

Introduction and Development of Strengths Perspective and Strengths-Oriented Case Management in the German-Speaking Area

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INTEGRATION OF THE STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE FROM THE SOCIAL WORK THEORY STANDPOINT

Our (Corinna Ehlers, Matthias Müller) connection to the strengths perspective is formed by personal ties, as we came upon strengths-oriented work at the University of Kansas not only through specialist literature but first and foremost through personal channels. Beside contacts with the colleagues at the School of Social Welfare (Rosemary Chapin, Rick Goscha, Chris Petr and Amy Mendenhall), it was also the exchange with the practitioners (e.g., from Bert Nash Community Mental Health Center) that affirmed us in our intention to delve deeper into the strengths work and to transfer these approaches to Germany as well.

Both of us have been active as case management educators in the training of case managers for years, and we are deeply interested in the practice of case management in the social work areas of activity, based on our social work background. In the German-speaking area, case management has evolved, out of social work, to become a generalist method which is now employed in very different areas of practice. Thus, case management takes place in social work, in healthcare and nursing care, in working with disabled people and in the insurance industry.

Since we wished strengths-oriented case management to be understood as an explicitly social-work case management approach (M. Müller 2018), it was necessary

to embed the strengths perspectives into the theoretical discourse of social work in the German-speaking area. Even though the person-in-environment approach, the person-centered dialogue management, the eco-social approach, the system-theoretical approaches to thinking and acting as well as the theoretical constructivist perspective and the approaches of orientation towards solution and resources are, of course, under the influence from the USA, the discussion of the approaches in the German-speaking area stands nonetheless on its own.

To introduce the strengths perspective to the German social work community, it seems necessary to connect the strengths perspective to common and well adopted theoretical approaches in Germany. In consideration of the historical experience, this is helpful because the development and professionalization of social work in Germany was interrupted due to the Nazi regime. After the Second World War social work was influenced by US-American approaches. Theories like *person-centered approach*, *eco-social approach* or the *solution-focused approach* had and still have an impact on practical social work in Germany. However, there is also a rich background of theories in the German-speaking area, and hence it is important to connect these different theoretical approaches as well as to point out their respective relationship with the strengths perspective.

The second point is that social work education in the last century was mainly conducted in colleges of higher education or universities of applied sciences with a focus on practical social work. For this reason, our research tradition is very young. With the following overview, we would like to summarize the conjunction of established theoretical frameworks in Germany with the strengths perspective.

Table 1: Overview Theories and Strengths Perspective

Theory	Connection to Strengths Perspective
<p><i>Person-in-environment approach</i> (Richmond 1917)</p> <p>Many ideas of Richmond were adopted by Alice Salomon, a pioneer of social work and founder of the first social work school in Germany</p>	<p>It is important to realize, with regard to the strengths orientation, that it likewise revolves around the viewpoint that reflects upon people within their environment. Not only individuals but also the environment come into focus. An essential part of social work is to influence the living conditions and to create possibilities for the client’s development. Problems and resources are thus a unique interplay between individuals and conditions in each instance, according to this view. Strengths-oriented working modes possess a dual focus as well: they work with people (for example, the strengthening of the self-management abilities), and they create systems like organizations or communities by generating possibilities and options. This process is less about interventions of the social work but rather – in a strengths-oriented sense – about creating forms of cooperation and shaping relationships.</p>

