Jan Tønnesvang & Nanna B. Hedegaard

QUALIFIED SELF-DETERMINATION
– what it is and how it can be used in practice

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This booklet is intended as an open access introduction to *the Model of Qualified Self Determination*, which is one of the cornerstones in the Integrative Vitalizing Psychology (IVP), developed by Jan Tønnesvang, who is a professor in Psychology at Aarhus University. Another model in IVP is *the Vitalizing Model*, which is also available as an open access booklet at Klim.dk. A third model in IVP is *the Quadrant Model*, which is developed by the American philosopher Ken Wilber. The Quadrant Model is essential in making Vitalizing Psychology an Integrative approach. A booklet that introduces to *the Quadrant Model* – what it is, and how it can be used in practice is also available for free download at Klim.dk

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Qualified Self-Determination
– *What it is and how it can be used in practice*

INTRODUCTION

This booklet describes the concept of Qualified Self-Determination and shows how this concept can be used in pedagogical and educational practice (Tønnesvang, 2002; 2012). For the professionals in these areas (e.g. teachers, pedagogues, youth counsellors and advisors etc.) the chapter will show how a set of models, based on the theory of Qualified Self-Determination, can be used to identify, analyze and work professionally with the development of basic life-competencies and life-challenges among children, youngsters, and emerging adults. The chapter further shows how the models can be used to analyze the pedagogical and educational systems in terms of how they sustain or hinder the development of the basic life-competencies in qualified self-determination. In that respect, the concept provides a tool for working from a resource-oriented perspective towards the development of life-competencies among children and youth.

QUALIFIED SELF-DETERMINATION - WHY IS IT A GOOD IDEA?

With the concept of Qualified Self-Determination, we are concerned with educational "Bildung-processes" from an integrational standpoint, where educational practice is connected to the development of four basic life-competencies. These four life-competencies are related to four basic life-dimensions in which people are supposed to develop competency if they are to succeed in becoming qualified and self-determined agents in their own lives. There are three good reasons why we consider the concept of Qualified Self-Determination useful as a framework for working in, for understanding, and for communicating about pedagogical and educational practices in relation to children and youngsters. These three reasons could be described under the following headlines:

1. **The concept captures the dual character of the basic life-competencies that are needed to live in a liberated, globalized world.**
   - ➢ QSD comprises both the qualificational and the self-determinational side of the life-competencies which should enable a person to self-regulate his or her life-course in both a technological and a socio-cultural sense.
2. **The concept can be considered meaningful at several levels.**
   - ➢ QSD can be differentiated (and used) vertically with respect to different levels of life-competencies and the corresponding different levels of pedagogical and educational practices.
3. **The concept is a form concept.**
   - ➢ QSD can be differentiated (and used) horizontally with respect to different pedagogical and educational contexts on the same level.

In the following, we will explain each of the headlines in a few more details.

1. The (dual) duality of the concept

Qualified Self-Determination contains the duality of qualification and self-determination as being the two central domains of pedagogical and educational practice. The duality accommodates the basic condition that we as humans exist in a world, where on one side there are demands (requirements) which determine that we (as participants in societies) need to qualify in order to function in and deal with the technological complexities of these societies and on the other side there are demands regarding the need for us to be self-determined in a participative creation of a meaningful existence both with and without others. Within the theory of Qualified Self-Determination, this duality results in a distinction between a technological life-dimension and a socio-moral life-dimension. These two life-dimensions are decisive for a person's life-realisation regardless of cultures. In order to live under these general conditions set by the life-dimensions, a basic, double-sided life-competency is required: a technical life-competency on the one hand and a political-ethical life-competency on the other. We can also term these two life-competencies Technicality and Sociality respectively.

Qualified Self-Determination as a concept, however, does not contain merely one duality. It has a second duality too. In other words, it has a **dual duality**. This dual duality captures the complexity of persons being outwardly directed in their life-realisation (which takes place in the technical life-dimension and the socio-moral life-dimension) while at the same time they are involved with their inwardly directed side, i.e. their inner, personal life-dimension. In these inwardly directed sides of the

duality, we can distinguish between a personal life-dimension 1, and a personal life-dimension 2. In personal life-dimension 1, one should develop a self-referential life-competency, i.e. self-reflection, perspective taking and the ability to connect things. We can also term this life-competency Reflexivity. In personal life-dimension 2, one should develop a phenomenological life-competency, dealing with feelings, desire, motivation and sensation. We can also term this life-competency Sensitivity.

