



## The Fork model

### - a tool to structure meaningful personal development -

#### Introduction

The Fork model is a cognitive tool to structure the complexity of personal development. Development is structured in four tracks and each track has a present and a desired state. Besides being a tool, the Fork model concretizes a specific idea that innovates the way professionals are helping their clients, patients, students, or employees. The Fork model and its philosophy is a choice for well-formed meaningful development. It's an approach, created over a period of fifteen years in relation with my own practice as psychotherapist, coach and teacher. In this article three aspects will briefly be described: the philosophy behind the model, the model, and its applications.

#### Philosophy

In Western society we organise development in a narrowing way. Sometimes it is thought as endless linear growth. In other cases we think we develop by reaching goals and being busy. In still other ways we develop as if we live on an island. Or we hope to create our own paradise by solving problems.

How we think about development can also be found back in how professionals are helping their clients. In the past, helping conversations were often based on analysing, making a diagnosis, and execute a treatment or in the case of social work, perform interventions. For quite a lot of life issues another approach is more appropriate. Instead of analysing, a problem or challenge is understood as a Present State, not an enemy or something wrong. The present state is starting point. It invites the person to formulate a goal and create in tension with the present state a new reality. Present state and desired state are the edges of a goal-oriented project. Formulating a goal helps a person to create change and build new behaviours.

Besides this goal oriented part helping should also be the reflection on how someone is dealing with his challenges. There is a lot to win if a client improves his ability to steer and guide himself. The philosophy behind the model is that self-guidance is a necessary condition in order the client learns something during the helping conversation. Clients should not only be helped but also learn how to help themselves.

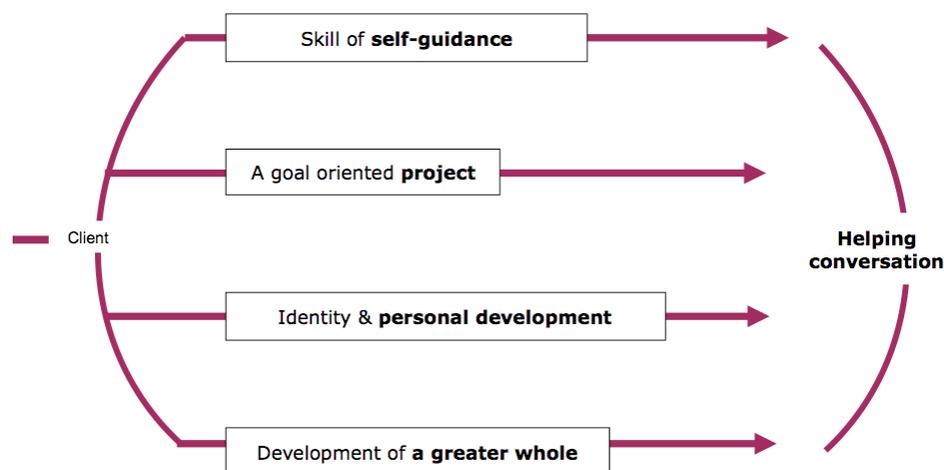
Thirdly, a new way of helping others is taking identity into account. Problems and challenges are part of a larger personal development. Knowing who one is and understanding a challenge in the frame of a life narrative, is a more profound way of helping people. In contrast with psychodynamic approaches, the philosophy is based on the fact that personal development is a normal existential feature of our lives. Personal development doesn't mean one has a disease and has to be healed or cured. Personal development is a process of individuation – becoming oneself.

Finally, systems thinking have to be part of individual development. An individual presents himself as an independent agency, but in a new worldview we have to start from the fact that everything is connected. An individual is part of a larger whole. One of the core statements of the approach is that a person can't develop himself, sitting on an island. It is by actively participating in the development of a greater whole that a person finds meaningfulness.

## The model

During my career as psychotherapist and coach I gradually developed a method to structure the complexity of the personal development of my clients. When training health care professionals one day, in 2008, I drew the way I was working as a path with different choice points. I discerned four choice points. The drawing looks like a fork. That is why one of my students called it 'The Fork'. And so it came into existence as a hands-on tool to help professionals structuring the life of their clients in a developmental way.

The Fork model consists of four tracks. Only by evolving on these four tracks at the same time, our way of development is lasting and meaningful. The fork helps people to multi-track development. It is something we have to learn because in most cases, we tend to limit ourselves to only solving problems, only reaching goals, or only looking inwardly. Here is how the model looks like:



## Method

If you want to structure personal development and you want to do it in a long lasting and meaningful way, then use this model to map four tracks of progress. You can use this model as a procedure, consisting of the following steps:

Step 1: Project. First start to define your **project**. A project is a structured approach: the present situation, the desired outcome, actions and feedback loops. The important thing about

a project is the fact that it must be down to earth. This track is about actions and making progress by doing something. Make a change in your behaviour or in your situation.