<p>The <i>person-centered approach</i> (Rogers 2003: 63)</p>	<p>The strengths orientation assumes, as Rogers suggests, that people have the potential in them to develop themselves in line of what is constructive for them, that they are capable of growth, and that they know what is good for them, so this inner drive is to be followed in the process of help.</p>
<p><i>Eco-social approach of the Life Model</i> (Germain/ Gitterman 1999)</p>	<p>In regard to the strengths perspective, people and environments are mutable. This means that a person can change and, in doing so, deliver adjustment and achievements in coping. Also, habitat and niches are changeable, and thus the adjustment and the coping become possible. These processes are not causally controllable, but strengths-oriented social work on the person, the social space and beyond that starts at the societal level.</p>
<p><i>Systems theory approach to thinking and acting</i> (Luhmann 1997)</p>	<p>Luhmann's theory shows clearly for the strengths perspective that communication plays a central role in constituting the situation of help. In the course of this, systems (society systems, organizations, interaction systems) process the communications according to their own rules. These rules are not foreseeable and not controllable either. Specialists are always a part of the help processes; they are always involved and never external – neutral – observers. The systemic view shows, for instance, that function systems shape their own context. The help should connect to these contexts. Persons have then ascribed meanings only from the viewpoint of system contexts. These viewpoints can be connected to strengths or inhibit them.</p>
<p><i>Systemic-constructivist approaches</i> (Gergen/ Gergen 2000)</p>	<p><i>Systemic-constructivist approaches</i> clearly show, with respect to the strengths perspective and against the background of the person-in-environment approach, the Life Model and the systems theory view, that a human being and the social environment of a human being exert significant influence on the construction of realities. If social niches or social systems are comprehended as social groups which live in their specific living spaces (habitat), then it becomes clear that the perceptions and ways of thinking of the respective groups are influenced by one another or, alternatively, by their own perceptions and by the environmental circumstances (the social context) in the process of their formation. Conversely, they shape the latter, too, so it is a reciprocal process.</p>
<p><i>Solution-focused approach</i> (Shazer de 1989)</p>	<p>The strengths perspective is based on the assumption that people have abilities and resources at their disposal which help them to cope with their problems. Additionally, the 'problem' is not always present with the same intensity, and there are always exceptions where the problem is less present or not there at all. The task of social workers is to pinpoint the exceptions from problematic situations and the 'hidden', unused resources. Furthermore, social workers support clients in integrating the resources into the helping process. The clients are thus empowered and also strengthened in their self-help potential so that they are able to regulate their own issues themselves to a great extent.</p>

FINDINGS FROM US DISCOURSE ON THE STRENGTHS PERSPECTIVE: THE DIFFERENTIATION BETWEEN STRENGTH AND RESOURCE

Knowing full well that in the social sciences and the humanities there often exist no consistent definitions, and clear delimitations between notions hardly exist either, US discourse on strengths perspective provided us with a thought-provoking impetus towards differentiating professionally between the terms 'strength' and 'resource'. In what follows we would like to summarize the findings that proved to be important to us:

- A differentiation between the terms 'strength' and 'resource' is substantial for understanding the strengths perspective since in the German terminology and in the German colloquial language the term 'strength' is used synonymously with 'resource'. Strength implies more than merely the existence of personal, material or social resources; strength focuses on the aspiration of a person, i.e. their pursuits, hopes, ambitions and their trust in themselves. The strengths orientation thus puts into the foreground, in particular, the alignment of the helping process towards the interests and the will of the clients.
- It was important to us to make clear that the means, properties or objects are not resources per se, but they are made to be that through an individual attribution. To comprehend the strengths perspective, the meaning of the subjective attributions is of substance, since subjective attribution is people's own construction, and it is essentially defined by their strengths. It happens especially in helping processes that the sensitivity to the personal attributions of clients is decisive. Parallel to that, properties and means exist which are generally evaluated by many people as positive, i.e. as a resource. Schubert and Knecht (2012: 19)* suggest using the terminological differentiation between "generally effective" and "supra-individually effective" resources. Generally, effective resource (e.g., character traits like self-confidence) are what we comprehend as an aspect of strength.
- Strengths are an important asset to people- and environment-related resources (physical, cultural, symbolic, relational, social and community-related resources). Irrespective of individual wishes and pursuits, the different cultural, social or physical resources are, of course, also present, but they are more difficult to activate or they possibly do not get activated at all. To speak figuratively, the motor, the power to utilize these resources, also when coping with problems, is lacking. A personal strength like courage or love of learning can be the driving force to activate a resource. Strengths and resources have a reciprocal relationship and refer to each other.

Despite the substantive proximity of the terms ‘strengths’ and ‘resources’ in the German-speaking area, differentiation is thus possible and necessary. In this process, and for the comprehension of the strengths perspective, it is important that strengths essentially define how the resources can be accessed. Strengths act as keys to the fundamental driving force for the helping process (cf. Ehlers 2013).

This terminological clarification of strengths and resources was important to us for the transfer of the strengths-oriented case management model of Rapp and Goscha (2012) into the German case management discourse. The reason is that we see a meaningful shift of focus and systematic extension of the actually well-known approaches to social work in the German-speaking area in the principles of Saleebey (2013) as well as in the concepts and methods of Rapp and Goscha (2012). They are aimed clearly and first and foremost at the personal hopes, prospects and dreams of the clients. The benefits of such a perspective are in the personal development and growth of the clients in their attempt to overcome difficulties. Strengths-oriented work thus does not confine itself to stabilizing the unsatisfactory circumstances but expedites an improvement of the life situation and living conditions. The communication of possibilities, hopes and growth infuses all levels of casework and (care) system work in the strengths-oriented work (cf. Chapin 2012, Rapp & Goscha 2012: 32).

