accuracy (It: “rigore senza esattezza”)



Bring out our tacit knowledge



Our knowledge is largely tacit (Polanyi) and we are unaware of it until "something" or "someone" different than usual, "foreign" forces us to reflect on and "see" what we took for granted.

Goodman's Levels of Reflection (1984)

1st Level Reflection to reach given objectives

- descriptions of facts (history and emotions); *PRO evaluation* (criteria for reflection are limited to technocratic issues of efficiency, effectiveness and accountability) and discussion (in group, in supervision, as part of a “portfolio” to use later);

2nd Level Reflection on the relationship between principles and practice

- *PRO learning* (exploration and explanation of facts through theoretical concepts) through the identification of values (individual, professional, organizational) and bases of action underlying the episode under examination. The findings become transferable to other cases;

3rd Level Reflection which besides the above incorporates ethical and political concerns

- *PRO identification* of influence produced on the case under examination by factors related to ethics and social policy.

reflection Vs. managerialism

- wide spread of **procedural guidelines**, forms and reference grids, which have produced mechanisms for standardized evaluations of situations and responses that are hardly compatible with the variety and diversity of situations in which people live
- **activist frenzy** (working without thinking) “we are often efficient but not effective” (Maria, s.w.)

Unit 2. Mistakes between learning and damage



Reflection on mistakes and failures

How can we turn from reflexivity as an abstraction to a reflective practice in health and social services? Reflection on mistakes and failures is a promising field in which to develop strategies for the reinforcement of professional skills in social workers and other professionals working with them.

A mistake is...

... an action, sentence, belief
that
unintentionally
brings us away (a deviation)
from what is
correct, right, true

All the mistakes are “bad”?



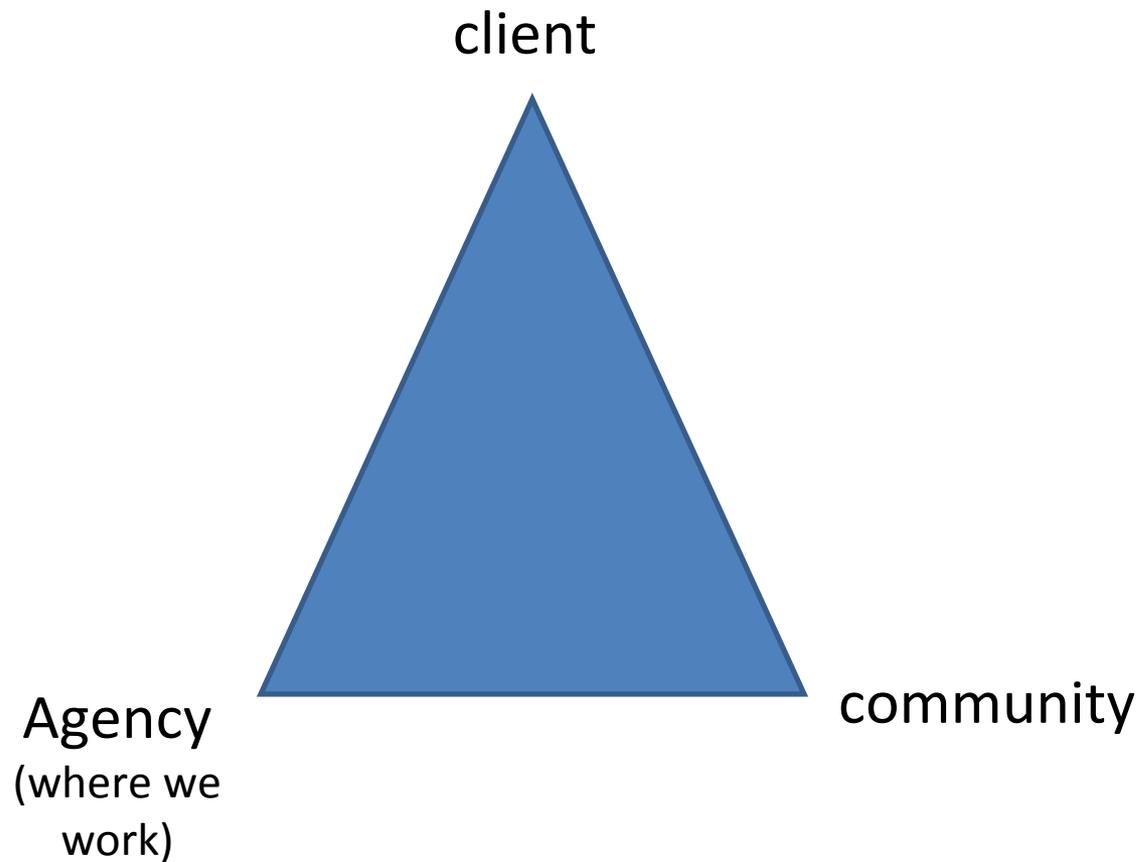
No!

