

Good Work

The Ethics of Craftsmanship

Harry Kunneman (ed.)



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Part II: METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

Handling Domestic Violence

The power and fragility of tacit knowing

Sietske Dijkstra

Introduction

In this paper I reflect on the study *Hidden Treasures* as a case study on tacit knowing. The study deals with what good professionals do and what clients experience with regard to domestic violence in an interagency perspective (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 2011, 2nd print). The starting point of this practice-based study is the Polanyian (1966) saying that ‘we know more than we can tell’. This refers to the fact that in every day practice the acts of social professionals are based on, and driven by, a lot of implicit knowing. Tacit elements can be shown in gestures, body movements, and expressions and in the virtue of skills or empathic or reflexive behaviour. Personal qualities are used to build up craftsmanship and applied in professional practice. There, in this application, new ways of knowing are developed (Sennett, 2008). In the first section I summarize the starting points, the leading questions and the methodological design of this study. Then I continue to explore tacit knowing further, using Polanyi’s theory of perception to underpin the importance of learning and discovery, creating a joint meaning that adds new perspectives, ways or meanings.

In the second part of the paper examples are given from both professionals and clients to illustrate the challenges of good work and the crucial principle of indwelling. Also the backside of growth is addressed, where meanings are destroyed and knowing is fragmented instead of integrated. We focus on a detail and we miss the whole. This leads to remarks on both the power and the fragility of tacit knowing and the question of transfer. Is it possible to bring tacit knowing in a stable position in the outside world? If we make practice based knowing explicit, will it stay as meaningful as it was, or can it become a hollow trunk without depth? How can we deal with complexity and with cooperation here? And does reflexivity necessarily lead to better work of practitioners? How do we face and bridge the gaps in knowing here, how do we cut overlap and how do we create space and skills for the unknowing and for new ways?

In the third part, after some preliminary conclusions, there is space for reflection on how to capture tacit knowing. Tacit knowing in social professional practice will always be a hidden treasure, never easy to get. To discover it asks for commitment, focal points, longer-term investments, common goals and endurance. Tacit knowing can be found in mind maps, in metaphors, in teams of professionals and in non-verbal behaviour and brought to light in being confronted with a piece of art or a drawing. So-called quick wins can destroy good work. Like Sennett (2008) states, if we are able to connect *Erlebnis* – the inner experience- with *Erfahrung*, the outer experience or deed, we help to create conditions in which comprehension deepens and tacit knowing, craftsmanship and team work can grow.

The need for good work

Social professionals act often on the compass of experience and practice based knowledge. Skilled professionals express their craftsmanship in refined practice: They usually show more than they tell. This is what makes observation and participatory research or working as a trainee so rich: it can bring the beauty and the depth of the work to surface, giving clues for transfer. The tacit or hidden dimensions of the work are wrapped up in stories and embedded in practices. The knowing of the social professions is furthermore embodied and can be viewed in gestures, body language and in physical interaction, for instance play or ensuring safety. Even when the tacit knowing is shared in doing good work, it is not necessarily completely explicit, nor put into words (Sennett, 2008). Good work reveals the secrets of a good functioning team of professionals. The craftsmanship expressed can have the vocabulary of acts or deeds only. It can be self-evident within the team or stay hidden from consciousness. To articulate the hidden I therefore started to ask professionals in ‘shelter work’ about the work of colleagues they really liked as good workers (Dijkstra, 2008, 33/34). Shelter work refers to crisis centres, long residential stay and different kinds of services for abused women, sometimes the partners and their children. It turned out that group interviews were helpful in surfacing the good work in teams of shelter workers. They crosscut the use of personal qualities within the framework of a professional context and what is needed to let the work flourish (Verhoeven & Dijkstra, 2010).

To be a social professional in the field of domestic violence is rather a difficult job. The quality of work is important and good work is essential: it can reduce risk, break destructive patterns and can even save lives. Failures bring costs for the society and harm professional practice (Dijkstra, 2008). Professionals in the field of child abuse and partner violence have to deal with complex, sometimes dangerous work, and are usually working under time pressure and in a situation of crisis. There can be limited information or comprehension. Despite the efforts professionals take, they cannot guarantee or claim a positive outcome. It is difficult to break the cycle of abuse. Therefore the work is characterized by uncertainty and urgency. In order to do good work, professionals need to use both personal and professional standards. In a mixture they weigh and integrate these perspectives in the course of their daily practice. The work rests on continuous assessment, accuracy, tuning in to the target groups and their goals, explaining the work and acting carefully and firmly.