In summary, this means that the concept of Qualified Self-Determination contains a qualificational side, a self-determinational side, an outwardly directed side and an inwardly directed side, thus providing a framework for formational educational and pedagogical practices which consists of four life-dimensions. Correspondingly there are four basic life-competencies.
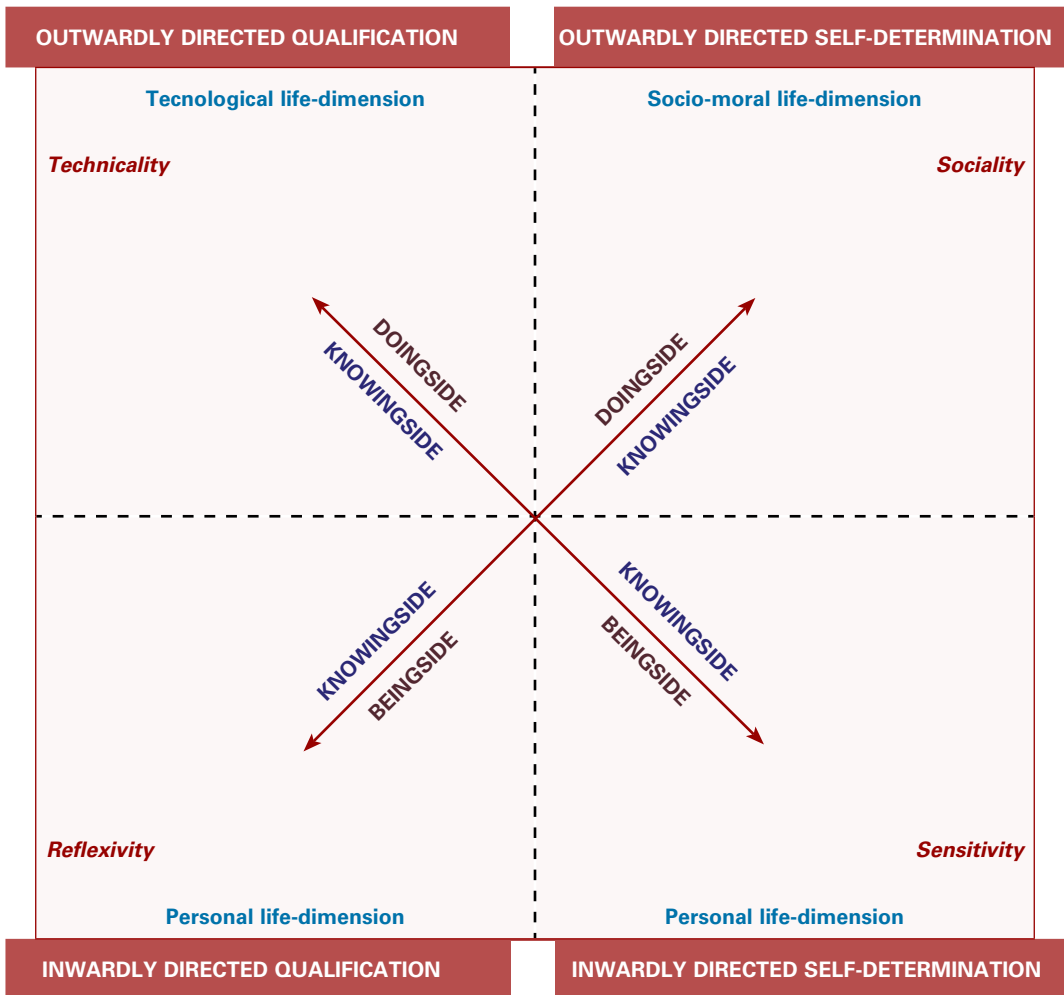
OUTWARDLY DIRECTED QUALIFICATION	OUTWARDLY DIRECTED SELF-DETERMINATION
Tecnological life-dimension	Socio-moral life-dimension
Technicality	Sociality
DOINGSIDE KNOWINGSIDE	DOINGSIDE KNOWINGSIDE
KNOWINGSIDE BEINGSIDE	KNOWINGSIDE BEINGSIDE
Reflexivity	Sensitivity
Personal life-dimension	Personal life-dimension
INWARDLY DIRECTED QUALIFICATION	INWARDLY DIRECTED SELF-DETERMINATION

Figure 1: The basic model of Qualificational Self-Determination.

The four life-competencies

Technicality (or technical life-competency) is concerned with the world of things and the skills needed to handle things. It consists of both a knowing side and a doing side. This means that the individual needs to acquire a basic knowledge about information retrieval and the handling of media and technology, as well as being able to act on the basis of this knowledge. Handling of technology should be understood in a broad sense as incorporating several different skills, such as the knowledge and skill-set required in order for the individual to be able to master the traditional school subjects (language, maths, etc.) and the skill-set and knowledge needed to work a computer or carry out physical exercises (playing a football) or creative (painting) and practical (cooking) activities, which also require special technical knowledge and abilities on that basis.

Key words: technicality, technical proficiency (academic skills) and other abilities.

Sociality (or political-ethical life-competency) is concerned with the world of sociality, culture and values and the skills needed to participate in this. Sociality also consists of both a knowing side and a doing side. The individual is supposed to develop knowledge of how to regulate social functioning, as well as being able to act on the basis of this knowledge. This life-competency gives the individual the opportunity to deal with and act according to the relation between individuality and community, and then doing this in a self-determining and morally sustainable way. In this context, relations are not merely 'you-and-me' relations, but also an understanding of what it means for a person to be part of socio-moral life-dimensions in a broader sense. Here for one, the individual becomes aware of situations within his or her environment and is invited to participate in these, which in turn could pave the way for the development of a democratic competency. As a formative educational, pedagogical, and social worker within this field, one's attention is focused on how the individual behaves and feels in the company of others, and which roles the individual adopts within a group - or ways in which the individual participates in and maintains friendships and dialogue.

