Action model:

From words to action using a participatory approach

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PART 1: Methodology for a participatory approach in a quality improvement process: SUMMARY

The active involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the design, implementation and monitoring of services for older people in need of care and assistance is essential to deliver quality care. A participatory methodology has been developed to help Partnership members understand better how they can develop a quality improvement process using a participatory approach.

1. The continuous improvement of quality

The methodology is inspired by the 'continuous improvement cycle' of the WHO Age-friendly cities program. It aims at being adapted to very different levels, from the neighbourhood to the national level, from very small projects to national-wide ones. It is made of four main steps:
- Planning
- Implementation
- Progress evaluation
- Continuous improvement

2. What is a participatory process and why should we use it?

The aim of a participatory approach is to involve all relevant stakeholders at different levels throughout the process of the cycle. When applied to services for older people in need of care and assistance, this methodology needs to involve a wide range of stakeholders: e.g. policy makers, service providers, carers, workers in social and health services, informal care organisations, older people's organisations and representatives from the police.

It is important to involve older people and all relevant stakeholders in the process to improve quality of services. It helps to develop a less bureaucratic bottom up process and can be used to gather the expectations from different target groups. In doing so, a civil dialogue and a sense of co-ownership of the process can be created. Moreover, it helps the acceptation of public authorities' decisions by a wider public and ensures a better sustainability on the long-term of the strategies developed. Finally, these tools help at empowering local actors by involving them in policy processes and adapt the policies to the citizens' needs. Participation of older people themselves enhances the involvement of end users in the development and evaluation of quality tools. A specific attention should be paid to cover the needs of frail people, with poor social contacts, whose voices are less easily heard.

3. How to develop a participatory approach in a quality improvement process?

Being part of the WeDO-partnership requires an on-going commitment to follow the participatory approach as a catalysator for change. The participation of older people should be applied all along the quality improvement process.

A. Planning

In this phase a plan is created. Find out what things are going wrong, identify goals and objectives, and plan for change. Follow the five steps:

1. Organise a steering group
   - Form an improvement team
   - Identify the stakeholders
   - Include older people('s representatives)

2. Assess what needs to be implemented to ensure compliance with the quality principles agreed by the Partnership.
   - Analyse the current situation
   - Collect current performance data
   - Collect data on the needs and expectations of older people (questionnaires, consultations, debates) to inform the assessment

3. Identify the targets and objectives
   - Come up with ideas for solving these problems
   - What are the objectives and goals of the project? What do you want to achieve? What changes do we want to make that will result in the improvement of quality of care? It is important to have a target to focus on. Do not be afraid to be very challenging in your expectations.
   - Objectives can be set out for the product as well as for the process

4. Develop a plan of action based on the outcome of the assessment
   - Develop ways to make improvements
   - How will you achieve the objectives? What actions will be developed to realise the goals? At this point the working route of the project is established.
   - What is the timing of the plan? When will you have meetings, what are the deadlines, what is the time schedule for every phase in the project you want to do?
   - Define the process requirements: What do you need to?

5. Identify indicators to monitor progress
   - How will you measure whether you have achieved the goals? How will you know that a change is an improvement? What are the indicators for monitoring the progress at the end of the project?

B. Implementation

At this point it is time to "do", to carry out the action plan.

1. Introduce changes
    - The first time, start to implement the change on a small scale, in an experimental phase. This minimises disturbing the routine activity while assessing whether the changes will work or not.

2. Set up monitoring procedure based on agreed quality principles using the agreed indicators
    - Document the process. For example by recording and describing the way the process is done. Collect notes of meetings, trainings, actions, … You can also take pictures, video tape, etc. Information on number of participants, measures of time, costs, movements, are all valuable knowledge for the next phase.

C. Progress evaluation

At the end of the implementation phase the steering groups has to make a progress evaluation to measure whether the objectives as formulated in the planning phase are met. Are the changes achieved? Are these changes improvements? Is the plan working as intended or are there revisions needed?

