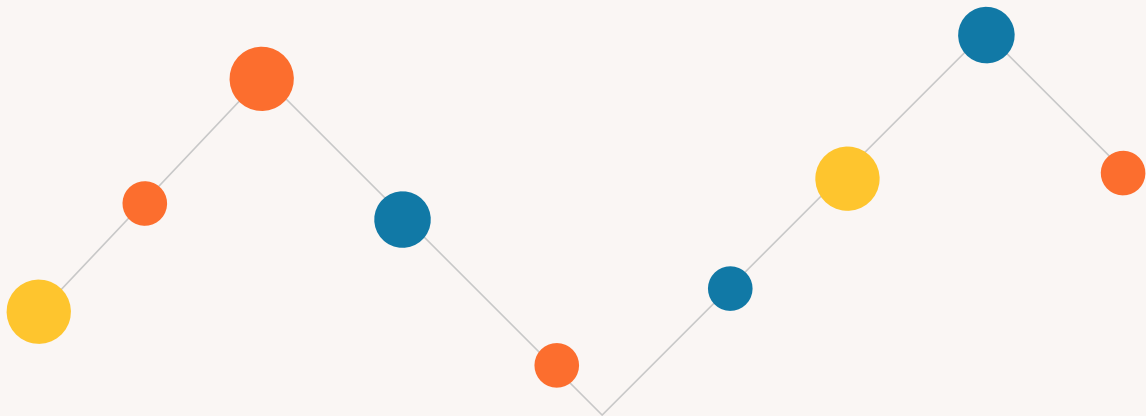


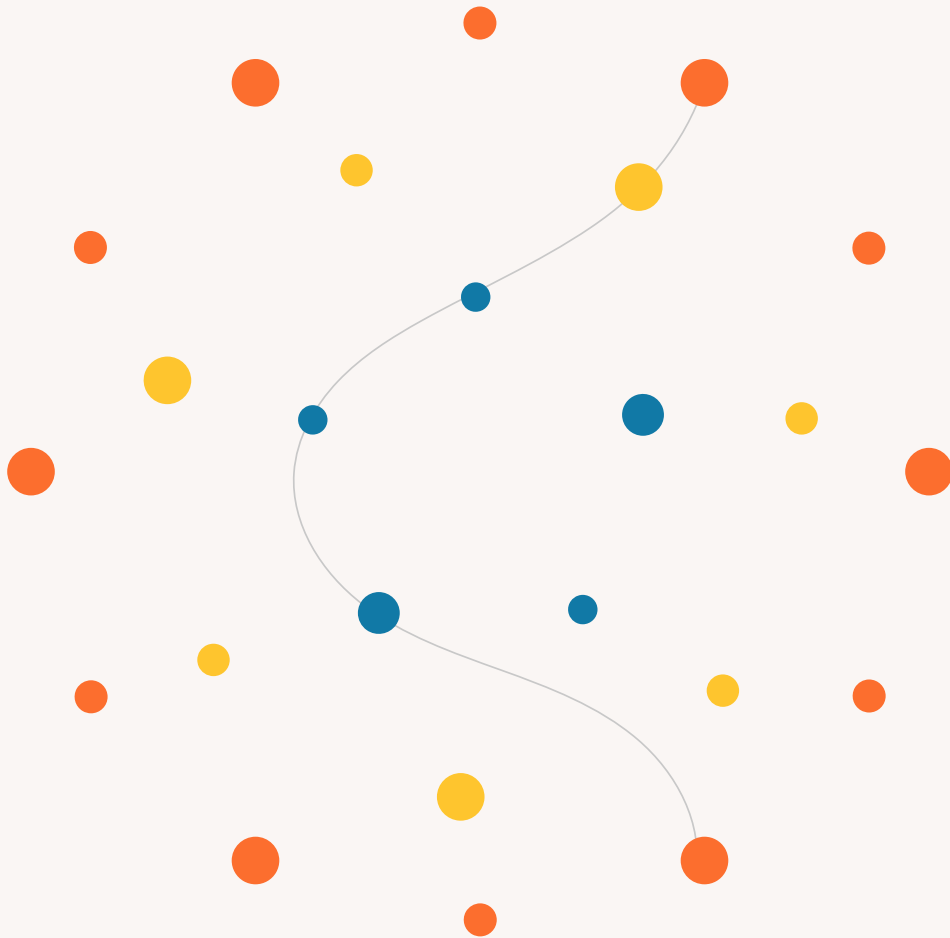
cadra

Report on our efforts to create a learning network of practitioners in the field of (cognitive) adult development - CADRA IO2 report