Key words: sociality, social competency and social horizon.

Reflexivity (or self-referential life-competency) is concerned with the world of personal reflection, thoughtfulness, and perspective taking. Reflexivity, too, consists of a knowing side and a being side. This refers to the fact that the individual will develop knowledge of his or her self-considerations and ways of construing knowledge and connecting things, and that the individual will have more or less

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capacity to be (exist) with this knowledge. For example, one might be aware that one cannot play on the computer until 2am, if one is supposed to learn something the next day. The question here is, how the individual is capable of having this knowledge effect his way of choosing what to do (for instance to turn off the computer and go to bed). Reflexivity has to do with the individual's capacity to take different perspectives and to see connections across contexts and consequently to see relevance and find meaning in his or her activities and engagements. Another example could be that the child or young person comes to realize that knowledge (at school) forms the basis of how to meet the world later on in life, and that such knowledge therefore is both self-relevant and society-relevant. As a formative educational worker, one can have an attentiveness towards whether individuals are capable of taking a reflective perspective on themselves, and relate this to the status and state of their own competencies, by for instance showing that they understand cross-curricular projects and know their particular learning style, at the same time as being thoughtful towards other people and towards their own actions.

Key words: reflexivity, thoughtfulness and perspective taking

Sensitivity (or phenomenological life-competency) is concerned with the world of personal experience, emotionality, lust and unlust, and how the individual is in contact with and regulate these. Sensitivity also entails both a knowing side and a being side. While the knowing side deals with the individual's knowledge of his own feelings, desires, interests and motivations, the being side is about the degree of self-contact and the kind of self-regulating competencies that the individual has in these experiential areas. Sensitivity thus has to do with basic self-understanding (including feeling one's body), astuteness, aesthetic sense, integrity and the ability to express oneself, and determines whether the formative educational and pedagogical processes are getting in touch with the individual's personal depths. The practitioner within this area will have an awareness of whether the individual manages to express him/herself, and to what extent the individual manages to experience, understand, regulate and handle feelings, needs and motivations.

Key words: sensitivity, emotions, self-contact/regulation.

2. Levels of Qualified Self-Determination

The second good reason for using Qualified Self-Determination as a concept in pedagogical and educational practises is that it can be considered as something that happens at different vertical levels. This captures the fundamental condition

mentioned earlier that general life-dimensions and related life-competencies exist for all people throughout life, but that at the same time they will be different in different life-periods. Once the individual has achieved qualified self-determination at one level, the development will continue towards a new level, at which qualified self-determination has a different meaning to that which is attributed to it at the former level. In this way, a person can be qualified and self-determined to different degrees and in different ways according to age and depending on his/her cognitive development/ability, differences in personal style (traits, thinking style, etc.), and self-regulatory capacities.

The theory of qualified self-determination distinguishes between four basic levels, as illustrated in figure 2, and will be further explained after the illustration.
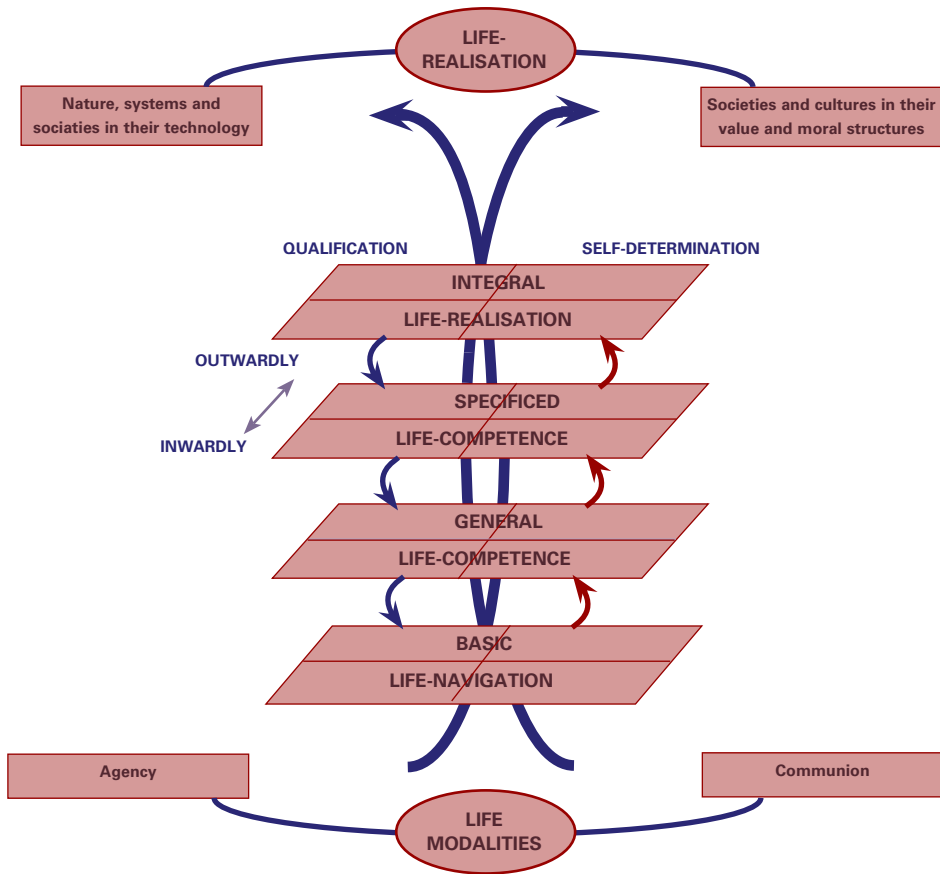