Alongside the now established terminological clarity, the strengths perspective is moreover comprehensively linked with the theories and views of the social work in the German-speaking area, and the strengths perspective brings in a new professional impulse here.

STRENGTHS-ORIENTED CASE MANAGEMENT

Only after the thorough clarification and terminological differentiation described above have we deployed strengths-oriented case management in our interpretation. In this process we started with the following constituting characteristics of case management:

- Differentiation between case level and (care) system level.
- Consistent orientation towards the needs and requirements of the addressees.
- Systematic case processing throughout the phases.
- Taking into consideration the reciprocal relationships between informal and formal systems.
- Interconnectedness and coordination of formal and informal help.
- Continuous trans-sectoral and responsible supervision and support of clients (cf., e.g., DGCC 2015, Ehlers & M. Müller 2013).

We have named the following characteristics for strengths-oriented case management modeled on Saleebey (2013), Rapp and Goscha (2012), Greene and Lee (2011: 40) in connection with the explanations of the specialist group we led: “Case

Management in the Area of Activity of Social Work” of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Care und Case Management (DGCC) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Soziale Arbeit (DGSA) (2014)¹:

- Strengths-oriented case management advocated the safeguarding of human rights. People’s dignity is respected and protected. Case managers work with their clients on their (the clients’) taking part in life according to their interests and being part of actively shaping their own lives (participation). They support people in developing and making use of their abilities.
- Strengths-oriented case management works with people’s motivation.
- Strengths-oriented case management assumes that every human being (also in critical life situations with limitations of different scale) can learn and grow as well as develop and change themselves.
- Strengths-oriented case management constitutes itself in a continuous relationship work between case managers and people who they work with. It is marked by dialogue communication processes. The clients are regarded as experts in their respective situations. They are co-producers of the helping process.
- Strengths-oriented case management programs implement multi-dimensional ways of thinking and working. A bio-psycho-social viewpoint is characteristic of those.
- Strengths-oriented case management takes place in an outreach form and in the social space.
- Strengths-oriented case management promotes help towards self-help and supports informal help forms.
- Strengths-oriented case management involves different levels when processing cases: with the addressees (case level) and with organizations, with political decision-makers as well as funding agencies ((care) system level).

These characteristics reflect the theoretical framework of German social work as well as the main principles of the strengths perspective. Embedded in these guidelines lies a five-step process² for our concept of strengths-oriented case management. It looks as follows:

1. Clarification phase:

Case management processes, as a rule, commence with a conceptual clarification prior to the contacts with the clients. Before the actual initial processing steps of the casework with the addressees are set into motion, a content-related alignment of the action concept takes place on the organizational level in reference to the target groups, the course of action in the strengths-oriented case processing or the

cross-linking. The fundamental ideas of the strengths perspective (Saleebey 2013) according to explanations of Rapp and Goscha (2012) with their assumptions and core principles, such as empowerment and participation, are conceptually recorded in the case management program. There are set criteria for the identification of complex cases, which lead to a corresponding range of choices for counseling and/or case management cases. Apart from that, the case intake gets clarified in the organization.

2. Strengths-oriented case assessment:

Based on trusting relationships, the wishes and hopes of the clients are discussed, personal competences and possibilities as well as supporting social relationships and opportunities are explored within the framework of the strengths-oriented case assessment. In the case assessment, strengths-oriented case management takes into account the multi-dimensional ways of thinking and working by, for instance, considering problematic situations from the bio-psycho-social perspective at the same time. A comprehensive strengths-oriented case assessment also takes place from different perspectives, with particular attention paid to subjectively perceived strengths and interests.

3. Strengths-oriented goal-setting and support plan:

On the basis of the interests, hopes and positive expectations, as well as the concrete needs and requirements of the clients, the corresponding individually motivated goals, are discussed. Framework and action goals are derived from those and formulated jointly. Resulting from the action goals, an assistance plan is developed, in which individual tasks for informal and formal helpers are set. Personal strengths and opportunities in the social space or community are taken into consideration all along and consistently in this process.