In our study called *Hidden Treasures* the leading question was to find out what good professionals do, and what clients experience, in dealing with domestic violence (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 2011, 2nd print). It was a bottom up study, addressing practitioners in daily practice on the work floor. We were very interested in finding good work, searching for good professionals, leaving the (transitional) space of ‘good’ open deliberately. Furthermore we added the (contrasting) perspective of clients. Thirdly, a helicopter view was taken by studying literature on tacit knowing, and articles on developments in the field of domestic violence to which respondents referred in the conversations. Besides examples of good work we also found barriers and gaps in knowing.

Knowing more than we can tell

The study can be considered as a case study on tacit knowing in the field of domestic violence. Starting point of our study on practice-based knowledge of domestic violence was Polanyi’s (1966) famous notion, uttered during the Terry lectures, that ‘we know more than we can tell’. Polanyi is referring to a surplus of meaning and knowing which cannot be explicitly stated in words, standards, or protocols. He refers to more subtle, fragile and highly personal ways of knowing, which are highly qualified but contextual. They are difficult to grasp and therefore not easily verbally transferred. An echo of Polanyi’s quote sounded in the words of a director of a women’s shelter in the Netherlands in 2007. She was convinced that the professionals working in the retreat knew what they were doing and were doing well for women and children: They gave protection, shelter and help. The main concern was that they were not able to provide explicit descriptions of this work, which she felt was relevant for the outside world. It was strongly felt to be good work. At the same time it appeared to be very vulnerable for external critique.

In our search for ‘Hidden treasures’ we tried to uncover this tacit dimension, using four basic assumptions as a starting point for shaping the study. First, the study is practice based and has an

interagency perspective: different professionals from different institutions and backgrounds need to work together. Second, the study is focused on lead professionals who are strongly linked to practice. Third, the experiences of clients are used as a mirror of reflection and confrontation, showing gaps, failures and good work. Fourth, the knowing of social professionals in practice is a larger domain than words can express.

Research questions and design

We chose a qualitative research design for our study (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 2011). Four research questions were formulated:

1. What does a *good professional* do in practice when dealing with domestic violence?
2. What does a good professional consider to be the core of this approach?
3. What does *international literature* say about tacit knowledge of social professionals on the work floor and what does Polanyi say about that?
4. How do *clients* value good and appropriate care and what bottlenecks do they experience?

We dealt with the research questions in three methodological ways. We studied the literature of tacit knowledge in social professions. Secondly, we interviewed clients as well as lead professionals. The individual interviews with three clients, all parents, two females and one male, were held on their experiences with partner violence, child exposure and help seeking. The interviews with fifteen lead professionals were held as questioning dialogues; nine of them were used as portraits of good work in the book *Hidden treasures*. The lead professionals worked in four sectors: the shelter work (3), care (3), police (1) and vocational education, social studies/applied sciences (2).

Polanyian theory

In the preparatory phase of this research, I encountered the famous and enigmatic Polanyian quote 'we know more than we can tell'. It seemed to connect well with the idea that there is a treasure to be found in professional practice, but the treasure is hidden in the dark and just switching on the light cannot solve the puzzle. Beside the treasures, there are also stiff routines present on the work floor. They do not lead to any further development or learning but create barriers for open minds and change. In order to understand more of the work of Polanyi, I started to search for more of his publications, and studied especially the part on Tacit Knowing from *Knowing and Being* (1969) and *The Tacit Dimension* (1966). Polanyi (1891-1976) was a Jewish scientist, born in Budapest, with a long and outstanding interdisciplinary career in chemistry, sociology, psychology and philosophy in Berlin, Manchester and Oxford, whose thoughts were especially welcomed in the USA, Chicago. Polanyi (1966; 1969) is very clear that all knowledge is either tacit or rooted in the tacit and he admits the indefinable powers of thought. Polanyi (1969) states: A wholly explicit knowledge is unthinkable (p. 144). Tacit knowing, according to Polanyi (1969), is indeed mysterious: it can be discovered without our being able to identify what it is that we have come to know (p.142). So, we know a person's face very well, but cannot tell how we recognize immediately the well-known face, nor can we explain how we ride a bike. Tacit knowing is highly personal, hidden, sometimes unconscious, non-articulated, embodied or expressed and it can be without words.