Figure 2. Levels of Qualified Self-Determination.

Basic life-navigation is the level at which capacities develop for basic trust and self-confidence, affect-regulation and perception of others, capacity for participating in structured and unstructured social settings, to use one's body in play and get dressed by oneself, and to use language in communication and to participate in playing games using basic social skills. Primarily, this level is concerned with preschool children and how their basic life-navigation skills develop through time spent with approving others and through activities that involve direction and some sort of purpose. The practitioner has an inclination to help the child make something happen and then to sustain the child's experiences of agency by making statements to (or with) the child to note 'that' this something actually happens or has happened. In doing so, the child will not only learn something, but also become aware of the fact that he or she has actually achieved something through his or her action, for instance with respect to there being a 'before' and an 'after' in an activity or learning process. Without using sophisticated reflectivity (which wouldn't be appropriate with normal preschool children), the practitioner can sustain the development of the child's sense of self-effectiveness and self-confidence by helping the child understand what he or she achieves through his or her actions.

General life-competency is the level at which basic capacities for participating in the educational, social, and cultural systems of society are developed. Broadly speaking, it has to do with capacities for working with others in groups, taking responsibility and leading and not-leading when appropriate. It has to do with developing capacity for self-expression, and for reflectivity, taking other people's perspectives on things, and for evaluating one's competencies, learning styles, and so forth in a process through which basic skills such as reading, writing, maths and history as well as sports and arts, etc. are acquired. The primary focus at this level is on children and young people in educational, pedagogical and social practices during their school years (preparatory school, middle school, senior school and continuation school) as well as in other institutions catering for children and young people that are concerned with the broad basic life-competencies that in general prepare a person to become part of a society. The practitioner at this level will guide and co-operate with the participators to support their development of all four competencies in ways that build up the participators' responsibilities for the process and the content of their learning and participation in the system. To do so requires a certain openness towards a continued self-reflection and a renewed way of looking at things as they develop.

Specified life-competency is the level at which capacities for entering and participating in different professional work- and life-domains develop and continue to be refined and transformed in further educational, professional and existential directions. At

this level, skills will be acquired that relate to specific work-areas, and the social competencies from the former level are transformed into more political-ethical dimensions related to the work-professions and to general attitudes towards life - in social relations, society, and around the world. The self-regulatory capacities from the former level are becoming more integrated with the values that step by step become more significant in the individual's life, and reflectivity will be more professionally anchored and - in the best-case scenario- more open towards ways of looking at things other than from one's own perspective. The primary systems at this level include all sorts of institutions for continued education (from universities to production schools), different job locations (companies and organizations), and locations for doing organized sports and arts and so on, which may contribute to sustaining the development of one or more of the four life-competencies, thus making the individual more self-determined in qualified ways in his or her continued participation in and contribution to the development of societal and cultural life and institutions.

Integral life-realisation is the level for the mature individual's formative developmental position. At this level, the individual creates entirety and integrity in relation to the life-competencies he/she has so far developed and organised throughout life. At this level, the individual really begins to understand how humans depend on opportunities for being creatively participating in social fields in ways that benefit the next generations. Here the individual orientates him/herself generatively (with a concern for the coming generations) and with more or less philosophical or spiritual attitudes towards life. In our society and in the world as a whole, there is a need for people who are able to realise their life in such a way that they, from positions of clear insight and with a capacity for action, use their talents and skills in new and innovative ways that can have a sustainable transforming influence on society - based on their wish to empower others and improve the conditions for life.

It is a central aspect of the theory of Qualified Self-Determination that the lower levels serve as a foundation for the higher levels, and that from the higher levels the individual can transform his/her relationship to life-experiences established earlier on at the lower levels. The point is that people continuously build on what they already know, and then use what they learn to perceive that which they knew (and were) before.

Another central aspect is that the four basic levels in figure 2 can be sub-divided further for the benefit of different institutions with different competency requirements. For instance this means that in school systems, where we are working with level (2) of general life-competencies, we can subdivide this level into e.g.

pre-school, middle school and senior school periods. This enables more detailed discussions and decisions to be made about what is required with respect to different groups of learners at different levels. There are two crucial points in working with qualified self-determination as a framework. One is that we should always be aware of the four areas of life-competency which the concept captures. The other is that each of the different levels of Qualified Self-Determination is something in its own right at the same time as being a preparation for moving on to the next level.