1. Involve external volunteers to check the objectives in regards to the implementation
    - Compare the results with the objectives and goals
    - Use the performing indicators, developed in the planning phase

2. The steering group defines recommendations for the next quality improvement cycle
    - Analyse the project regarding following areas:
        o Methods that are used to achieve the objectives
        o People involved to achieve the objective
        o Equipment, costs, materials, … used to achieve the objective
        o Make use of the process data documented throughout the process
        o Make use of the results of the evaluation of the objectives
    - Formulate recommendations: What lessons can we learn from the planning and implementation phase? What was good? What needs to be changed? Where did delays occur and why?
    - Identify any new problems when they crop up

D. Continuous and continual improvement

This phase ensures the long-term value of the project and enlarges the possibilities to improve quality care.

1. *Continuous improvement*: Regular assessment through the ABC cycle (plan – implement – evaluate)
   - At this point of the project, you will normally already have achieved some improvement, but not the level that is ultimately perfect. Therefore, after the evaluation, new objectives can be set and new actions can be planned.
   - Repeat the cycle of quality improvement and define new opportunities.
   - On the start of the next planning phase, the results of the evaluations and the recommendations made, are used to determine the objectives and establishing the plan. In doing so, the cycle is repeated and repeated again and again … without this it is one-time change, and not a cycle of improvement.
   - In a second and third cycle, the implementation of the actions can be done on a larger scale.
     - E.g. From neighbourhood level to municipality to regional to national level
     - E.g. Involving more people, more organisations, more stakeholders

2. *Continual improvement:* Establish on-going feedback
   - Do not wait until the end of the project to evaluate, but use it daily, as a way of thinking.
   - An improvement process must focus daily on how the process, the project can be improved and adopted.
   - Improvement is a result of persistent and iterative methodology and should be included in the daily management of the project.

3. Standardise tools
   - Cycle 1 often can be seen as a pilot project. Use the knowledge from the cycle evaluation to improve and standardise certain tools used in the process
     - Process standardization (invitation letters, PowerPoint presentations, …)
     - Trainings and workshops
     - Questionnaires
     - Evaluation matrices
     - …

PART 2: Methodology for a participatory approach in a quality improvement process: FULL VERSION

A. Planning

1. Selection of the setting

Where do you want to start with a concrete project? The project has a bigger chance to succeed when you start with a little, concrete project within a little domain. Do not start with an idea to change the entire policy on quality of care, but use a first project to generate success. In a second phase, you can do a new project, somewhat bigger, and afterwards a third, and so on.

So select and delineate a setting: This can be one or two nursing homes, one or two local organisations, one or two neighbourhoods, …

2. Organise a steering group for the project in the chosen setting

2.1 Basic criteria for a good steering group

A first step in the realisation of the project is to form a steering group who supervises and coordinates the project. There are people who succeed in accomplishing something important for many other people all on their own. But most people work together with others if they want to achieve something in the interest of many. An important advantage of working with a steering group is that a group's proposal is often more constructive and more easily adopted because they are more realistic. Within the group there already may have been discussions weighing the advantages and disadvantages from various standpoint, which generates a more nuanced picture.

Forming a steering group is a very crucial step in your project. Recruiting people for a steering group must be very well thought; the kind of people you invite is crucial. Look in the environment what types of people you can have in the steering group and search focused to those people you need.

Tips to form a good steering group

- Use a mix of different types of people: older people, policymakers, professionals, … Definitely include an older person in the steering group.
- You need people with good organisational experience such as a good chairman, an active secretary who are both enthusiastic.

- You need someone with expertise on the subject (i.e. on applying for subsidies, policies, technical details …). Not everyone needs to know everything but a group is efficient and enjoys its work if one or more people in it are well informed.
- There is a need to have important people in your steering group. When an influential governmental official is a member of your group it gives your project an air of importance. Important people increase your group's status and raise the chance that the project will be taken seriously. Note that working with important people not always makes the work easier. It is important that they have a say, without having to say it all.
- The power of number can be effective in influencing policymakers, other organisations, stakeholders, clients, … Nevertheless, too many people in your steering group can work paralyzing.