To understand the tacit dimension it is crucial to study Polanyi's dynamic theory of perception or awareness and the tacit powers of it. *Trained perception is basic to all descriptive sciences* (Polanyi, 1969, 139). He distinguishes two ways of perception: the focal (proximal/particulars) and the subsidiary (distal/the whole). They have different functions. The subsidiary is always present and represents the periphery seen from the corner of my eye; the focal brings it articulated to my special attention. The latter is selected, on the foreground and articulated where the subsidiary is

unspecifiable and embedded, giving soil and space for the focal. The cooperation of the focal and the subsidiary is of crucial importance: together they integrate two ways of seeing. In a fusion they create a joint meaning of a quality not yet present. Polanyi (1969) speaks then of discovery, growth of science and new paths. He praises the speed and complexity of tacit integration and compares the logic of perceptual integration with a model for the logic of discovery (139). Further, he remarks that only tacit knowing can solve a perceptual problem. Meek (2011), who studied Polanyi for years, mentions that this new insight can take shape of an 'Oh, I see it' moment. After a struggle to find an undiscovered pattern that relates the particulars, the insight of the pattern changes the former particulars and they become clues we rely on. We look at them in a new way, may be even see future manifestations. So we continue a 'never ending adventure of coming to know' (Meek, 2011, 75) or 'an ever-deeper understanding of a comprehensive entity' (Polanyi, 1969, 125).

The meaningful fusion shows the power of tacit knowing and the great potential for learning and discovery. On the one hand it leads to greater coherence, to growth and understanding of the whole. In other words, to integration, a fruitful union of doing and thinking. On the other hand though, there is the permanent danger of destroying the coherence, exchanging it in favour of a detail or a fragment, leading to disintegration in which one fails to re-integrate. This collapse of knowing illustrates the fragility of tacit knowing. Tacit integration leads to transformation; disintegration leads to fragmentation. The focal can lead to isolation and meaninglessness.

The possibility for human beings to integrate knowing is explained by the crucial principle of indwelling. It is an internalizing experience taken in by the body and expressed by the body, in mastering a complex problem or in the virtue of a skill by skilful incorporation. We extend ourselves. By taking in we are not looking anymore at something but attend from within to things outside. In a positive cycle it results in increasing comprehension. Polanyi uses here the creation of a Gestalt, where the whole is more than all the particles, has a surplus.

I call this subsidiary ability tacitly integrated by social professionals handling domestic violence expressed by a mind map *rooted knowing*, ('geworteld weten') which comes from rehearsal and knowing by experience, contrasted with uprooted knowing (in Dutch: 'ongeworteld weten' or 'oppervlakkig weten'), just taken from a protocol or a checklist. Protocols or rules without any reflection or training can become a danger for good work because they lack roots and therefore also memory and context.

Examples of reflections on good work for clients

Three clients, one male and two females, were interviewed on their experiences with domestic violence and the help they found. They were rather critical about the help: it was often fragmented, cutting their stories into pieces, isolating parts of it, missing the whole. The male accounts the paradox that youth care and child protective services were checking on his children, but overlooked his needs and did not reach out for support and help:

After my ex was arrested the professionals of youth care told me that the children were not removed. There was no direct danger for them. They did not think about me being violated by my ex-wife. Then, and still now, I need good support and aid and did not receive help. I neither felt seen nor heard (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 2011, 96).

The ex-husband of one female client was convicted and had a restraining order. Nevertheless, he was often stalking his ex-wife and refused help for the children. Despite the fact that the boys were harmed and had witnessed daily severe incidents of partner abuse, the judge concluded there should be a visitation every fortnight. It took several years and a lot of paperwork and proof to undo the custody:

The judge did not consider the backgrounds (of the partner abuse and the detention, SD). Partner violence in custody is not taken into account. My sons do not want to see their father (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 2011 (127/128).

The second interviewed female took her reflection on the healing skills and attitude of the therapist as a role model for her own work as a social professional in building relationships that really count:

She was really there for me, gave me attention and confronted me, if necessary. Her deep humanity was expressed in her whole attitude (...). Because I fully trusted her, I was able to dive into the deep (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 61/62).

This account is a powerful example of what Meek (2011) in her book *Loving to know* describes as an interpersonal epistemology: knowing is always interpersonal and is 'knowing on the way': we transform in meeting.