- The metaphor of Columbus discovering America “by mistake” while looking for a new route to India can help develop a better comprehension of the potentialities of this kind of reflection and help social workers find new ways to face the complex problems of their clients.

Why sometimes we need to do mistakes

- People free to choose can make wrong choices. A world without errors would be a world without choice. (C. Handy)
- “Nature at fault” can be seen as individuals of a species more suitable than the others in case of a a change in the environment.

Who decide/evalutate what is right or wrong? We, but also...

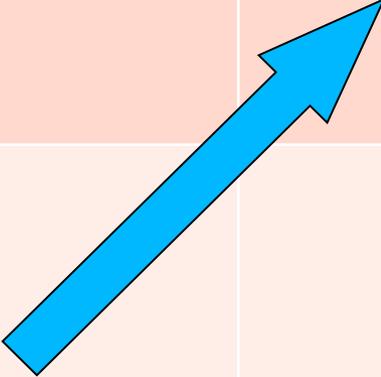
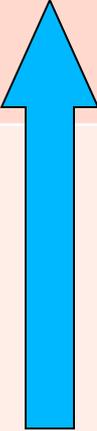


- User
 - is he/she competent?
 - is he/she the one who is suffering the damage?
 - For example,. sugery, removal of a child from a family at risk...
- Agency/Organization
 - procedures (risk of hardeing, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath”)
 - colleagues (*criticism*)
- Community/territory
 - Professional (Code of conduct) and scientific (knowledge ↔ expertise ↔ action)
 - Public opinion
 - State → laws

Learning and damage

mistake	With damage	Without damage
With learning	i.e. child put away from his family	i.e. wrong answer to a mathematics problem
Without learning	i.e. as above but without activation of reflection process	i.e. greeting a client using somebody's else name (when looking very tired)

Where leads learning from error?

mistake	with damage	without
with learning		
without learning		

How to learn from mistakes:

- The result of a qualitative research undertaken in some Italian services and the review of some strategies (i.e. Gibb's reflective cycle) for a structured reflection show-that:
 - sometimes social workers “need” to make mistakes because paradoxically in many cases it is the only way to help the client in a long- term perspective and to learn how to reduce negative outcomes in health and social services;
 - both intuition and rational reasoning are needed in social work practice, but they often produce systematic errors. Reflecting on these mistakes makes us better understand how we think and feel (the dual-process model of Kahneman gives a framework for a better understanding of the whole process) and helps to correct our practice. At the same time open and structured discussions with colleagues about mistakes improve the quality of “learning organization” where people can express and receive criticism using effective strategies.

main causes of mistakes committed by social workers and other helping professions

- lack of time, urgency, too much work (8)
- inadequate relationship with the user (6)
- inadequate relationship with the user
between colleagues (6)
- anxiety and action without reflection (4)
- lack of training (4).
- inattention (4)
- mental patterns that hinder a proper
assessment of the situation (4).
- inadequacies in the organization (2)
- conflicting interests (1)

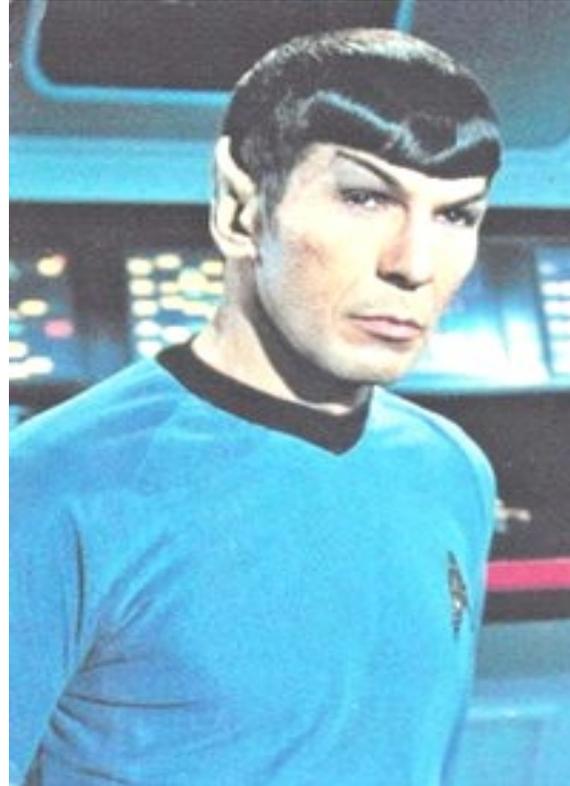
main effects produced by mistakes committed by social workers and other helping professions