Tips to approach volunteers or organisations to come into the steering group?

- Personal contact is essential. Sending a letter is usually not a good idea. You go and talk with each person you have in mind.
- Invite a candidate personal to attend an initial meeting. After the meeting they can make a definitive decision about participating. People must have the possibility to say "no". If you say this forehand that is an open invitation and that they **always** can make their decision afterwards, the chances are good that people will take you upon on it.
- Each partner (volunteer or organisations) has to see the benefits from the project. The project may need some volunteers but why do the partners need this project?

2.2 First meeting of the steering group: organisation and target

The first phases of setting up a participatory project are very important. You can compare it with building a house. The foundation of that house is one of the most essential things and that needs be placed properly, otherwise the house will collapse. It also determines the rest of the building. For that reason, the first meeting with the steering group is so important. It determines the whole project.

Tips to do in the first meeting:

- Arrange a warm welcome (coffee, tea, biscuits, cake …)
- Explain the purpose
- Exchange thoughts
- Obtain commitments for participation
- Obtain commitment about the targets of the project: invest as much times and energy as needed to assure that everyone is on the same track. This will prevent nasty surprises at inconvenient moments in the future.
- Make arrangements and officialise these arrangements by putting them on paper
- Put on paper all tasks and responsibilities
- Define the means and their sources and get commitments: e.g. money for coffee, tea, postage stamps, meeting places, telephone, …

3. Assess what needs to be implemented to ensure compliance with the quality principles agreed by the Partnership

3.1 Contact Key persons

After this first meeting we have now our steering group. We could get right down to work, but it is wise to think about collecting more information on the topic. You may have a steering group, which is diversely composed, but we need to involve more people and use their expertise and information to have a solid, broadly accepted project.

First, it is important to involve Key Persons. Key persons have a lot to say. Key persons have an important position in the community (in which you are doing your project: e.g. country-level, neighbourhood or nursing home). They can be ministers and academics, but also active residents, a chairman of a senior organisation, a social worker, a local doctor, priest, home care coordinator, … They know a lot about the subject of the project or the community where the project takes place; who are often influential in their own circles. Therefore, it is a good think to make and keep contact with those who can be important for your project.

Being in touch with these people is important for three reasons:

1. They can be a source of information. They know the local situation, its history, who are the local people, who are the target groups, who are the main organisations. They have an insight on the problems in the community, and what possible thresholds could arise in the project.
2. If key persons support a project, chances are that they will be positive in talking about the project. And if key persons talk to a lot of people, that is a good thing. Therefore it is also good to have different types of key persons, with a different network, different communication and information channels, etc.
3. A key person has contacts. If he or she is behind your project, more people can be reached through him or her. They are for example good intermediaries to find volunteers.

Tips to recruit key persons

- To recruit key persons a clear function profile needs to be developed. Such a function profile describes the capacities needed of the key persons in your specific project. What type of key persons are we looking for? Which capacities are we looking for? What can they do specifically for the project?
- The steering group puts together a list of names of potential key persons. These key persons are personally approached /asked by the member of the steering group.
- Invite all key persons to an informative meeting. After the meeting they can make a definitive decision about participating. People must have the possibility to say "no". If you say this forehand that is an open invitation and that they **always** can make their decision afterwards, the chances are good that people will take you upon on it.

Tips to invite to the informative meeting with key persons:

- Members of the steering group
- Possibly an important person ('godmother' or 'godfather' of the project, the prime ministers, the mayor, the director of the nursing home ,…)
- Key persons who confirmed their presence at the meeting

Tips to do in the informative meeting with key persons:

- Arrange a warm welcome (coffee, tea, biscuits, cake …)
- Explain the purpose of the project
- Exchange thoughts
- Explain why you have chosen them, why the key persons are important.
- Explain what they have to do (Where, when, how, limitations). Be as concrete as possible.