Report for Intellectual Output 2 of the CADRA Project

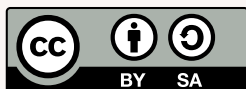
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What is CADRA?

The CADRA project was a three year Erasmus+ co-funded, pan-European initiative, running from December 2020 until August 2023. It explored leadership developmental needs and leadership development and focused on delivering working tools and methodologies to help leaders navigate the challenges of our times.



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Abstract

This is a report on our efforts and outcomes to approach practitioners in the field of inner and adult development¹ to create a learning network, and to cohere, helping people in leadership and other responsible roles and positions to deal with current challenges.

The activities have taken place as part of the 3-year Erasmus+ co-funded project “CADRA - Cognitive Adult Development from Research to Application”, which ran from 12/2020 to 08/2023 as a cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, a strategic partnership for adult education.

This report is a documentation, and the story of our shared efforts, outcomes, and learnings.

Introduction

The adult developmental methodologies that we used for observing the capabilities of people in their thinking and relating to themselves and the world focus on “dialectical thinking”.

Dialectical thinking can be defined as

“...a set of attention and thinking strategies, or approaches, to reducing automatic negative thinking, dichotomous thinking, polarising, and concomitant negative emotions, emotion dysregulation, and impulsive and other problematic behaviors.”, (Fruzetti, 2022).

The dialectical method usually refers to a dialogue between people who have diverging opinions of an issue while trying to understand the other's perspective.

Thus, we looked at our questions and findings through several lenses and from various perspectives, too. One set of perspectives that we used on a regular basis and researched in this project is rooted in Otto Laske's Constructive Developmental Framework and entails 4 “moments” of dialectical thinking: Context, Process, Relation, and Transformation (Laske, 2009: 172). Another set of perspectives is based in “The Art of Hosting and Harvesting Conversations that matter”, a

¹ This word “development” is problematic because of its mostly one dimensional and therefore reductionist and linear interpretation in its various contexts: psychological, educational, economical, ecological, political etc. We will not dare to define what we mean with it here, leaving it rather open to the reader to try and grasp the difficulties we refer to.

body of methodologies to foster better conversations and work better together, based on the work of a global network of practitioners with its beginnings in the 1980's community activism. A third set of perspectives has its foundation in Gregory and Nora Bateson's work and looks at learning as a layered relational process within contexts, whose differences make a difference.

Multiple Descriptions

By applying different sets of perspectives, we tell the story of our work with and in the field of adult development practitioners twofold: firstly as a quest behind a question and secondly from the perspectives of Otto Laske's four dialectical moments. With this, we try to describe our endeavour in multiple ways, hopefully helping the reader to understand what dialectical thinking is about.

We invite you to read with an open mind, open heart and open will (Scharmer, 2009), being aware that there might be perspectives you do not share (yet) or you do not understand (yet) or perspectives that question your way of seeing things. Our assumption is that the better we become able to hold multiple perspectives and relations (for example through dialectical practice), the easier it gets to resolve conflicts peacefully and to grow more resilient together and capable of becoming part of the solutions we need.

The quest behind the question - Storyline 1

“The quest behind the question” is a concept from the “Pro Action Café” - format developed by Ria Baeck and Rainer von Leoprechting, and refers to the deeper intention people are holding for the projects they are bringing to life. We use this phrase here according to the concept of a quest as a storyline.

The Question

What has been our underlying question?

In our greater CADRA question on how to bring certain adult developmental methodologies (Otto Laske etc.) to a larger audience lies the question:

How do we convene, maybe even cohere the practitioners of these practices and methodologies, in order to amplify what we find helpful and useful in them, to tackle the multicrisis we are facing as humanity?