The accounts of the clients presented here who had to deal with partner violence and child abuse speak of counterparts or barriers in which professionals were lacking of time, attention and care. This resulted in a lack of contact in which they received fragmented instead of inclusive help. So there was not enough (professional) awareness or tacit understanding of their complex case to put their stories in a meaningful and knowing context. Unfortunately, trauma is indwelt too. This adds to the fact that clients usually remember the past violations in bits and pieces. Trauma narrows awareness and impairs memory (Dijkstra, 2000). So there is also a disconnection from the perspective of those who were involved in the domestic violence. Trauma is a destroyer of coherence and the body keeps the score. Reading the client means understanding the narrative and the logic in the behavior, connecting it to their needs. Herman (1994) explained that in order to heal, the powerlessness and the isolation need to be transformed into power, self-worth and connectedness(255).

Examples of good work of professionals

The lead professionals have by experience an in-depth inside view on violence in relationships and a passion how to learn from it. The challenge they face is to connect this inside view with the outside world in a meaningful and refined way that makes further development and implementation possible. That means they have to explain the daily work to many partners, using explicit language, without reducing complexity and with attention for the headlines and the detail. It is a kind of psycho-education for a broad and diverse audience:

The language of perpetrator and victim does not fit to bring forward what is going on. We need to focus more on the dynamics in which couples can be caught, leading to destructive patterns (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 2011, 76).

The lead professional of the police reflects on the role of professionals in his team, preparing them to expect the unexpected, to be flexible and ready for change:

You don't prepare the professionals at the police in a particular subject, but you have to prepare them for change. Prepare them for the fact that you are never sure, that is the only certainty you have (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 2011, 136).

A lead professional from the shelter work has more practice based concerns in getting the change realized on the work floor, stating: '*We need to move from thinking to doing*'. And '*Examples can become cliches*'. Skilled observations need to be practiced and made explicit to be able to learn from it. They can be alternated with reading, writing, experimenting. To keep on learning there is a need to ask for client feedback.

The educational professional argues that the attitude towards change is crucial to be and to stay innovative:

By experience you have the intention to act from the same perspective. That is a danger. You cannot on your routine give help in the same way for forty years (Dijkstra en Van Dartel, 2011, 106/107).

Organizations have to give the time and spaced needed for professionals to grow in their work. This professionalism is often a goal they admire, but the circumstances are counterproductive. Acceleration and reflection in and after action can be rather antagonistic forces. Skills need rehearsed to ripen and to make reflection and imagination possible (see Sennett, 2008, 328). It is obvious from our study hidden treasures that lifelong learning in both the subject of domestic violence and the skills, attitudes and mind sets required are definitely needed to be able to do good work: '*We need long term investment in reflection and experiment*'.

Another lead professional in education of social work, illustrates the indwelling and open minded capacities of outreaching work:

The power of working in an outreaching manner is that professionals do what is necessary. They will not go to see a client with the idea of having a good conversation and doing an intake, but with an open mind, without knowing what to expect there. These professionals adapt to whatever they find there. (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 2011, 117).

The power and fragility of tacit knowing

So far our examples have shown both the power and the fragility of tacit knowing. Tacit knowing creates strong bonds, sharp intuitions (Munro, 2002) and good work in teams, but it also can be too fragile for making a transfer to the outside world. It can stay an Erlebnis without an Erfahrung (Sennett, 2008, 321). Then it is a shared attitude and mind-set for insiders but it will prove to be difficult to convince and explain to the outside world.

Power	Fragility
Very fast	Implicit
Refined, complex and powerful	Difficulty standing in the world
Innovation	No easy transfer
No fixed perspective	Learning by observation and doing
Transferable	Easily broken
Immediate	Not captured in words or procedures
Does not need words	Difficult to proof
Integrating	Falling apart
True/ Credibility	Needs (re)integration

Preliminary conclusions

‘All knowledge is personal knowledge’ is a Polanyian quote from *Knowing and being*, expanded by Meek (2011), who argues and underpins eloquently that all knowing is interpersonal knowing. In meeting, a mutual encounter, we transform. The journey unfolds by discovery through dialogue. In terms of developing interventions, without contact there is no fundamental change possible. These fundamental statements help the social professional to understand that explicit knowledge without any implicit addition is a hollow trunk or a stiff routine. Even explicit argumentation is based on tacit dimensions. Indwelling, articulation and (re)integration are necessary tools to build on the craftsmanship of social professionals and professionals who deal with domestic violence. Personal qualities in professional work are essential to build for good work and good practice. Faith in and sharing tacit knowing makes it more powerful. New discoveries can become apparent by passion to act in practice, by learning by doing and reflecting on it. The tacit plays a huge role in this development of good work in complex cases.