3.2 Collection of Data and information: Make a "biography" of the setting

It is good that others share your ideas (by having a steering group and having contacted key-persons). But often that is not sufficient. You need to have an overview of the assets and the weaknesses of your setting. You need to detect where your project should focus on.
Moreover, when it really comes down to it, for instance in group discussions with the building society, or with local policymakers, or with the board of a nursing home, or with the press, or with national government, it is powerful to back up your ideas and arguments with facts and figures. Your arguments will in any case be all the stronger.

You can look for different canals of data:

- Numbers and statistics: How many people are you talking about in your project? How many older people receive care from that home care organisation? How many older people live in that neighbourhood? These data can come from the local government, home help agencies, building societies, service providers, community organisations, …
- You can organise a survey to know how the older residents feel about your project's objective and its related factors: What do they think about the reasons of the project? What are the most important issues in the community? How do they feel about the quality of care? What needs to be improved in their point of view? Also in this part of the project, older people could be involved. The Belgian Ageing Studies are an example of such active involvement of older people in research. In this study, interviews are conducted through older volunteers. These volunteers invited respondents to participate in the research project. The questionnaire was meant to be self-administering, although volunteers were allowed to clarify the meaning of questions, in the case this was requested. This system has the advantages of face to face-research (higher response rate), while minimising the disadvantages (social

desirability). An older person trained these volunteers and during the research phase a professional working at the municipality monitored them.

Organise discussion groups to make a SWOT-analysis
- Topics to discuss in a SWOT-analysis:
    - How do you define "quality in care"? Is this present in your setting e.g. neighbourhood, nursing home, organisation)?
    - Which principles of the Quality Framework are available?
    - Which principles of the Quality Framework deserve further attention?
    - What are the strengths of your setting (e.g. neighbourhood, nursing home, organisation) to provide/have quality care?
    - What are the weaknesses of your setting (e.g. neighbourhood, nursing home, organisation) to provide/have quality care?
    - What are the opportunities of your setting (e.g. neighbourhood, nursing home, organisation) to provide/have quality care?
    - What are the threats of your setting (e.g. neighbourhood, nursing home, organisation) to provide/have quality care?
- Organise such discussion groups with a range of stakeholders
    - group of older persons
    - group of professionals
    - group of informal carers
    - the group of Key persons
- Make a written report of each discussion group

4. Define and describe the project: Identify the targets and objectives

Now, the steering group can define and describe the project, in consultation with the keyfigures. Based on your SWOT-analysis, your survey, your discussion groups etc. you have now a clear image of the assets and weak points of the setting. Based on those insights, you can now define a list of targets and objectives. Come up with ideas for solving the problem. Afterwards, make a ranking of those targets and objectives. Which objectives are most necessary, and are realisable?

Tips for identifying targets and objectives

- The aim of the project must be very clear and very delineated. It should have a clear and attractive target.
- The beginning and the end of the timing of the project should be known.
- Objectives can be set out for the product as well as for the process
    - E.g. product: At least 10 informal carers should have followed the course on "caring for people with dementia"
    - E.g. process: In order to develop the course of "caring for people with dementia" informal carers, as well as older people with dementia should be heard.

Bad example: Our project aim is to improve the quality of care of older people. (This is too abstract and has to be translated into a specific objective).

Better example: Our project aim is to make a policy plan for the next three years on how we could enhance residents' participation and involvement in evaluating the quality of care. (This is an example of a concrete objective with an umbrella-like character. Many concrete initiatives can be set up under that umbrella: e.g. create a residents advisory board in our nursing home.)

5. Develop a plan of action based on the outcome of the assessment

You have defined your project, your target and objectives. Now it is necessary to discuss how you are going to reach those objectives. Which actions are you going to undertake to realise the project?

