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# Professional development at the workplace: lessons from a didactic intervention within a farmers' advisory organization in France

Paul Olry, Marianne Cerf, Sophie Duhamel

# Scientific issue

## Professional development : a constant focus in education sciences

- **focus on the subject**
  - As part of a team : professional development occurs within a team or a collective which routines and norms shape the work (Dubar, 1994; Wittorski, )
  - As constantly interpreting his (her) environment : professional development occurs in the course of action through a permanent reflexive journey (Leblanc, Poizat, Flandin)
- **focus on the workplace environment** : affordance of the environment and subject engagement are key for professional development (Fuller & Unwin, Billett, Filliettaz) as long as participatory processes are organized

- *Studies focus on the development process rather than on the content to be developed*
- *While the main characteristics of the devices supporting professional development are well described, less attention is paid to the way to combine them over time to support content ownership*

# Social issue

- From conventional to agro-ecological farming under economic, environmental and regulatory pressures
- A (r)evolution for farmers : new skills to cope with the intrinsic uncertainty and complexity of the agro-eco-systems (from chemical and mechanical inputs to tuning biological processes)
- A (r)evolution for advisory boards:
  - less driven by farmers' day to day demand, more in line with policy requirements
  - less focused on « hot problems during the season », more driven by « designing a robust and resilient agroecosystem » in line with farmer overall strategy

**An issue for the farm advisors : how to cope with these sometime controversial evolutions ? Does it need marginal adaptation or radical change of their way to perform their work ?  
If radical change : what and how ?**



# Social question

The advice can not anymore be standardized and its content is to be elaborated with the farmer

from « giving an advice » to « holding an advice »



- A new relation to build (position, timing)
- A new inquiry on farm and farm practices (paying attention to specificity of the agroecosystem)
- New uses of back office support (less standardized solutions, more systemic reasoning in a collaborative way)

→ How do advisors deal with these cognitive and conative costs and how to support them ?

# Our problematic on professional development a call for a didactic intervention

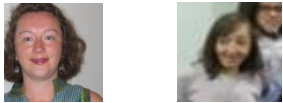
- **Didactic dimension** : A need for new conceptualizations in real work situations (Pastré, Vergnaud, Piaget)
- **Intervention dimension** : enabling professionals to reassess their professional norms and routines in light of new working challenges and to develop collectively new ways to think and perform their work
- At the core of the didactic intervention : *self work analysis* within a *collective of peers* supported by *a facilitator* who monitor the intervention pathway

## **Case study : a device built at the interface of 4 advisory boards to support advisors in their professional development regarding agronomic advice**

- from delivery of technical decision rules to a shared understanding of agroecological situations, problems, available levers, e.g. a new common knowledge on the way to build a field inquiry (agroecosystem diagnosis)
- from optimizing farmers routines to awareness of their inadequacy regarding agroecological issues (developing a shared and operational agronomic reasoning)

# Fieldwork and methodology : the CHANGER case study

**Two advisors (facilitators)** developed a device to promote the collective thinking, based on work analysis of advisory situations which the participants encounter and share thanks to narratives or collective experiences.



Seminars (two days)

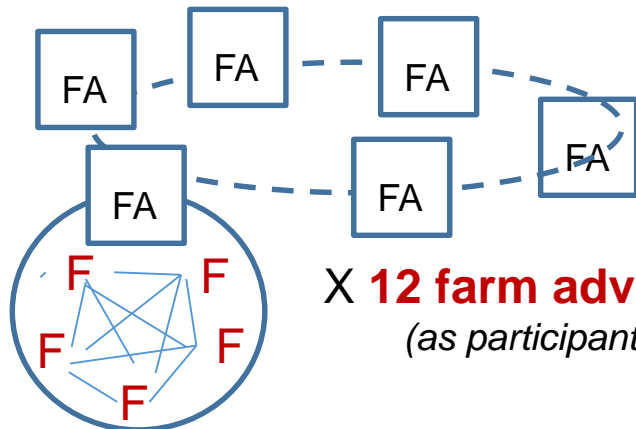
\$1 \$2 \$3 \$4 | S5 | S6

Year 1

Year 2

Year 3

SF



X 12 farm advisors  
(as participants)

X 8  
devices

**Research team 5 people different expertise**

. Organizing back-up sessions for the device facilitators

. Conducting research  
data collection: interviews, photos, audio and video-recording, written traces, drawing traces

data analysis : of the intervention, the debates among advisors, their impacts on their individual and collective professional development



*Agroconseil : a guide in which basic notions are given regarding work analysis, grids are proposed to analyze advisor-situation coupling in a given situation, questioning to support the narrative of an experienced situation, to reflect upon advisor activity*

# A grid to analyze the didactic intervention and its developmental effects

Séminaire	Construire le dispositif et la culture commune	Regarder votre métier	Travailler sur vos mandats	Travailler sur vos situations	Travailler sur leS tourS de plaine	Interagir								
date														
date														
date														
au croisement des lignes et des colonnes : dire ce qui a été fait pour cela, dire ce que les animatrices cherchaient à faire débattre, dire ce qui ressort des débats														
le faire pour la présentation seulement sur un séminaire et pour l'ensemble des séminaires sur une seule colonne. Cela doit permettre de pointer ce que ce type de dépouillement permet d'analyser														

Reste à faire

# Findings 1 : What did the advisors learn individually and collectively in this 3 year process ?

- Change in intervention purpose : From enabling advisors to take ownership of Agroveil to enabling them to change their mindset regarding their activity which meant to feel free individually or collectively :
  - To develop an inquiry on their own activity
  - To differently value agronomic facts or relational configurations
- Change in advisors position and reasoning : collective debates on the way to build field tour interactions or to position themselves regarding their terms of reference (from their organisation, the farmers, other stakeholders such as water boards) create an opportunity
  - to move from taking professional norms as granted, to questioning what is valuable for oneself or collectively.
  - develop advisory content in collaboration with the farmers. While most of them identify the need to frame the interaction scene differently some did achieve to create farmers' ownership on a more systemic inquiry while others stick to a technical position

# Findings2 : The drivers of a didactic intervention

- **A specified perimeter**: Cropping systems and agroecological transition
- **A agreed purpose among all the participants**: it develops in the course of the intervention as gaining ownership and capability for transforming their way to be an advisor and to perform the advisor-farmer relation.
- **A collectively build goal** : to explore the advisor-advisory situation coupling
- **A dynamics supported by 3 principles**:
  - *reflexivity* : individual (what is my ZPD? ) and collective (what are the new patterns which enable us to support farmers in their transitions)
  - *Progressivity of the exercises* : support for the collective inquiry on the way to value situations characteristics (norm debates) and the inquiry on the oneself coupling with a situation.
  - *Intermediary objects* : tangible tools which support the valuation process and its role in the activity (Agroseil grids and language, drawings, field tour...)

## Conclusion

neither adult training nor workplace learning but a third lane....creating opportunities for didactic interventions

- **Opening a third place** : a regular space in which discussions take place on professional practice rather than on technical issues
- **Identifying third facilitators** : peers who step aside and work with their peers to support their continuous professional development through reflecting upon their experience
- **Building third tools** : intermediary objects enabling a shared focus on activity analysis

A need to offer back-up to facilitators of such didactic interventions.