

# *Dialogue In Professional Social Work*

Anna Metteri, Senior Lecturer, Social Worker,  
University of Tampere

Kaarina Mönkkönen, PhD, Human Resource  
Manager, Social Psychologist,

Employment and Economic Development Centre  
for North Savo



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# Agenda

In professions which work through human interaction it is necessary to examine how mutual understanding is constructed.

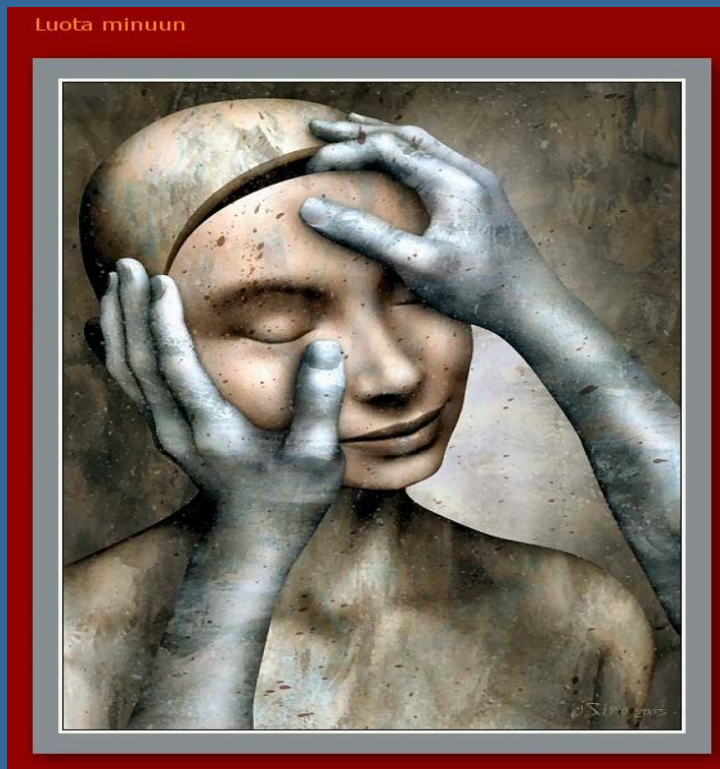
We introduce three different orientations to interaction: expert-centered, client-centered and dialogical interactive orientation.

Elements of these orientations can be perceived in various interactions. We see them as different dimensions which we can recognize in single interaction episodes.

Social workers need the skills of dialogue in different relationships with clients, communities, professional networks, political decision makers, general public etc.

The current challenge for Finnish socialworkers is to break the traditional culture of silence and enter into public dialogue.

# Why is dialogue so difficult in practice?



# Which elements make client work effective?

- 1) Good relationship between the client and the worker, but also between the social worker and other professionals and with the client's network
- 2) To support the subjectivity of the client
- 3) Pro active attitude to the future
- 4) The worker's ability to benefit from the client's resources
- 5) Respectful way of communication



(Sipo Art collection 2005)