Develop ways to make improvements
- How will you achieve the objectives? What actions will be developed to realise the goals?
- What is the timing of the plan? When will you have meetings, what are the deadlines, what is the time schedule for every phase in the project you want to do?
- Define the process requirements: What do you need to undertake? What is your financial budget?

6. Identify indicators to monitor progress

Once you will execute the project, you will need to monitor whether you achieve your goals. Decide how you will monitor the project progress
- How will you measure whether you have achieved the goals?
    - E.g. attendance list of participants in the trainings
- How will you know that a change is an improvement? What are the indicators for monitoring the progress at the end of the project?
    - E.g. evaluation discussion with 5 participants, 2 months after the training to assess whether the training has facilitated the informal care for the person with dementia. Was the training useful?
    - E.g. Questionnaire in the beginning and the end of the project to measure differences (e.g. in Quality of Life, caregiver burden)

B. Implementation

1. Introduce changes

1.1 Get to work: in public

Now it is time to get the ball really rolling, and bring it out in the open, in public. What you need are more people, people who want to be active in a task group, who want to help as volunteers… How do you get these people? You get them involved by making your plans more widely known, and you do it in such an attractive way that people want to be part of the project.

There is however a dilemma between the aim of having a big working group and its potential negative outcome: if there are already enough people participating, than it can seem that you are not necessary. As steering group, you must be aware of this. One way of resolving this problem is by setting up smaller task groups and dividing the targets. For instance: If your concern is having a residents-newspaper in your nursing home, you could set up a group that will take photographs, you could set up interview groups, you could set up a cartoon drawing group, you could set up the puzzle-makers group, and so forth. It is always clearer what people's individual roles and contributions are when the group is small. And in small groups, no one can afford to be missed.

Tips to get out into the public:

- Throughout the project, send **several** press releases. Communicate the process of the project: (1) We want to improve the quality of care and are going to start with a project; (2) The project is searching key persons; (3) We are doing an analysis of the setting and detecting our assets and weak points, (4) We have chosen a project (5) We have started with the project; (6) The project is looking for volunteers for this and that task group …
- Use a wide range of communication channels. Send messages to the local, and national press, use the magazines of municipalities, organisations, Internet, and so forth.
- Have a big starting event. It is an event in and for the public, with the press and lots of people involved. Also, have a big ending event, where you thank and praise all the volunteers; where you highlight the most important results. Use this as the opportunity to present the next project.

1.2 Task groups

There are two important conditions for a good working task group. The first condition concerns size. The best size for a task group is 5 to 12 people. If the group consists of fewer

than five, then it quickly happens that too much is asked of each team member. When the group is larger than 12, it could become difficult for having discussions and making decisions. With more than 12 members, the chances are greater that some individuals are left with nothing and they loose their motivation.

Second, every member of the team should have the same information. If you have a group of 30 people, some may be well informed, but others joined in somewhat later and do not really know what is going on. To start off properly, everyone should be thoroughly informed. Therefore start by giving plenty of attention to this, at the first meeting for new people.

A first meeting of the task groups needs to be organised. Two different kinds of starting meetings are possible. The first is a full or plenary meeting, one to which everyone interested in any of the task groups are invited. The second possibility is to organise a separate meeting for each of the task groups. You can of course invite everyone for the first part of the meeting and then divide the public up into groups.

In a task group it is important to create a positive atmosphere and an own identity. At least, people have to know each other's names. A list of participants with everybody's name and telephone number is a start. Express a personal interest in someone who has been ill or on holiday. This creates the feeling: if you are not here, you were missed.

Next, how important the group's aims are, if the atmosphere is poor, the pleasant atmosphere quickly disappears. Often, it revolves around very simple things. If there is something good to eat with the coffee, an empty meeting room can suddenly seem much friendlier.

Finally, a recognisable public image can increase the group's sense of identity. You could for instance consider: a group logo and their own letterhead.

2. Set up monitoring procedure based on agreed quality principles using the agreed indicators

In point 6 of Planning you agreed how to monitor the project progress. Put this into practice, and monitor the project.