3. Qualified Self-determination is a form concept

The third good reason for using the concept of Qualified Self-Determination as a framework for pedagogical and educational practice is that it is a form concept. This means that the concept does not in itself determine or provide details of what should make up the concrete content of the life-competencies at different levels. Instead the concept is a structured map of basic life-competencies to which any educational or pedagogical activity (education, counselling, guidance and treat-ment) can be related. This map can work as meta-methodical framework providing a common language to attend to, discuss and coordinate actions in different ways of working with the development of the four life-competencies of children and young people in different settings and at different functional levels. The model of Qualified Self-Determination suggests that no one way and no one method should be applied in pedagogical and educational work with children and young people. *At the same time, the model provides a language to articulate, how different approaches involving different methods can be used to sustain meaningful disagreements about the best way to best support children and young people in their development of life-competencies.* Qualified Self-Determination is an overarching meta-methodical framework which can work as an integrative operative system to be applied across different contexts (horizontally), such as school, afterschool care, youth clubs and youth centres, independently of the potentially different educational content and focus applicable in those different contexts. That's pretty clever.

The following pages will provide some broad guidelines on how to apply three operationalized versions of Qualified Self-Determination with different practical purposes.

SYSTEM ANALYSIS: WHAT DO WE DO, WHAT CAN WE DO, AND HOW DO WE DO IT?

Model 1 is a model of how to use the concept of QSD for System Analysis. The model is supposed to make the systems around children and young people aware of the conditions they provide for developing the four life-competencies. Through system analysis, educational and pedagogical practitioners are taking a perspective on themselves and the systems they are working in, in order to create optimum conditions for the development of life-competencies, not just in general but with respect to the competency profile of the individual participator (child or young person). What kind of conditions for developing technicality, sociality, sensitivity, and reflectivity does the system provide for the individual? Are the conditions good enough? If not, are there any new opportunities, what should be done to realise those, and who should be in charge and take the first steps towards this realisation? Using a common model to share knowledge, create a common goal and cooperating to coordinate actions, gives better conditions for the actions to be mutually supporting instead of coincidentally, and perhaps competitively, related to each other. It means that *potential disagreements can become meaningful disagreements.* Meaningful disagreements are disagreements where there is basic logic and awareness of what we are talking about, from what perspective, and with what reference to the common model it is said and meant. To disagree in a meaningful way becomes particularly relevant when different professional groups are to discuss how they see a specific child or young person, in order to create a common goal for change, and based on that to coordinate actions to make the changes happen. The model does not demand that the system works with all the four life-competencies of the participators all the time, but it makes it mandatory to heighten the awareness in the system of which competencies are being worked with and which competencies are left out. In that respect, the model gives *the practitioner a tool for analysing , how as a system (including the adults, who work within this), he/she does what he/she does within the four life-dimensions that sustain in either good or bad ways the competency development of the participators in the system (the children and young persons).* Figure 3 shows the model for system analysis.

When we use the QSD model for System Analysis in relation to a specific individual or group, we sometimes insert the name or a picture of the individual (or group) in the middle of the model. This supports the investigation of opportunities by focussing on that which should be of primary concern in the discussion - namely conditions for the specific individual (or group) now visibly placed in the middle and therefore becomes more present.
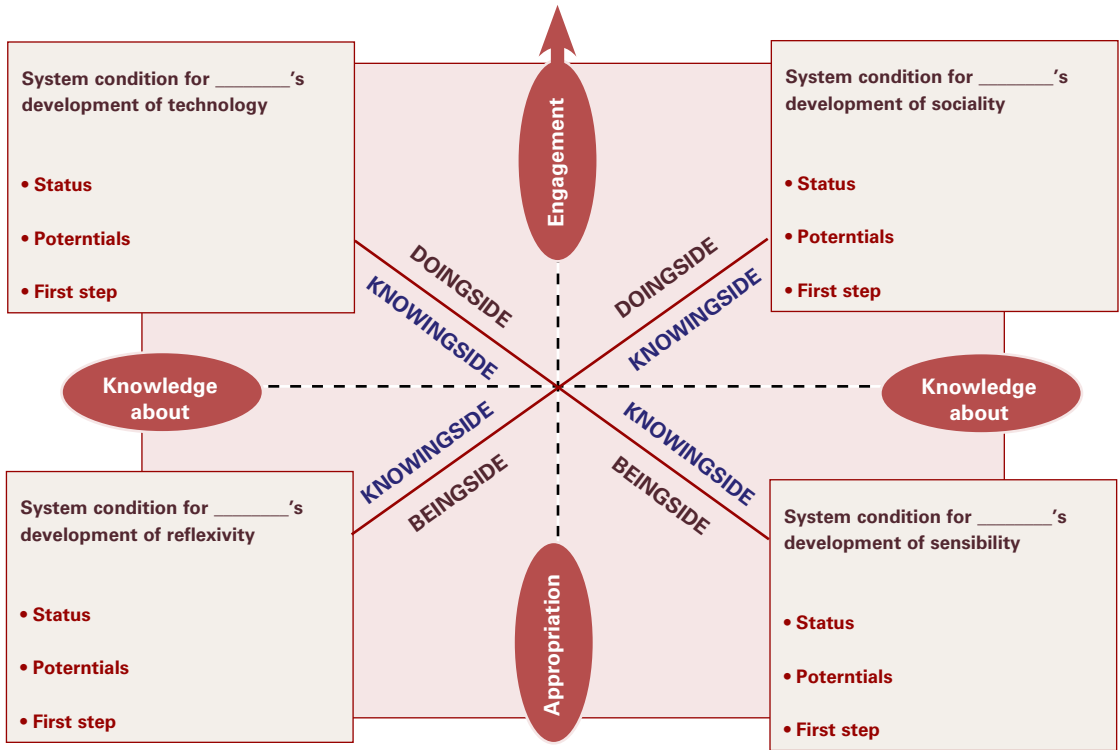
Figure 3. Qualified Self-Determination as a tool for Analysing Conditions in the System.