4. Implementation of the support plan and monitoring:

Within the scope of implementing the support plan, the required case-related aids are linked with one another. Informal aids and peer-support approaches receive special consideration in this process. The coordinated help process is monitored by, for instance, analyzing deviations from planning and adjusting the support plan if necessary. The work is moreover documented in a professionally appropriate way in order to keep it comprehensible for the third parties. Change steps of the addressees are acknowledged with appreciation and professionally supervised if necessary.

5. Strengths-oriented evaluation:

Towards the end of the help process, the following issues get reflected upon between clients and professionals: How did the process run? What results were achieved? Additionally, it must be clarified how personal development processes can be secured long-term. Beyond the case-related assessment, a cross-case assessment of case management processes within the scope of accountability to executive boards and politics takes place.

The casework is not a linear process. It follows a rhizomatic, interconnected and circular order (cf. Haye & Kleve 2011: 125).

A wide variety of tools for the case processing in the singular work phases is available, such as network maps, strengths assessment, personal recovery plan as well as various techniques (e.g., competence in conducting talks, visualization). However, not all tools have to be put to use in each case. With strengths assessment and personal recovery plan as well as strengths-based supervision we recommend, in any event, using the standard tools of the strengths perspective which adhere to the procedures, according to Rapp & Goscha (2012). We have incorporated the tools, which are presented in the table below, in coordination with the five phases of strengths-oriented case management (Ehlers/ M. Müller/ Schuster 2017: 210).

Table 2: Tool Kit of Strengths-Oriented Case Management (SOCM)

Process phases	Tool
1. Clarification phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client information • Checklist for the choices of SoCM clients • Counselling agreement • Release from confidentiality
2. Strengths-oriented case assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network card • Problem multi-perspective grid • PELG (problem perception and definition/ explanation models/ solution attempts/ goals) • Strengths assessment • Strengths card • Lifeline • Situation assessment
3. Strengths-oriented goal-setting and assistance planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ‘Bouquet of hypotheses’ • Miracle question • Care plan • Personal recovery plan
4. Cross-linking and implementation of the support plan and monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care plan • My personal recovery plan • Checklist regional care supply system
5. Strengths-oriented evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Client questions • Evaluation questionnaire clients

It is important to note that in Germany we do not have a strong tradition of evidence-based social work. Besides, social work services often do not have a stan-

standardized methodology or program they work with. Social workers mostly work with a personal selection of methods depending on their training. This individual range of methods and instruments within a service can be an advantage, but it also seems to be a hurdle to evaluating the work and developing an evidence-based practice. Therefore, it was important for us to offer, with the SoCM, a conceptual framework with a steady process (five phases) and a variety of tools. The most common instruments are explained and available in our book (Ehlers/ M. Müller/ Schuster 2017). However, we point out that it is helpful to work with a core set of instruments, like Rapp & Goscha (2012) suggest (strength assessment, personal recovery and strengths-oriented supervision).

Strengths-oriented supervision as the professional supervision of the strengths-oriented case management process is not a component of the case processing phases but is clearly seen as a task of the organization in which the strengths-oriented case management program is executed. Supervision is not practiced in a standardized form in social work as compared to the different international developments. In the Anglo-Saxon countries, guidance and mentoring of voluntary as well as full-time staff members in social organizations (“senior supervision” or “supervision within a given organization”, Belardi 2001: 6) developed based on the early academization of social work. Supervision is then understood as a continuous, individual and professional reflection with team management or superiors. The reflection takes place against the background of the work concept (e.g., strengths-oriented case management) and monitors whether the specialists work according to this concept, what is successful in this process, and what they need in order to even better implement the professional demands that are stipulated in the work concept. Thus supervision is conceived here as an internal professional control.

Conversely, in the German-speaking area, another concept of supervision prevails as a rule. Based on the late academization of social work in the 1970s, social work executive and management levels, which would allow supervision in the Anglo-Saxon understanding, did not exist in Germany. For this reason, social workers were and are often trained, instructed and professionally mentored by persons with qualifications in other fields. Resulting from these circumstances, a mainly outside-the-organization, freelance supervision developed in Germany. It is, on the one hand, practiced at a perfectly high standard; on the other hand, it is shaped by the vast supply of freelance supervision offers, stark ignorance of the field and heavy psychotherapeutizing (cf. Belardi 2001). Supervisions within the organization which take into account whether the strategic concept (e.g., strengths-oriented case management) gets implemented by the staff or which would support the staff in implementing this concept are rather uncommon in the German-speaking area for this very reason. As there is thus a distinct supply of outside-the-organization supervision, we as a strengths-oriented group counseling have particularly shifted into focus and elaborated the significance of the within-the-organization group supervision as an internal specialist controlling according to Rapp and Goscha (2012).