*What is your project exactly about?  
What is your goal?*

Step 2: Self-guidance. Reflect on **HOW** you are doing your project. While doing your project, you can learn to be more effective and efficient. Maybe you are postponing. Maybe you feel disempowered to keep going or getting started. Maybe you are fighting against an obstacle and it keeps bouncing back at you. Maybe you do not integrate the feedback. This track is about improving your competence to manage yourself and your situation.

*How can you improve the way you are dealing with your project and your life in general?*

Step 3: Identity. The next step is to relate everything what you are doing to **who you are**. That is your unique being, your identity. You have values, a worldview and a sense of purpose. Your task is to connect with the purposeful energy that runs through your life. Feedback helps. Working on your shadow sides too. Often people are engaged in projects that do not match with who they are. Why are we so busy, knowing that our efforts are not matching our values and are not contributing to the development of who we sincerely want to be?

*What is your identity emerging from your incarnation, biographical events and social environment?  
What is your developmental theme in this stage of your life?*

Step 4: Greater whole. Finally, development is not complete if you do not connect your development with a larger **whole**. Meaningfulness only emerges if you choose something more important than yourself. Dedicate your life to a higher goal and you will experience a deep sense of purpose. This greater thing can be the well-being of your family, the growth of your organisation or a more sustainable world.

*What is the development of the greater whole to which you belong?  
In what sense is your project and your personal development a contribution to the development of the greater whole?*

## **Application 1: Project management**

Project management is invented to design goal-oriented action in complex situations. This idea fits very well with the Project track in the Fork model. What is often forgotten in projects is mapping the identity of the project owners. People who design projects should not be merely looking at the outside. A bird's eye view is an important piece to add. From that perspective the goal of the project can be linked with a greater whole. Of course this is the organisation in the first place. But the fourth track can add an important question to the success of a project: how is the project contributing to what development of the larger whole? The point is about the difference between a goal and a purpose. Goals are not purposes. A purpose is something meaningful that emerges from a sense of being connected to a higher value. It creates leverage because the project is not just a job, but loaded with a mission to contribute to a higher cause.

## **APPLICATION 2: Life-coaching**

The Fork model helps to describe different approaches in coaching. In coaching defining a project is standard. All coaches are asking the goal question. Also well-accepted, is asking personal questions or doing some biographical work. Clients know that their values and previous life experiences can interfere with progress. The coach has different methods to structure identity development, like personality typology, Logical Levels, life span narrative, talent management, etc.

More rare are coaches who put explicit attention on the competence of self-guidance. Most coaches are trapped in the content of the issue. In our view the coach is partly educator because many clients do not have the ability to make progress in their project. The coach teaches his client to manage a project or structure his personal development in this stage of life. Starting to give feedback on client's ability in self-guidance is rather new.

Still more rare is the connection between individual development and the development of the whole to which the client belongs. Coaches are working with their client as if personal development is done on an island. I agree that working with an individual client is an excellent way to empower a client. But this doesn't mean that the client has to be isolated from his context. In an inspiring contemporary worldview we like to integrate the idea that an individual co-creates the whole. It is the participatory identity of all of us that constitute the whole. For many clients it is surprising that we as coach, are asking: 'in what sense is your goal, your project, and your personal development a contribution to a better world?' Clients are not used that happiness and meaningfulness is created by our connection with the whole. Adding the fourth track in coaching creates leverage 'be the change you want to see in the world'. Most clients are surprised but they love it. It creates meaning and purpose. Clients become excited, because they know that this is the piece in the puzzle to adopt a lasting way of being happy.

### **Application 3: Education**

A teacher can use the Fork model to structure guiding students. The goal of the student's project is that he or she learns something. This has to be evaluated at the end. Self-guidance is known as the importance of learning how to learn. As teachers we regularly help students to reflect on how they are learning.

What is most often absent in education is the relationship between what have to be learned and the student with his unique values, qualities, assets, etcetera. Part of a sustaining meaningful development of students is creating space so that students have the chance to get to know themselves better.

Even more critical is the fourth track. We are not teaching something for fun. Teacher and students alike connect with the development of the larger whole. But this is not often expressed clearly. Educational theorists like Freire, Illich, and Montessori have argued that education always should have a political dimension. This has to be understood as the critical view on existing practices and aligning education to social change. There is still a long way to go for education to become an organisation of change, rather than an organisation of socialisation. By asking the questions of the fourth track teachers, students, and school leaders start to reflect on their relationship with society and culture. If well-connected students can become change agents or cultural creatives.

### **The book**

I wrote a book about this model. In the book each track is elaborated. Each track has its own methods of progression. With a little bit of imagination and background knowledge you can start using this model. My students are telling me it is a very simple but very powerful model. It is a tool to structure the complexity of development and it is very helpful in conversations.

If you would like to learn more about this model, we organise webinars, skype conversations, etc.

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