Neither in this model, nor in the other two models in the set, is it imperative to begin the investigation with a specific life-competency. In principle, it makes no difference if the investigation takes off from technicality, sociality, sensitivity or reflectivity. What does make a difference, however, is that the investigation is thorough and includes considerations of all four areas in the model.

When working concretely with development within the four dimensions of the model, the first step is to identify, which conditions exist in the system. This knowledge may then be used as a facilitator for reflecting and discussing possibilities for change in the conditions of the system, and subsequently, in order to actually create these changes, make sure that it is agreed what should be the first step, how, when, and with whom in charge. In the model, the elements in this process are captured with the three words: Status, Potentials, and First Step

Status: The word status refers to how the system provides actual conditions for the individual's life-competencies and their development. Areas to reflect on could be as suggested by the following questions:

> ➢ **What and how does the system offer conditions for the development of the individual's life-competencies?**
> ➢ **What kind of norm does the system represent in relation to the specific life-competency?**
> ➢ **What are the reasons for the system offering this kind of opportunities and conditions?**
> ➢ **Are there any limitations to this?**

Potentials: The word 'potentials' is supposed to encourage an open dialogue about which kind of possibilities might help to sustain development/change and which form they should take. Furthermore, the investigations of potentials are supposed to enable the a team to jointly consider how they can plan for the future - based on shared suggestions for alternative routes to take.

First step: The first step in the model is supposed to ensure that the considerations of the potentials are turned into concrete actions, meaning that the "discussion mode" is taken over by an "action mode". There are no specific criteria as to what a first step can be. It can be an agreement to go home and think. It can be an agreement to change a specific thing, etc. The crucial point is that an agreement is made about which concrete action should be taken, when the meeting is over. Based on a discussion of the first step, it is good idea, if the following can be agreed:

> ➢ **Who does what, in relation to what, when, how and together with whom?**
> ➢ **What shall be done, if this step fails - by whom?**

This said, it is important to be aware that the guidelines only provide ideas of ways in which to use the models. They are by no way mandatory. We are not providing a cook-book or a manual of "the right way" to use the models. We are suggesting ways in which it can be used given that we do (in a mandatory way) agree on the existence of the four areas of life-competency, and that they develop under the different conditions provided by the systems in which children and young people grow up and are educated. In the end, it is up to the professional practitioners to find the most suitable ways of using the model in their concrete practical context.

THE ECHO SOUNDER: WHO SEES MY PROFILE AND POTENTIALS?

While the model for System Analysis focuses on the conditions provided by the system for the development of life-competencies (for individuals and groups), the echo sounder is a 'graduation' model that focuses on the individual by differentiating between different functional levels of the individual's life-competencies.

The Graduations are constructed in such a way that within each domain of life-competency, it differentiates between four levels spanning from a surplus position, over a matching position, to a getting on position, and ending with a position where there is cause for concern. We call this latter position anOOPS-position. The terms for the positions have been allocated colours in order to distinguish between blue (which is surplus), green (which is matching according to standard), yellow (which is below standard and therefore signals that there is a need to get on with something if the individual is to reach the matching level in this area) and red (which is termed Oops to signal a serious cause for concern in this area).

When assessing functional levels of the Individual's life-capacities, we always run the risk of creating a deadlock situation for him or her. To be sure, the Echo Sounder can be used to stigmatise individuals due to their evaluated functional levels of competencies: "You are so and so on the different competencies which allows me to treat you in this or that way". This, however, would be a fundamental misunderstanding of what have been our intentions with the creation of the model. The model is meant to be a resource-oriented map for professional practitioners to make sure that they are having a broad view of both the challenges and the potentialities of the individual in regard to his or her different competencies. By identifying challenges and potentialities in terms of all four domains, the model is a tool for helping the professional practitioners to get the best opportunities to find ways of sustaining the individual's development by actively and cooperatively using the knowledge that they - through an Echo Sounder analysis - have acquired about the individual's competency-profile.