**Many ways to interact**

Besserwisser

Consider the client's needs

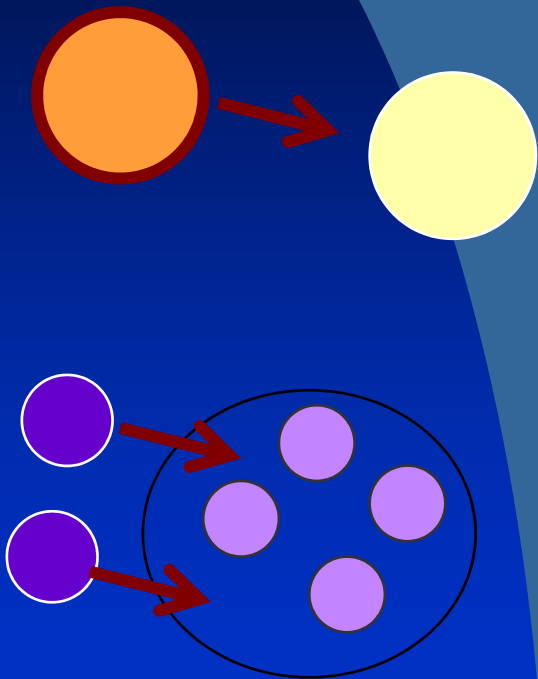
Endless flexibility

Joint expertise and learning



## Authority/expert centered orientation

### *Besserwisser*



- Interaction is strongly directed by the goals dictated by an expert or by the institution.
- A worker has to motivate and educate the client as he or she "doesn't know his or her best" (Weckroth 1992).
- One-sided relation where only a little emphasis is placed on the view of the client.
- The expert's compete with each other on their knowledge.

## N.B.

- Responsibility cannot be forced.
- Sustainable change requires independent thinking.
- Power can also be invisible (eg. The problems in the relationship are connected to the client. If the relationship is working, the expert gets the "credit". (c.f Mönkkönen 2002).

# Client-centered orientation:

## 1) Client- orientated interaction

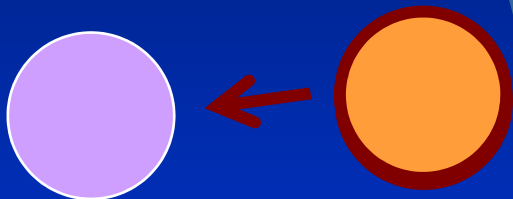
The concept as such is unclear.

That is why we divide client -centered orientation into two different categories:  
client orientated interaction and client -based orientation.

The concept has a positive origin, where the following features are emphasized:

- Respectful attitude towards the clients
- Better understanding of the needs of the client
- Focus on the client's situation, not on the needs of the institution.
- Reinforcing client's resources
- Seeing client as the active party

*Considering the client's needs*



## N.B.:

Customer-orientation in business is not the same as that in social work.

Social work is based on caring for the client independent of his or her ability to pay.

Client centered orientation must not mean deep and blind involvement in the client's world nor should the expert's responsibility be forgotten.

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# Client - centered orientation:

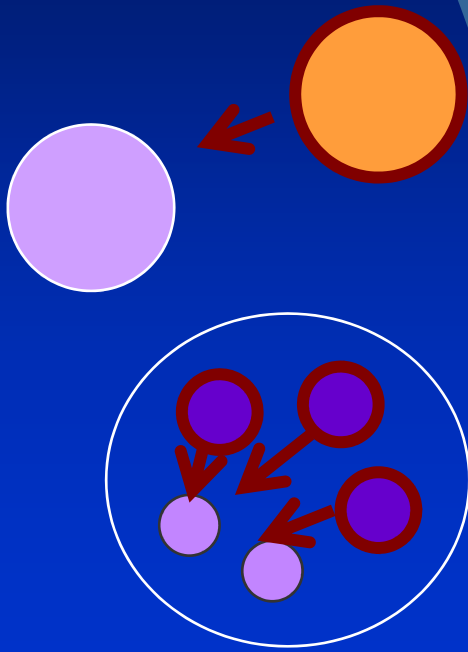
## 2) Client-based orientation

It is not good for the client, if the worker is "too" understanding and too sympathetic and does not take any responsibility and ignores reciprocal personal effort

The worker focuses only on the positive aspects and is not willing to raise any negative issues nor take a stand (e.g threat to confidential relationship)