The Quest

What journey did we embark on?

We set out to build a lasting learning and “developmental” network of/ with and for practitioners of various methodologies fostering adult development through dialectical thinking and practice:

explicitly:

- the Constructive Developmental Framework (CDF) by Otto Laske,
- the 12 Thoughtform Framework by Iva Vurdelja,
- the Immunity to Change Method by Lisa Lahey and Robert Kegan
- Action Learning by Reg Revans

other methodologies and approaches we found to deepen dialectical thinking, and the application of multiple perspectives:

- Nora Batesons’ Warm Data Labs and “People need People” online sessions
- certain formats from the practice of the “Art of Hosting”
- Joanna Macey’s “the work that reconnects” as practised by Phoebe Tickell’s “Moral Imaginations”,
- “the Glass Bead Game” invented by Laurence Currie-Clark,
- other practices that help us apply different (even more than human) perspectives than our own.

In this quest, we were looking for people understanding the term “adult development” in a similar way as we did back then². We were also looking for people who practised one or the other way of “developmental methodologies”. These people we identified and invited to join our online conversations and practitioner gatherings. Our idea was to invite fruitful exchange, mutual learning, inspiration and coherence.

The Surprise

What did we find that we didn't expect?

Little did we know that “the field” and concept of “adult development” is spread across various fields of expertise and multiple contexts, in which the term as such isn't necessarily used. In our learning event in October 2022 in Austria, we mapped the various fields and contexts in which some concept of “adult development” exists or occurs, even if it is understood in ways that would not use the term. Here's what we found, making no claim to be complete:



² As you will learn throughout this report, our understanding of the term changed over the course of the three year project.

Within these different contexts occur different concepts of how we as human beings learn and/or develop, different ideas of learning and different practices on how to foster adult learning or development. We came across severe divides in how people view and understand these concepts.

While we were working on our three year Erasmus+ CADRA project, quite an important online debate³ took place. The central point of concern was, whether “developmental stage theories” (of which we applied at least a version of Robert Kegan’s social - emotional framework as applied by Otto Laske in the CDF) are deeply flawed and their application harmful or whether human (adult) development actually happens in stages. The topic with its various stakeholders is so complex, that it is difficult to give an overview of the lines of conflicting perspectives in this short report.

What was important from this debate for our way of looking at adult development and what is important to consider is the question whether something like an “individual” actually exists - given the fact that we are co-respondent interbeings subdued to constant change, determined by all of our ancestral lines as well as by any interaction we are ever part of - let alone, that we consist of more “foreign” cells than our actual human body cells.

We also had to ponder about what “change” and “development” actually mean. The answers are very complex, especially when one applies dialectical thinking.

Throughout the course of the project, we also realised that our own ideas of how (not only) humans learn and “develop” were quite diverse, and we found the same conflicting viewpoints in our project team.

What was remarkable for us is that by deeply and honestly applying dialectical thinking to these conflicting perspectives, it became possible for us to understand and weigh their meaningfulness in these times. From various viewpoints, one can see the validity of many of the arguments they bring to the table.

³ This online debate has been named “The Great Stage Theory Debate™” by followers. kaa Faensen has created a Notion Page containing a timeline of social media posts, podcasts, blog posts and video conversations with the links to the respective data, which you can find [here](#).

The Outcomes

What did we produce and harvest as part of the journey?

Here's a list of all the activities we conducted as practitioners in the field over the course of the three year project. We presented this at our final project presentation in Liechtenstein in July 2023.



We touched an estimated number of 500-800 people with the various activities in the CADRA project. Many of these people are multipliers in the various fields connected in one way or the other to what we call here “Adult Development”.

Furthermore, we described some of the practices and trainings we conducted, these tools you can also find published for open use on our website, including the short and the long version of the Inner Development Goals toolkit, which is part of the CADRA projects’ outputs.

As for our approach to gather and cohere practitioners:

At the moment we have a mailing list of 135 actively signed up participants. 63 people subscribed to the [CAD YouTube channel](#). The latest video has been viewed 105 times. The most viewed video has been seen 397 times. There are 20 videos on the YouTube channel. Up to now, we have carried out 17 Salons and have scheduled five more already.

