

GUIDE FOR IMPLEMENTING POSITIVE DEVIANCE IN THE WORK OF PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATES

What is the positive deviance approach? It is an approach aimed at solving problems that plague a community.

What is positive and what is deviance?

The approach is based on the practical knowledge that a number of individuals or groups use different, unusual practices to solve problems faced by the community to which they belong.

Apart from the strategies they use to solve challenges, they do not differ from other people around them, except for one thing - their success in solving the problems that plague their community with the help of available resources. They were called **champions**, and their practices a **positive deviance**.

The positive deviance approach was developed by the Sternin couple, Monique and Jerry, when they were faced with the task of reducing child malnutrition in villages in Vietnam. At that time, the usual method of work: bring experts to do an analysis, and then apply agricultural techniques

that give success in other places, they had no money. They had to approach the problem differently and they did. They went to the village and talked with the people about which children were the best fed and what solutions their parents used. This is how the approach of positive deviance was born.



Author: Markus Spiske

Positive practices can be practiced by other members of the community - the solutions are generally simple and accessible to everyone.

The positive deviance approach seeks to discover them, to introduce them to those people who face the challenge of the solution found by the champion, and to make knowledge of them available to a wider circle of people. This approach empowers the community to bring about social and behavioral change among its members by: discovering **champions**, encouraging others to learn from them how to solve the challenge they face and by using resources available to all.

The positive deviance approach does not impose solutions but has a motto:

Not about me without me.

In other words: you can't solve my problem without me.



Author: Ann H

What steps does the positive deviance approach involve?

The positive deviance methodology has five steps.

1. **Defining the problem.** Community members - those who are affected by the problem, identify what is bothering them and what would be a desirable solution for them. In this phase, you talk to the different individuals and groups that make up the community and constantly ask the question: Who else should be invited to participate in solving the problem? In addition, formal and informal resources available to the community to solve the problem are identified. Then he looks for the usual ways of dealing with the problem, which do not always prove to be successful.

2. followed by **the detachment of those who have a different approach to the problem and who successfully solve it.** The key questions that are asked at this stage are: Are all attempts to solve the problem unsuccessful? Is there anyone who managed to overcome the problem?

3. In the next step, the **community gets to know the specific practices used by the champions** to solve the problem. It is important to describe your strategies and behaviors in great detail and to check if they can be applied to the whole community.

4. In the fourth step, the **community designs and develops activities to teach other people** to use positive deviance. At this stage, it is important to answer the questions: What, Who, With whom, How and How long (does it work)? Then to design activities that will allow people to practice positive deviance in a safe environment.

5. In the fifth step, the community develops indicators that will be able to measure, **initiative** positive deviance. **Can geronto housewives and professional workers of centers for social work use the approach of positive deviance in their work?**

This approach can also be applied by geronto-housewives and professional workers of centers for social work. For example, it is not uncommon for the elderly to suspect and distrust others, including social workers and geronto housewives. When they do not trust others, the elderly do not seek the help they need, and their quality of life decreases. A positive deviance approach here can help identify those who have successfully built trust with the elderly and teach the rest of us how to use their solutions.

There is also one *But!*

The positive deviance approach is not universally applicable and should not be used when there are other, tried and tested solutions that produce results. It is used when existing practices are not successful, as a kind of alternative approach in the case of working on challenges that affect a significant number of members of a community, with unforeseeable consequences, and in order to solve them, they require a social change or a change in the behavior of individuals.

Proposal for professional workers of the Center of Social Work

What does the application of a positive approach look like in practice?

The approach of positive deviance can be practiced within centers for social work at regular meetings of professional workers. It can also include other people who are important for solving a problem that bothers users of the centers' services, as well as all those who are involved in solving the problem. This actually means that we can use this approach when we face challenges while performing our work (as in the example with distrust of old people), as well as in the case that we want to support others to solve problems that indirectly concern us. For example, geronto-housewives are trained to recognize victims of violence among users of services in the home and inform professionals that an elderly person suffers violence, but they can also point to their own and positive practices that the elderly used to defend themselves from violence.

Old people are often lonely, and geronto housewives play an important role in alleviating this phenomenon. For example, one of the positive deviance practices they use is establishing communication between an elderly parent and their children who cannot visit them regularly. They enable service users to establish contact with their sons and daughters using modern technologies.

From this example, we see that the SOLUTIONS are SIMPLE AND APPLICABLE!

EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE

Here is how the application of the approach can look like in practice. A meeting was organized between expert workers of the center for social work and members of the pensioners' association. At the meeting, Marija, a social worker, opens the question: What problems are you facing? The elderly recognized: loneliness, illness, isolation, low mood, poverty, and Marija, using the approach of curiosity, recognized that the elderly were also troubled by insufficient information about their rights, but also by numerous prejudices, e.g. about the nursing home.

Since institutional accommodation for a part of the elderly functionally dependent and lonely persons is the optimal solution - because they have no one to rely on and are at high risk of violence, neglect and self-neglect, it is important that the elderly have information about the possibilities available to them.

Marija knows from her experience that not everyone is old without information - among them there are champions of positive deviance. Such is the case of Mileto, who at the beginning was hesitant to go to the institution himself. She helped him make such a decision by encouraging his relatives to visit the home, to talk to the users of the institution and by giving him a choice: if he does not like life in the institution, he should return home.

He checks with the members of the association and his colleagues whether such a practice can be useful for them and for others to learn from it. They also discuss who else should be involved in solving the problem of lack of information among the elderly and identify actors who could help (local journalists, presidents of local offices in rural communities, geronto-homemakers, but also other old people).

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The opinions expressed in this document represent the views of the authors of the research.

More about the working method:

www.positivedeviance.org

www.win-org.eu