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS OF STRENGTHS-ORIENTED CASE MANAGEMENT IN THE GERMAN-SPEAKING AREA

The statements above serve to explain how we introduced the strengths perspective and strengths-oriented case management in Germany with the publication of “Strengths-Oriented Case Management. Processing Complex Cases in Five Steps” (Ehlers/ M. Müller/ Schuster 2017). In this work, we especially emphasized the points which, in our view, establish clear connections to the US discourse. We also highlighted the differences which denote that we have developed the strengths perspective against the background of our understanding of strengths, theory and social work, to become an approach adapted to the German general conditions - and standing on its own, “rooted in strengths”. The practice development in Germany, however, has not yet reached the stage where research monitoring of the concept can be approximated in practice.

At present we are working on spelling out the strengths perspective yet further (Ehlers 2019) and on appropriating strengths-oriented case management for various fields of practice in social work in the German-speaking area (M. Müller 2016, 2020; Gierz/ Große/ M. Müller 2020).

A working model with methods for a strengths-focused target work was developed for strengths-oriented work with people, also independently of the case management context (Ehlers 2019). This is supposed to make it easier to put on the ‘strengths glasses’ in daily work, to explore strengths and to formulate motivational goals with a focus on people’s strengths. The heart of this model is the strengths spectrum, which enables a structured assessment of strengths in the three areas: 1) personal character strengths, 2) abilities/skills and 3) needs. In the different approaches of the strengths assessment that are presented here the focus is on the single strengths areas, like the talents or character strengths. With the aid of the strengths spectrum, the three elementary strengths areas are explored in a differentiated manner prior to considering the interplay of the strengths areas the so-called strengths sweet spot. The target work is then particularly about recognizing strengths from the sweet spot and putting them to use systematically in daily life. The methods of formulating strengths-focused goals with action plans based on the Zurich Resource Model (Storch/ Krause 2011) are used for this purpose. The strengths spectrum was taken up at the HAWK (University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Faculty of Social Work and Health) within the scope of the strengths lab³, and a workshop was developed for the strengths work during the studies. The objective of the strengths lab is to promote the strengths work of future social workers even during their training. The strengths lab is a space for learning and doing research where study and work materials for the strengths work are developed. The workshop “Strengths Course” is offered on a voluntary basis once per term. In keeping with a peer concept, the workshop is offered by students for students. The participating students have an opportunity to explore their strengths within the framework of self-reflection but also to use the group for reflection processes.

Since the concept of strengths-oriented case management, as initially published in the German-speaking area, was not bound to a particular field of work, it is an essential task now to make it known in the various fields of practice of the social work and to accentuate the practice benefit of a strengths-oriented working mode. The first step in this direction was already made as early as 2016, before the publication of our book “Strengths-Oriented Case Management. Processing Complex Cases in Five Steps” (Ehlers/ M. Müller/ Schuster 2017) for the migration and integration counseling (M. Müller 2016). The tasks of the migration and integration counseling (MBE) in Germany are, among other things, to carry out needs-oriented individual case counseling within the framework of case management (BMI (Federal Ministry of the Interior) 2016, p. 549). It comprises the following goals:

- “The MBE should deliberately initiate, regulate and supervise the process of integration of grown-up immigrants” (BMI 2016, p. 549).
- “The MBE should make a qualitative contribution towards enabling immigrants to act autonomously in all matters of daily life. This should also contribute to restricting the immigrants’ dependence on social transfer payments to a necessary minimum” (BMI 2016, p. 549).
- “The immigrants should be promptly introduced or referred to the existing thematic support and counseling offers (so-called standard services). They should furthermore be persuaded to continuously and actively participate in the integration process” (BMI 2016, p. 549).