The [Center of Applied Dialectics](#), as our partner organisation hosting the online salons, is likely to still exist and grow as a community of practitioners in the field of Adult Development well beyond the project.

It is hard to measure the impact of these events. We can say for sure that people interact and engage in personal and professional dialogue, talk about how they apply it to their work and how it informs their personal development.

While talking ABOUT maturity probably we ourselves matured the most, "vertically" (cognitive, social-emotional), "horizontally" (how to organise, how to communicate), and regarding shadow-integration (things we rather not look at when perceiving ourselves).

Beyond that, we think it is fair to say that the momentum of the project reached a lot of people who would not have gotten in contact with a sophisticated approach to Adult Development.

The Learnings

What insights and knowledge did we gain on the way?

We learned that “the field” of “Adult Development” is a moiree of overlapping and developing fields with different understandings of crucial terms and concepts. We understood that “gathering practitioners” is a courageous undertaking in a time struck by a global pandemic and in a culture in which individual recognition is hardly achieved by collaborating on important concepts.

We learned that in the middle of a raging discussion about the very topic of your work, one is likely to become part of a side and the rift between sides will show up most likely in the very middle of the project itself. Nevertheless, occupying oneself with the topic of how adults develop and mature⁴, especially with dialectical thinking and a reasonable way of mature decision making, we learned to not only actively look for and understand other perspectives, but to take them into account, while at the same time deepening, broadening and also questioning our own value systems.

On our [website](#), we quote both Albert Einstein and Gregory Bateson, who mention something that could be described as “the problem with the way we think”. Regarding this human condition, while trying to gather and cohere practitioners in the field, we could experience how thinking differently led to ourselves behaving differently in critical situations. Thus, we experienced how game-changing a different way

⁴ We use the term maturity with an ecosystemic lens. Maturity then describes the capacity of a system to hold and entertain various, diverse, even contradictory relationships at the same time, contributing to the resilience and inclusivity of the system.

of thinking would be to face and handle the many local and global challenges we see ourselves confronted with.

If we think in a way that makes a difference, we perceive in a way that makes a difference, and then we act in a way that makes a difference. Or to quote Nora Bateson in this moment: “perception is action”.

Thoughtscapes⁵ in motion - Storyline 2

Otto Laske (Laske, 2009) describes four classes of dialectical thought forms, which people are using to think about the world. These moments of dialectical thinking are called:

- **Context** - regarding wholes and their parts in various structural categories
- **Process** - regarding emergence and disappearance, constant change and patterns of becoming and passing
- **Relation** - regarding the connections, interdependencies, and relationships between parts and wholes and their common ground(s)
- **Transformation** - regarding living systems, and their organisation as well as the development of systems through balance and breakdown

In this second storyline of the report for Intellectual Output 2 we structure the content according to these four moments of dialectical thinking, applying different lenses to think about this part of the CADRA project.

Context

The parts and the whole

The whole

The larger whole to be considered around this report is the 3-year Erasmus+ cofunded [CADRA project](#), ideated by Rainer von Leoprechting and the partners of pro action learning Ltd. (now called Fraendi), bringing together six European partner organisations to deliver six deliverables, so called “Intellectual Outputs” (Erasmus+ term).

The part of the larger whole for which this report is written, is one of the six deliverables for the CADRA project “Intellectual output 2” with the goal to gather and cohere practitioners in the realm of adult development and create a lasting learning community of practitioners in the field.

The parts

- Deliverables:
 - To build a lasting learning and developmental network for developmentalists.