The (re)union of the two qualities of the Polanyian theory on perception might be the core of the knowing and learning of these professionals. The professionals apply and discover in practice. If the knowing is integrated it gets innovative (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995), meaningful and can create new coherence and deeper understanding. If knowing disintegrates, there is deskilling and destruction of meaning (Polanyi, 1969; Sennett, 2008). Quick wins are harmful, when it comes to the ethics of craftsmanship (Sennett, 2008). They undermine the self-respect and undo the long-term investment needed to develop tacit knowing. The short-term perspective puts good work under enormous

pressure. It leads to loss of contact, low trust and fragmentation, to what Sennett (2012) calls ‘feigned solidarity’ (169) and ‘uncooperative self’ (179 ff). If the two ways come together they unite *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung*, as Sennett (2008, p. 321), concludes. They bring together the inner experience -the indwelling principle of Polanyi- and the utter expression in the deed or the skill. Then, the passion and good work evolve and keep on turning the wheel of learning and discovery. There is an on-going fruitful interaction between not knowing, tacit and implicit knowing and explicit knowing (Sennett, 2008, p. 61).

Discussion and reflection

There is still more to know about tapping tacit knowing and using the potential for professional growth and understanding of difficult and sensitive social issues, like domestic violence. How can indwelling and articulation be used in educational practice for future social professionals? How can students be more trained in observation and participatory projects? How can we find ways of observing and interpreting verbal and body languages, in order to dive deeper? How can we use the dialogue and refine the ways of co-creating knowing? How can we learn more from needs and feedback of clients?

To discover tacit knowing some professional and organizational requirements have to be fulfilled. It asks for commitment, focal points, longer-term investment, common goals and endurance. Furthermore tacit knowing can be better expressed than verbalized directly. Tacit knowing can be found in mind maps, in metaphors and images, in teams of professionals, in client feedback and in interviews with skilled practitioners and analysing topics and patterns (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 2011), in reflecting on timing and images of crisis-intervention after partner abuse (Dijkstra, 2011), in learning from (stuck or fatal) cases (Van der Laan, 1995; Turnell & Edwards, 1999; Dijkstra, 2008), in naming the good work of colleagues and the qualities (Dijkstra, 2008), in (observing) non-verbal behaviour. And it can be brought to light in the confrontation with a piece of art or a drawing and an attitude of not knowing (Blom, 2009; Kunneman, 2012, 164 ff).

Methods to stimulate and uncover Tacit Knowing:

1. Questioning expert-practitioners or group interviews with workers of primary process on their desire to do their work well and concentrate on co-creating (Dijkstra & Van Dartel 2011; Verhoeven & Dijkstra, 2010).
2. Naming the qualities of good work of practitioners colleagues, reflecting on it and discuss it in the group (Dijkstra, 2008).
3. Reflect on (stuck) cases in teams and groups (Van der Laan, 1995; Signs of Safety).
4. Always go for detail, an example or a specification; be concrete and specific (see also Signs of Safety; Turnell & Edwards, 1999)
5. Don't miss the entity in the fragment (detail), so zoom in and zoom out and reflect on what you see (see Dijkstra, 2008; 2000).
6. Use clients' needs and clients' feedback to sharpen your approach and make sure clients systems are the heart of the help (Dijkstra & Van Dartel, 2011).
7. Cherish (good) interdisciplinary team work, encounters, slow questions, art and vitality in the social domain (building trust).

It is difficult, as Sennett (2012) points out, to do good work when the system radiates indifference and increasing speed leads to a lack of self-esteem and uncertainty. Good work (Sennett) and slow questions (Kunneman) are under continuous pressure.

In order to contribute to learning communities we continue to bring together experiences of practitioners of different backgrounds and agencies and mix them with young professionals and professionals to be and we continue to confront society and professionals with the accounts of people

who lived in intimate violence. In professional practice, in scientific debate and reflection and in the formal education of future social professionals a fundamental shift of attention is needed to learning, discovery and development of knowledge. Practice-wisdom (Tsui & Cheung, 2009), derived from craftsmanship needs to be one of the guiding principles.

We as professionals and as human beings need continuous efforts to see and to be the whole, even despite the fact that we just perceive fragments. The permanent acceleration is a serious danger. We need transitional space for slow questions to chew on and to digest (Kunneman, 2012) and we need to cherish teams and encounters in order to make good work rooted, skilful and sustainable.

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