*" The client is provisionally right" (Jope Ruonansuu 2008)*

*Endless flexibility*

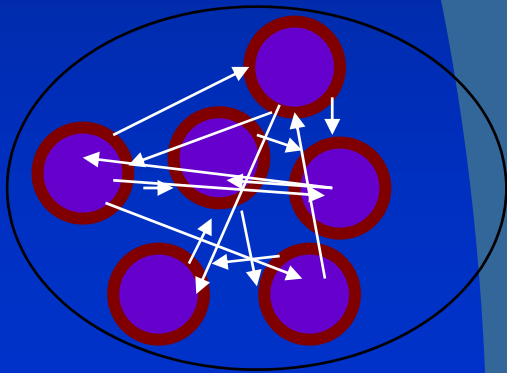
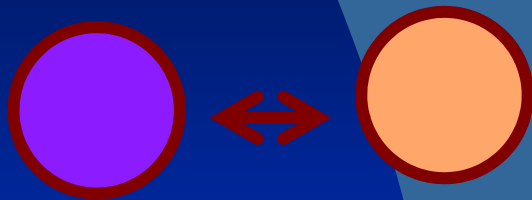


How do we create space for different voices?



# Dialogical interactive orientation

*Joint expertise*



In dialogue, the social worker and the client are jointly building knowledge and finding new ideas. Dialogue cannot be based on one person's terms only – nor the worker neither the client knows the right answer beforehand.

Dialogue is thinking together, but also constructing knowledge together.

Listening is one element of dialogue, but dialogue also needs responding to the other person's views.

'Not knowing' is an important element of dialogue.

Idea of individualistic expertise - collective expertise?

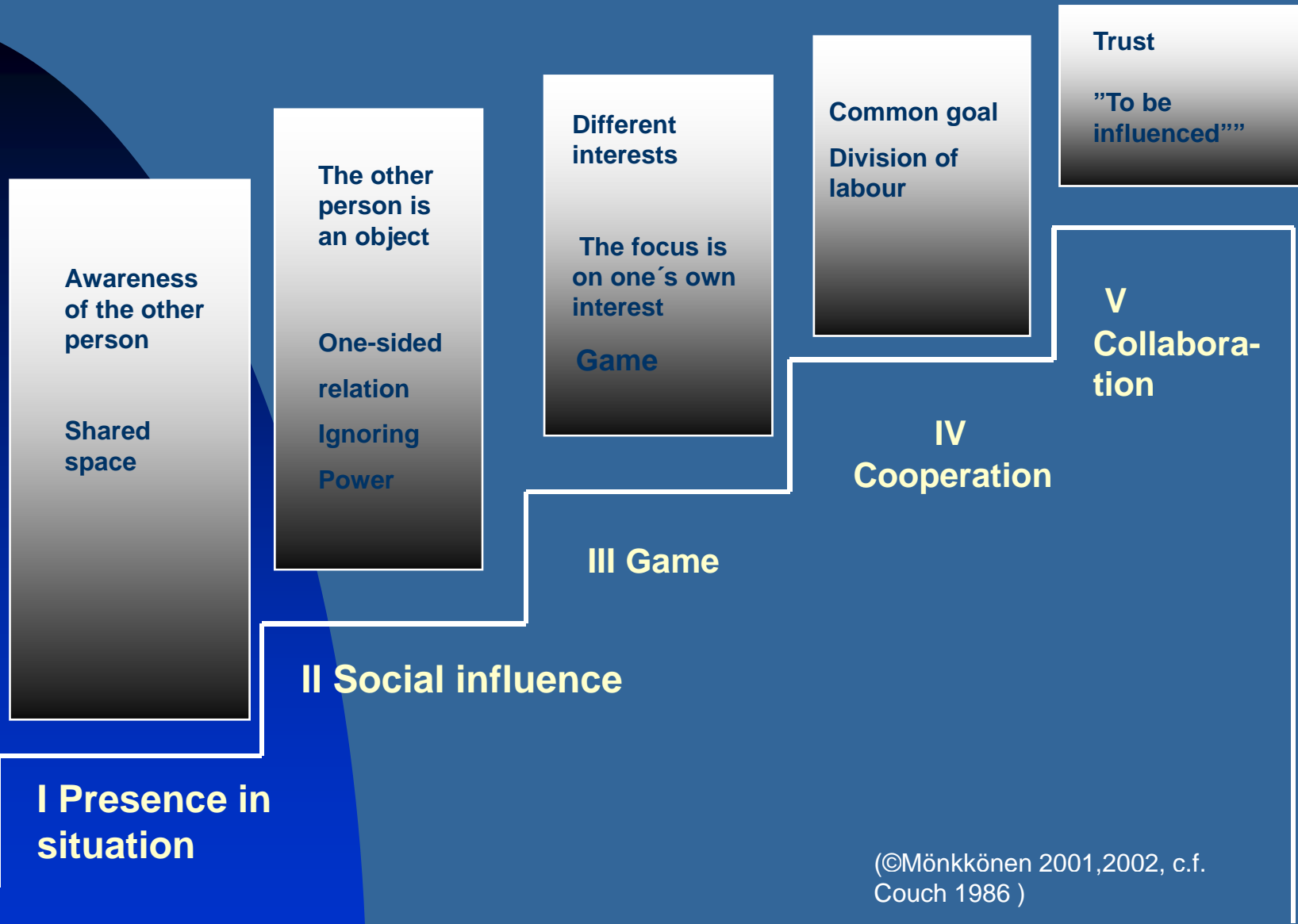
## N.B.:

- Justification to be in dialogue is not created automatically (it needs trust, you can never know when it will be reached).

Dialogue is not only language (words and speech). It is based on relationship. (e.g non verbal communication)

- ***What kind of obstacles for dialogue do we have in our current institutions and attitudes?***

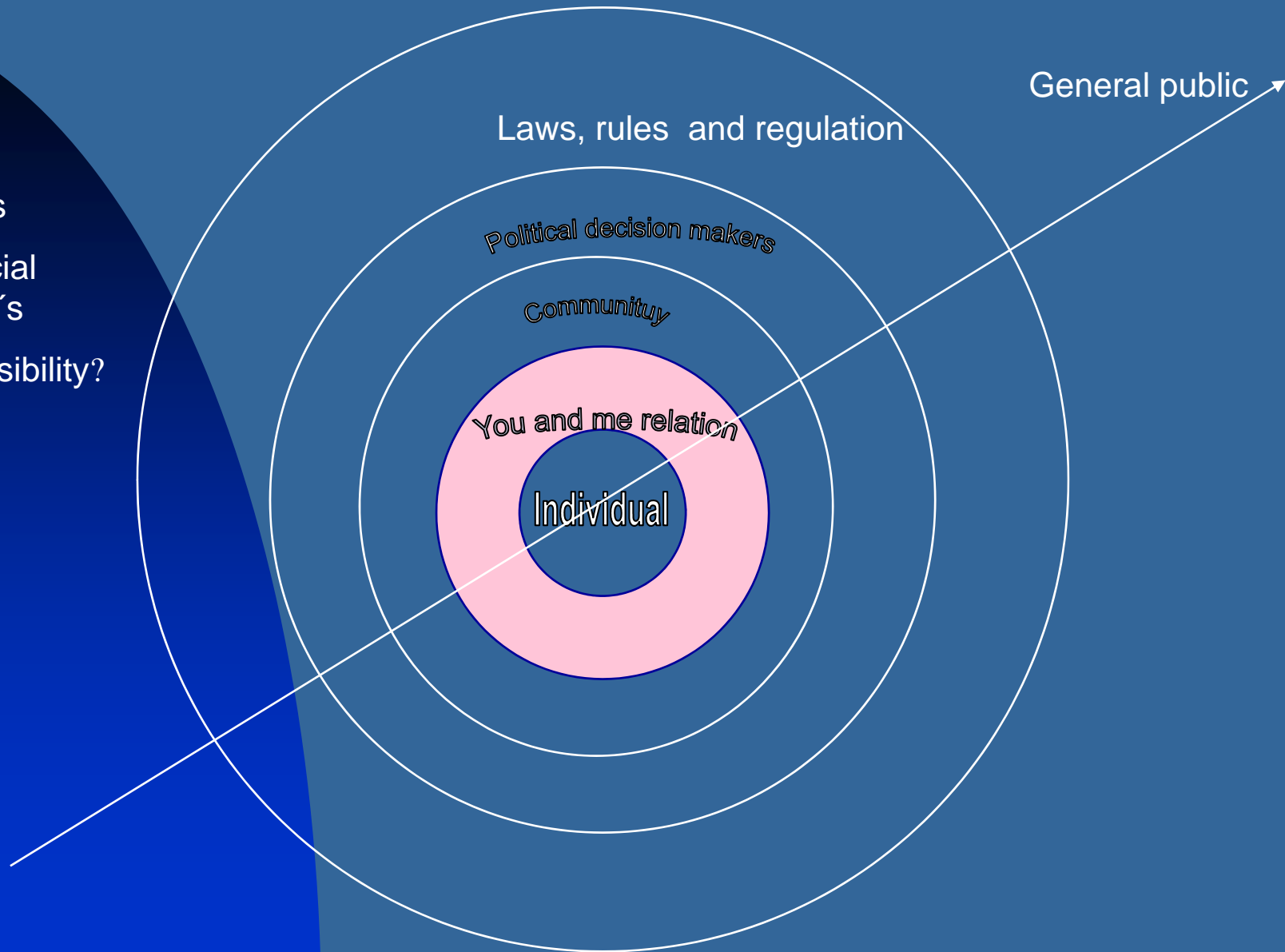
# Various levels in social interaction



(©Mönkkönen 2001,2002, c.f. Couch 1986 )

# Different areas of dialogue

What is  