Though the Echo Sounder differentiates between levels in each of the four domains of life-competencies, it should be noted that the model in itself does not say anything about what kind of specific content or capacity corresponds to the different levels. Neither the Sounder nor the theory of qualified self-determination in itself determine in de-contextualised ways what should be classified as cause for concern or surplus or that which is in between these positions. The professional practitioners are supposed to use their knowledge about the kinds of functional capacities that should be considered as corresponding to the different levels of functional appropriateness in their specific educational, pedagogical or social con-

text - given the formal standards of the system they are working in. Based on that, they can communicate with each other - in a common language based on a shared reference - about their different views on what they see as state of the art, challenges, and resources regarding the competencies of the individual or the group. By sharing their knowledge and viewpoints in this structured way, they get a scrutinising background for creating common goals for the specific individual or the specific group of individuals. Using the model in this way, enables them to: 1. share their knowledge; 2. formulate common goals; and 3. coordinate actions so that they are mutually sustaining instead of negatively competing against each other.
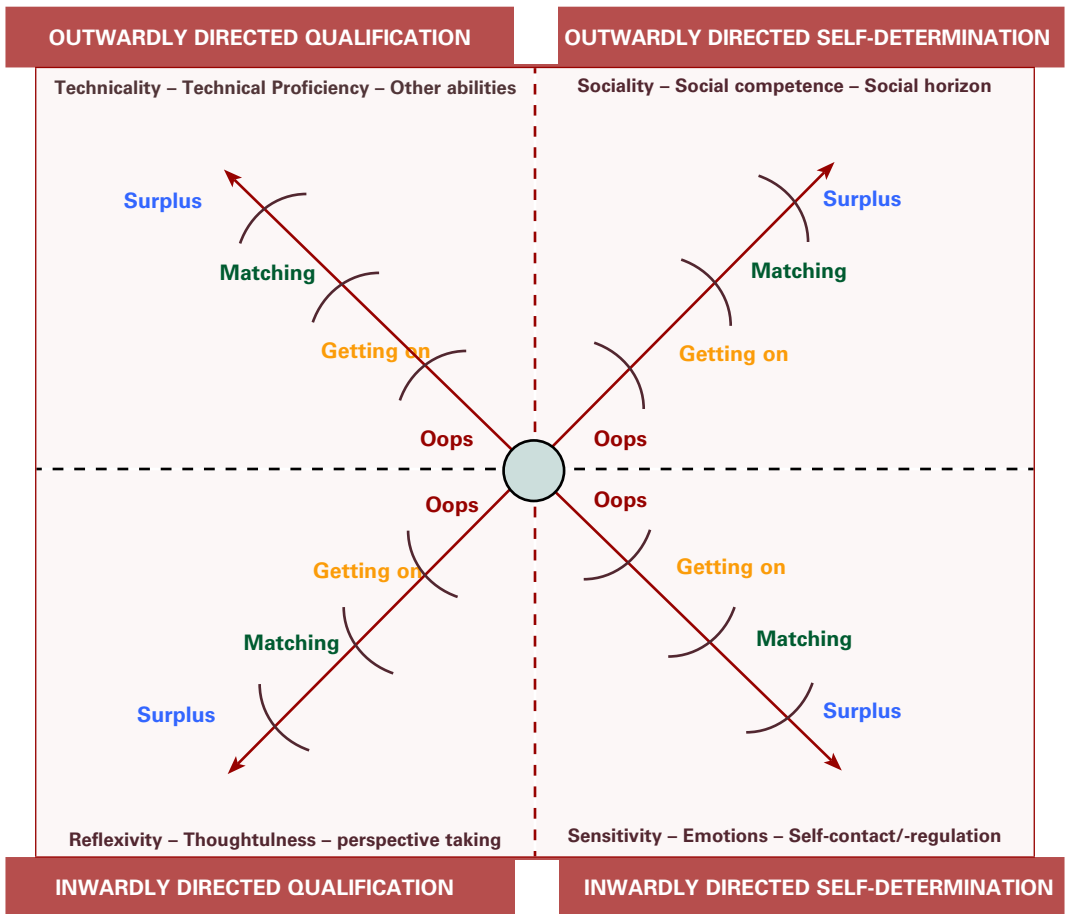

| OUTWARDLY DIRECTED QUALIFICATION | OUTWARDLY DIRECTED SELF-DETERMINATION |

Technicality – Technical Proficiency – Other abilities

Sociality – Social competence – Social horizon

Surplus

Matching

Getting on

Oops   Oops

Oops   Oops

Getting on

Matching

Surplus

Reflexivity – Thoughtulness – perspective taking

Sensitivity – Emotions – Self-contact/-regulation

| INWARDLY DIRECTED QUALIFICATION | INWARDLY DIRECTED SELF-DETERMINATION |

Figure 4. The Echo Sounder - Profile and Potentials of the four competencies.