The migration and integration counseling has the political assignment to practice case management, but it lacks professional orientation in the implementation of case management itself. With the publication “Case Management in the Migration Counseling for Grown-Up Immigrants (MBE) – a Working Aid” (M. Müller 2016), a strengths-oriented professional framework of good practice for two out of six major organizations conducting such counseling in Germany was published. Many tools for the practice from our version of strengths-oriented case management (Ehlers/ M. Müller/ Schuster 2017) were transferred onto the social work with migrants. The next step (M. Müller 2020) for the work with migrants and strengths-oriented case management takes it further and comprises also the youth migration services. These are likewise politically obligated to implement case management in counseling young people (aged 12 – 26), their goals being similar to the migration and integration counseling. For this purpose, a strengths-oriented specialist migration service case management is presented, which bears far more on strengths assessment, personal recovery plan and strengths-oriented group supervision. Alongside these three central tools, more attention is paid to the strengths-oriented community ties.

The second practice substantiation takes place for clinical social work. The discussions and practice developments in the clinical social work in the German-speaking

area have occurred largely detached from the discussions of case management so far. With the special issue “Strengths-Oriented Case Management in the Psychiatric Care of Hard-to-Reach Clients” (Gierz/ Große/ M. Müller 2020), a link to the clinical social work has been established, which makes it clear what working methods make sense from the strengths perspective of the so-called “heavy user”, “high utilizer” or “high-cost user”, and how it can be accomplished that with strengths-oriented case management and strengths assessment, personal recovery plan and strengths-oriented group supervision the help is aligned closely to the strengths and the will of the clients. The deployment of strengths-oriented case management for clinical social work, which started with this special issue, will be continued with a further publication (Große/ M. Müller 2020) and likely with a panel at the Trinational Congress of the German, Austrian and Swiss expert associations for social work in the spring of 2020.

Seeing as case management in the German-speaking area – as already mentioned – is conceived in a rather generalist way and, against this background, is applied to very different working areas, the discussion around social work case management is still very young (Soziale Arbeit 2018). A long time there had been no standards for social work case management that would be attuned to the demands of social work. This gap was closed by the colleagues of the Österreichische Gesellschaft für Soziale Arbeit (ogsa) in 2019 with the publication “Standards for Social Work Case Management” (Goger/ Tordy 2019). In this first publication on the subject in the German language, the differentiation between strengths and resources was taken up, and the strengths perspective is explicitly referred to while doing so (Saleebey 2013; Ehlers/ M. Müller/ Schuster 2017).

CONCLUSION

The strengths perspective is, at least in the German-speaking area, a new perspective on the practice of social work. It enables a special kind of thinking and working with clients (cf. Saleebey 1996: 303), expands the established resource approaches by adding personal pursuits, hopes and interests of people. And yet the strengths perspective is about a new direction of social work in the German-speaking area, which is attempting to align itself to the positive and the constructive power of the people's self-concept and to steer the working process along those lines.

In strengths-oriented case management, we see a chance to shift the support process very closely to the user and to shape it and navigate it consistently based on people's pursuits. In this respect, the strengths-oriented point of view is about a radically subject-oriented perception, which enriches social work.

Our book (Ehlers/ M. Müller/ Schuster 2017) was the beginning of designing social work consistently from the strengths perspective. This was the point of departure for subsequent works of ours (Ehlers 2019; M. Müller 2016; 2020; Gierz/ Große/

Müller 2020) and our colleagues' (Goger/ Tordy 2019). Research that can substantiate the evidence of strengths-oriented case management in the German-speaking area is difficult to finance; it must be endeavored, however, for the sake of the future. Irrespective of this, the first "Roots in Strength" will contribute to the strengths perspective gaining significance in the German-speaking area which it has long been enjoying worldwide.

From our experiences, we would like to point out two things for ongoing development and implementation of the strengths perspective in different countries worldwide. First, it would be worth promoting a continuing international discussion on how strengths and resources could be classified. This could be helpful for research and development of new theories as well as for defining new tools.

Secondly, it seems important to consider how strengths-based approaches can flourish in times of austerity. Many countries are facing challenging times with budget cuts and changing policies. More than ever, strength-based social work is in danger of being misunderstood and instrumentalized as a money-saving model. Therefore, it would be helpful to discover more about best practice models within their area-specific context, like certain theories or policies.

END NOTES

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[†]For better readability, the German text phrases are translated into English.

¹The discussion paper can be accessed at http://www.dgcc.de/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2015_02_Diskussionspapier_CM_Soziale-Arbeit_Feb_2015.pdf (last downloaded on 22.5.2015).

²This operational sequence is based on the explanations by Ehlers (2011).

³See <https://www.hawk.de/de/hochschule/fakultaeten-und-standorte/fakultaet-soziale-arbeit-und-gesundheit/labore/staerkenlabor>

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