the social  
worker's  
responsibility?



Each person is unique and going somewhere . The client is the captain, but the worker is the helmsman. The target should be constructed together.



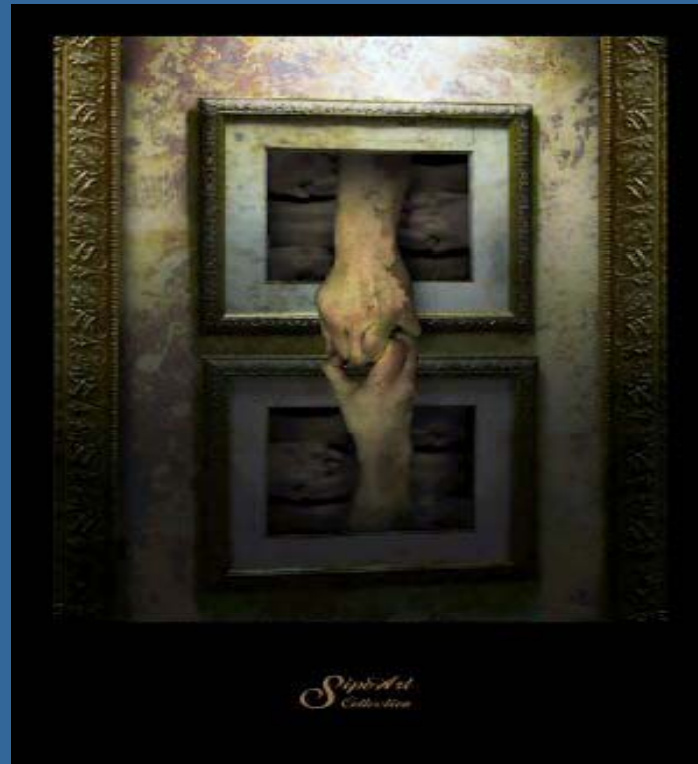
(Sipo Art collection 2005)

Thank you for your attention!

Contact information:

[anna.metteri@uta.fi](mailto:anna.metteri@uta.fi)

[kaarina.monkkonen@te-keskus.fi](mailto:kaarina.monkkonen@te-keskus.fi)



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