⁵ We use “Thoughtscape” according to “Landscape” as the landscape of the capability to think in various and diverse ways

- A thematic learning workshop with practitioners from all other partners and associated practitioners in Austria in October 2022. The workshop piloted the experience from our peer-learning network and explored the longer term development needs and possibilities from the participants.
- Results:
 - 17 online salons with mostly renowned practitioners in the field
 - A highly successful learning workshop in Austria in October 2022 with 16 participants from all CADRA partner organisations
- Stakeholders:
 - The six partner organisations of the CADRA project
 - The 15+ participants of the partner organisations: freelancers, employees, managers, trainers, associated consultants, CEO's, researchers etc.
 - Renowned practitioners in the field, whom we invited to learn, practice and discuss methodologies together
 - The broader interested public, specifically multipliers in the moiree of fields around the concept and practice of adult development

Other groups of parts of this effort to cohere practitioners in the field contain the above mentioned methodologies and formats, as well as the worldviews held by the participants or for example the cultures they come from. We could name many more categories of relevant parts that influenced the project.

Process

The journey, the void, and the emergence

Once upon a time, short before the beginning of the pandemic, the idea for the CADRA project was born out of a group of like minded individuals occupying themselves with Otto Laske's "Constructive Developmental Framework". They started to look for other practitioners of the same or similar approaches to adult development and invited them to share their practice, logic, worldviews and formats with each other. Online salons were held which led to ideas of mutual collaboration. Rifts within the group of the CADRA project emerged, due to diverging views on development and different practices of collaboration. The conflicts around how to view stage theories introduced a more differentiated view onto their own approaches and practices. In October 2022, the participants of the CADRA project gathered to apply the methodologies learned on themselves and learn

about the field and its needs. Many of the participants reported that the learning event was transformational for them. At the end of the three year project phase, many of them are clearer around their values and intentions. A larger group of practitioners, held by one of the partners' organisations, emerged, keeping up the dialogue around cognitive adult development practices, their gifts, shortcomings and further evolution.

Relation

The patterns of interdependence, the relations, the common ground

Various relationships formed the CADRA project and made the results of the effort to cohere practitioners in the field possible. The two founders of Fraendi Ltd. were colleagues and friends before the inception of the CADRA project. One of the founders had translated Otto Laske's book "Measuring Hidden Dimensions" into German. The existing friendship between many people participating in the CADRA project has shaped the will to collaborate and embark on a developmental journey together. Knowledge of the common ground around cognitive adult development sprang out of participants having met years before the project, because they shared interest in Ken Wilber's Integral Theory. Some of the practitioners and partners in the project had already founded the "Centre for Applied Dialectics" together, which became the organisation to host the online salons we conducted.

The friendships between participants of the CADRA project and representatives of the sides of the above mentioned stage theory debate made it difficult to take firm stands as a project, because we deeply tried to understand each other and our arguments and thus, discovered that our differing value and judgement systems were actually related. The deeper intention of both sides is to bridge the gap between the nature of our big challenges and the way we perceive, think and act.

Transformation

The system and its changes

Every system has its limits to stability and harmony. Throughout the CADRA project, various challenges occurred, which brought the partnership and the project to its limits and made smaller and larger changes inevitable.

In the effort to gather practitioners in the field, the worldviews of two of the organising CADRA participants clashed vehemently, pulling

other partners into the resolution of the conflict. Throughout the conversations, which led to huge respect and a lasting friendship between the two persons, it became necessary to truly apply the other's perspective, thus widening the persons' knowledge and understanding of another reality. During the process of the resolution of the conflict, both participants experienced a developmental shift in their worldviews, and their ways of dealing with the worldview that they had not noticed or even rejected so far. It led to both becoming more capable of following their calling as well as becoming more capable in the evaluation of other conflicting worldviews and how they were dealt with in the CADRA partnership system.

This transformational episode led to the hosting of different salons by different people and a phase in which the system rearranged itself until it found a new stability.

Epilogue

We hope you enjoyed this multiperspectival report and we hope it helps you understand some of our experiences as practitioners of what we call “Cognitive Adult Development”. If you are interested in learning more, please visit our website <https://cadra.li>.

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Web Presences

- The CADRA Project: <https://cadra.li>
- Otto Laske: <https://interdevelopmentals.org/>
- Nora Bateson and the International Bateson Institute: <https://batesoninstitute.org/>
- CAD - Centre for Applied Dialectics: <https://www.applied-dialectics.org/>
- CAD Salons YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@cad-centerforapplieddialec9451/videos>
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