- failure of the plan for inadequacy, ineffectiveness or inefficiency of the intervention (7).
- damage in the relationships with the user (no confidence, escape, dissatisfaction ...) (6)
- damage to the user (4)
- wrong assessment (3)
- Burnout (3)
- "Error chain" (incorrect information from operator to operator) (3)
- personal and professional growth (1)
- delays in the intervention (1)
- compromised path of life (children) (1)

A social worker says...

*“There are mistakes that may be of assessment in the assessment stage, the starting stage of a journey with a person, an individual project, for example, [...] But these mistakes do almost never lead to a failure, they are not the ones that determine the failure. **The ability to straighten the path according to that mistake, here is the difference.** When you let loose, let the empty, lacking continuity on the project, lack the checks, skip the checks. This is why the project may fail, not because a mistake of initial assessment” (interview Marco8 social worker).*

Unit 3. Rationality, intuition and mistake in social work



The limits of intuition - 1



- Together a pair of shoes and a football ball cost 110 euro, the shoes cost 100 euro more than the ball; how much does the ball cost?
- the shoes 100 and the ball 10 ?
- NO! $100 - 10 = 90!$
- The correct answer is: 105 the shoes, 5 the ball ($105 - 5 = 100$)



The limits of intuition - 2

- In a lawn there is a sod. Every day the sod doubles its dimensions. In 48 days the whole lawn is covered. How many days are needed to cover half lawn?
- Half meadow in half days, that is 24?
- Correct answer: 47 days, the 48^o the sod doubles and covers the missing half.

Kahneman's model

	PERCEPTION	INTUITION SYSTEM 1	REASONING SYSTEM 2
PROCESS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast • Parallel • Automatic • Effortless • Associative • Slow-learning 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow • Serial • Controlled • Effortful • Rule-governed • Flexible
CONTENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percepts • Current stimulation • Stimulus-bound 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conceptual representations • Past, Present and Future • Can be evoked by language 	

There is a logic in our mistakes...

"More than Dr. Spock, we tend to look like Charlie Brown. And like his, even our heads are often "hot and stupid. " But at least there is a method in the "stupidity": **the mistakes we make are pervasive, recurring and predictable.** They are the result of a logic different from mathematics, but less systematic, it is the result of ongoing negotiation process between "automatic" processes and "controlled" ones, between "affected" and "cognition" - or, more commonly, between passion and reason - and the game of synapses of the brain corresponding areas "(Matteo Motterlini)



...and there are mistakes in our
logic.

*“Yet, as masterfully documented by Antonio Damasio, in the light of numerous cases of his patients with brain lesions in the ventromedial prefrontal region, to make a “right” decision knowing what should be done is not enough, but it is like we have to “feel” it also on the body.. As if **pure reason he needed special assistance to implement his plans**, a bit 'of passion that helps!”*
(Matteo Motterlini)

Emotional intelligence (Goleman)

“Reality often face us with a range of very difficult choices (how to invest our savings? who to marry?). In all these cases, the lessons from emotional life (eg the memory of an disastrous investment or of a painful sentimental break) send signals that restrict the scope of the decision, eliminating some options and highlighting others from the outset. [...] Emotions guide our decisions moment by moment, in close collaboration with the rational mind, allowing logical thinking or making it impossible”



- Sometimes we are the victim of "illusions" that take place systematically: eg. a stick partly submerged in water seems broken even if it is perfectly straight.
- How can we avoid mistakes in cases like this? It is clear that a closer look gives no help. We continue to see what we see. The use of geometry and optics to assess the shape of all objects around us would be a safe method, but would produce **paralysis**.

It would be like trying to play chess by calculating at each step all possible variations, we will not go over the opening moves. But **our mistakes** [similar to the ones observed in the most common answers to the problems presented previously] (not unlike the effect of refraction of the stick in the water) **are** systematic and therefore, under certain conditions, **predictable**.
(Motterlini)