C. Progress evaluation

1. Tips to involve external (older) volunteers to check the objectives in regards to the implementation

1. Select targets that are attractive to each specific target group
   - To participate, someone must agree with the objective of the activity. Your project must become their project.

2. Make those targets known, and invite your target group to participate
   - Anyone who knows nothing about it and is not asked will not join in.
   - Why don't people take part? Because they have not been asked for.

3. Develop a range of activities
   - Activities must attract different people. Not everyone likes the same activities.
   - Taking part has to be fun. People are not active to become unhappy. And not everyone enjoys the same jobs.
   - Translate your aims into different kind of activities.

4. Solve possible obstacles or interferences
   - People have to be able, in a position to help.
   - E.g.: People can have objections to taking on long-term commitments. You will reduce the barriers for them if you make it clear how long a period of time you want them to participate.
   - E.g.: People may have transportation problems to come and go from the activities. How will you solve this?
   - E.g. People may hesitate to join because they think they cannot do the task, or that they do not know enough. This is why it is also important to contact them in person. Point out to them that their participation will bring the project considerable expertise and knowledge. Do not just say: this person and that person take part, or the mayor supports the project, or we have received a grant from… Say: we want you to join, because you are important.

5. Make competence profiles for the people you want to involve in the project. For example: Competences of volunteers:
   - Substantial involvement/engagement
   - Being able to work painstakingly
   - Keep one's appointments, meet one's commitments
   - Be responsible
   - Listening skills
   - Be eager to learn
   - Be socially engaged
   - Wanting to develop his/her personal skills

6. There is a considerable potential for recruiting older people into volunteering. The main reason why people do not volunteer is because they have not been asked for. 80 to 85% of the volunteers have been recruited through other members (Fisher and Schaffer, 1993). So, ask people personally to join in. Word-of-mouth appears to be one of the most effective recruit campaign and the most common one is a neighbour telling neighbours (Freeman,1997).

Some basic principles when you invite people to the project
- Believe in your project and let your enthusiasm glow
- Stress the necessity or the innovative character of the Project
- Aim high, involving local government or other important departments
- Set short term targets that are realistic
- Success feeds motivation
- Stress the benefits of participation
- Let VIPs testify about their involvement and participation
- Never push people who are reluctant
- Make no enemies

2. Define with the steering group recommendations for the next quality improvement cycle

Analyse the project regarding following areas:
- Methods that are used to achieve the objectives
- People involved to achieve the objective
- Equipment, costs, materials, … used to achieve the objective
- Make use of the process data documented throughout the process
- Make use of the results of the evaluation of the objectives

Formulate recommendations
- What lessons can we learn from the planning and implementation phase?
- What was good?
- What needs to be changed?
- Where did delays occur and why?
- Identify any new problems when they crop up

D. Continuous and continual improvement

1. Continuous improvement cycle: Regular assessment through the ABC cycle (plan – implement – evaluate)

At this point of the project, you will normally already have achieved some improvement, but not the level that is ultimately perfect. Therefore, after the evaluation, new objectives can be set and new actions can be planned. On the start of the next planning phase, the results of the evaluations and the recommendations made, are used to determine the objectives and establishing the plan. In doing so, the cycle is repeated and repeated again and again … without this it is one-time change, and not a cycle of improvement. Consequently, repeat the cycle of quality improvement and define new opportunities.

In a second and third cycle, the implementation of the actions can be done on a larger scale.
- E.g. From neighbourhood level to municipality to regional to national level
- E.g. Involving more people, more organisations, more stakeholders

2. Standardise tools

Cycle 1 often can be seen as a pilot project. Use the knowledge from the cycle evaluation to improve and standardise certain tools used in the process
- Process standardization (invitation letters, PowerPoint presentations, …)
- Trainings and workshops
- Questionnaires
- Evaluation matrices
- …

Moreover, at this point you can start disseminating examples of good practice to the public
- Organize workshops, conferences
- Make publications
- Create a website
- Create continuous, long-term networks