## THE RESOURCE MODEL: HOW THEN ABOUT MY INTERESTS AND SELF-VIEW?

The resource model focuses on the individual's needs and interests, and how they relate to his or her functional capacities (e.g. competencies). *The model is supposed to indicate what the individual is good at, and what kind of challenges the individual might be facing if he/she recognizes his/her basic needs and interests as something that can be satisfied and realised. The model can be used in a dialogue with the individual about what he/she would wish to do in his/her life and based on that, to investigate what challenges this poses in relation to the four life-competencies, as well as what can be done to handle these challenges.*

When the individual's actions are based on his or her interests, these interests can be expressed in different ways and have references to different life-domains. The individual might for instance experience his/her interests as being pleasure-bound and associated with positive sensations (sensitivity), or they can be meaning-bound interests based on a recognition of importance and relevance of doing what the interest is about (reflexivity). The point is that the resource model focuses on analysing the needs and interests of the individual in relation to where those needs and interests are rooted according to the model.

Besides functioning directly as a tool for dialogue, the *model can also be used as a plan-of-action tool in conversations about the individual(s).* By using the model together with an individual, he or she gets the opportunity to look at his/her school, school life or spare time, etc. in a helicopter perspective, which may help the individual understand the potentialities and obstacles in his or her environments in relation to the wishes he or she has, to move life in some other direction. If on the other hand, we use the model as a tool for talking about the individual, it can sustain the ways in which we focus our attention on the individual's self-experiences. By focussing on the interests and self-experiences of the individual, the model invites us to take a looking as perspective on the individual, in which we try to imagine how it is experienced to be this person from the inside out. This is in contrast to the Echo Sounder, which is more oriented towards a looking at perspective on the individual, in which the individual is understood from the inside out and in relation to the kind of functional capacities (competencies) he or she possesses. By using both models, the practitioner gets the opportunity to recognise the individual on several parameters and to accommodate his or her current capacity for creating knowledge and meaning, interests and challenges in a wider perspective. Such a holistic approach might have the supplementary function of nurturing the development of the individual's self-respect.

To be suitable for a direct dialogue with an older child or young person, the resource model is outlined with simplified definitions of the four domains.

Technical life-competency is named Skills, political-ethical life-competence is named Relations, self-referential competency is named Reflections, and phenomenological competency is named Feelings. It is important to bear in mind, that underneath these terms lies the full complexity of the four life-competencies in Qualified Self-Determination. It is at the same time worth remembering that the skill of the practitioner to actually use the models is not something that is developed by reading about it. It takes doing to learn to do. In order to become proficient in using the models for practical use, you have to start using them - in practice. Enjoy the journey!
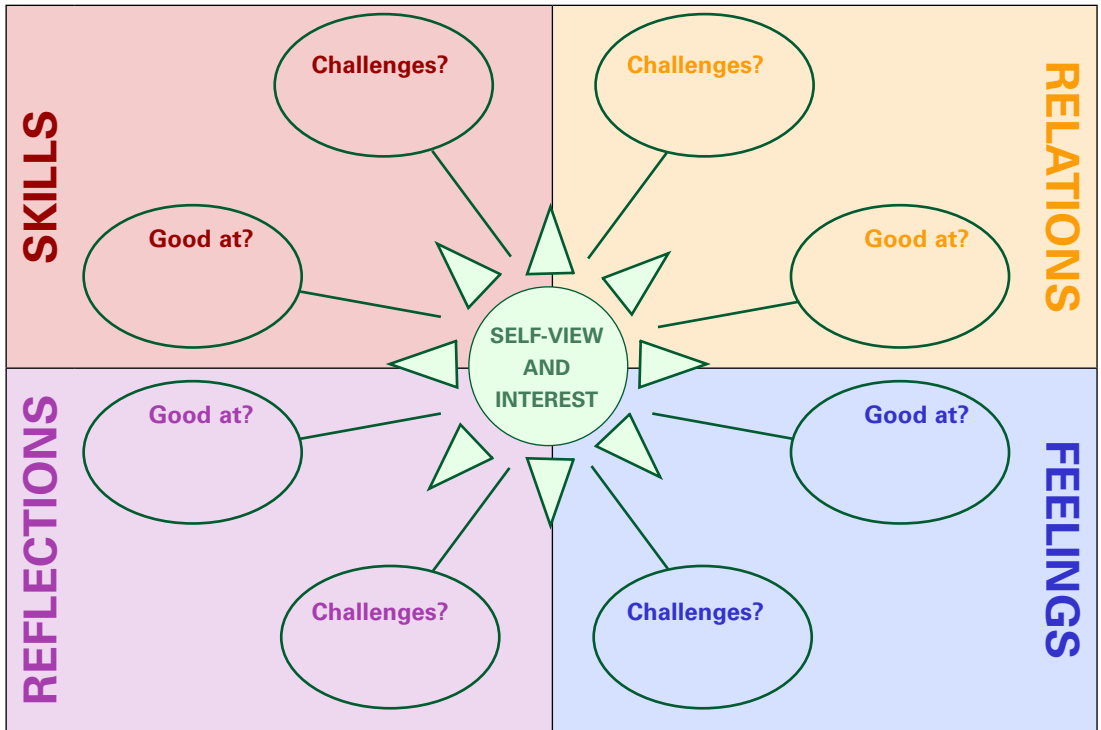
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