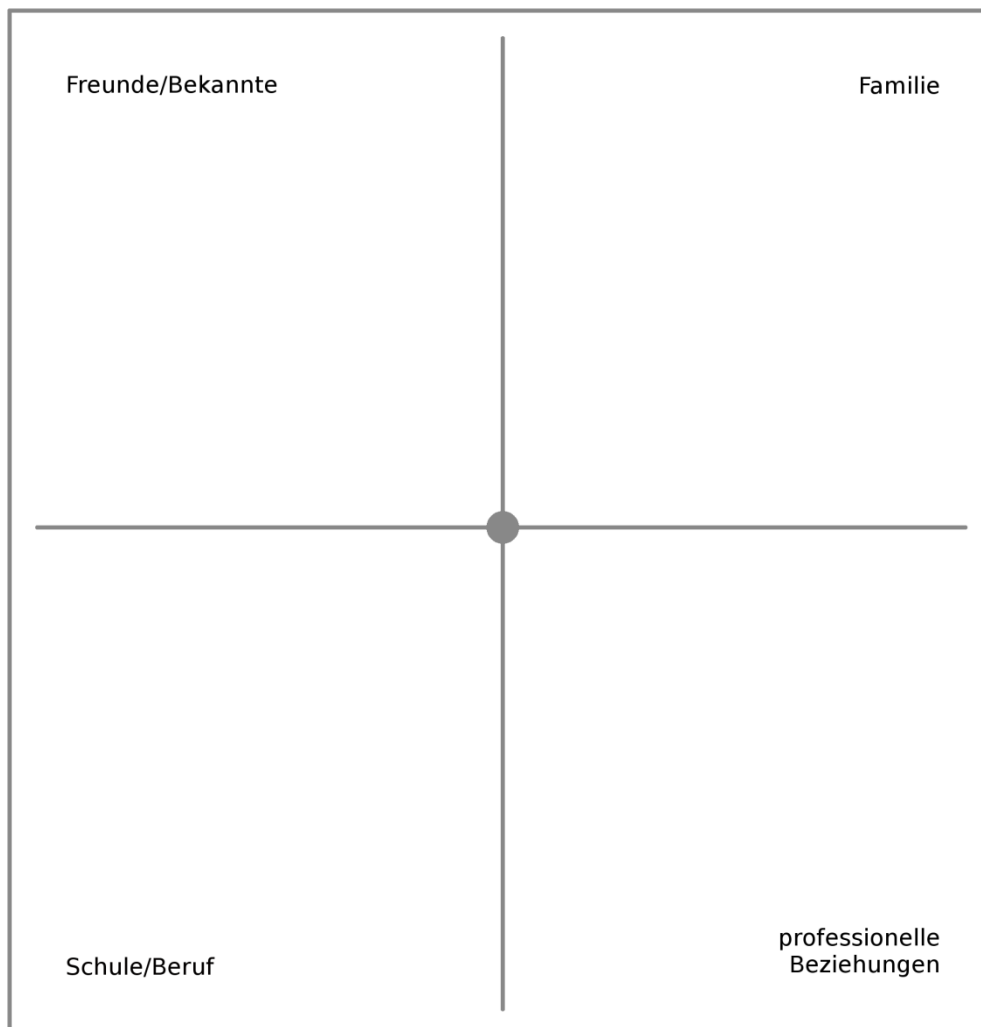


Network diagnostics - network card¹

In social work, the involvement of the individual in the social and in society is considered essential. In this context, it has been found that network diagnostics can provide a first overview of the human resources of a client. The person-person relationships can be detected using various methods of network diagnostics (Ecomap, VIP card (Herwig-Lempp: 2007), Social Atom (Moreno)).²

One example is Pantucek's "network card". It is based on solid theoretical background and has the advantage that it is an imaging method. It allows extensive interpretative possibilities and is well-suited for collaborative diagnosis. This method is mainly used in the process of case compilation.³



¹In Pantucek, P. (2009): Soziale Diagnostik. Verfahren für die Praxis Sozialer Arbeit. 2. Verbesserte Auflage. Wien, Köln, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag Ges.m.b.H und Co. KG.

² Cf. ibid. pp. 186

³ Cf. ibid. p. 188

Creation of a network card - steps:

- Select an **anchor person** (client; young person) as **the centre** of the network. The network card is usually created together with the anchor.
- The surface is divided into **four sectors**: Family, friends/acquaintances, school/work, professional reference people.
- All **persons in the social environment** are written down: **the more important** the person, **the closer** they is positioned to the anchor person.
- If there is a **contact** between two persons they are connected **with a line**. The result is a network that can be developed to varying degrees in the different sectors.
- It might be best to use a pencil to start with, so it is easier to apply corrections.⁴

Evaluation of the network card

The network illustration makes it possible to determine the so-called network density number. The measure of the density of a support network represents an important parameter for assessing the functionality of networks.⁵

$$\text{density} = n / \{ [N(N-1)] / 2 \}$$

- **"n**: number of pairs of persons (who know each other and are in contact) in the network. Each pair is counted only once, the anchor person is not counted in this count).
- **N**: Total number of persons in the network (without anchor person).
- **Measure of density**: It indicates the ratio of potential and realised contacts. The value is between 0.00 (i.e. the network consists exclusively of individuals who do not know each other) and 1.00 (i.e. each person in the network is in contact with everyone else).
- **Density**: This is an indicator of how closely and centred a system is."⁶

Very dense systems, for example, are characterised by the fact that almost all individuals know each other. That has the advantage that there are readily available communication channels and that commonly shared information and similar perspectives are predominant. A high density, however, has the disadvantage that the autonomy of the anchor person is limited and that available resources are hardly differentiated.⁷

A network density of more than 0.50 is considered high. The larger the network, the lower the average density. In networks with more than 40 knots, the density falls below 0.1. The density can, therefore, only be interpreted in relation to the network size. It is advisable to determine two density figures; this increases precision. That means determining a value for the "inner" circle of closer contacts and a value for the "outer" loop, representing the rare, looser contacts. The difference between the two values may indicate that updating the looser/rare contacts might increase the network diversity. That means, the lower the density of the larger network is compared to the inner circle,

⁴ Cf. ibid. pp. 188

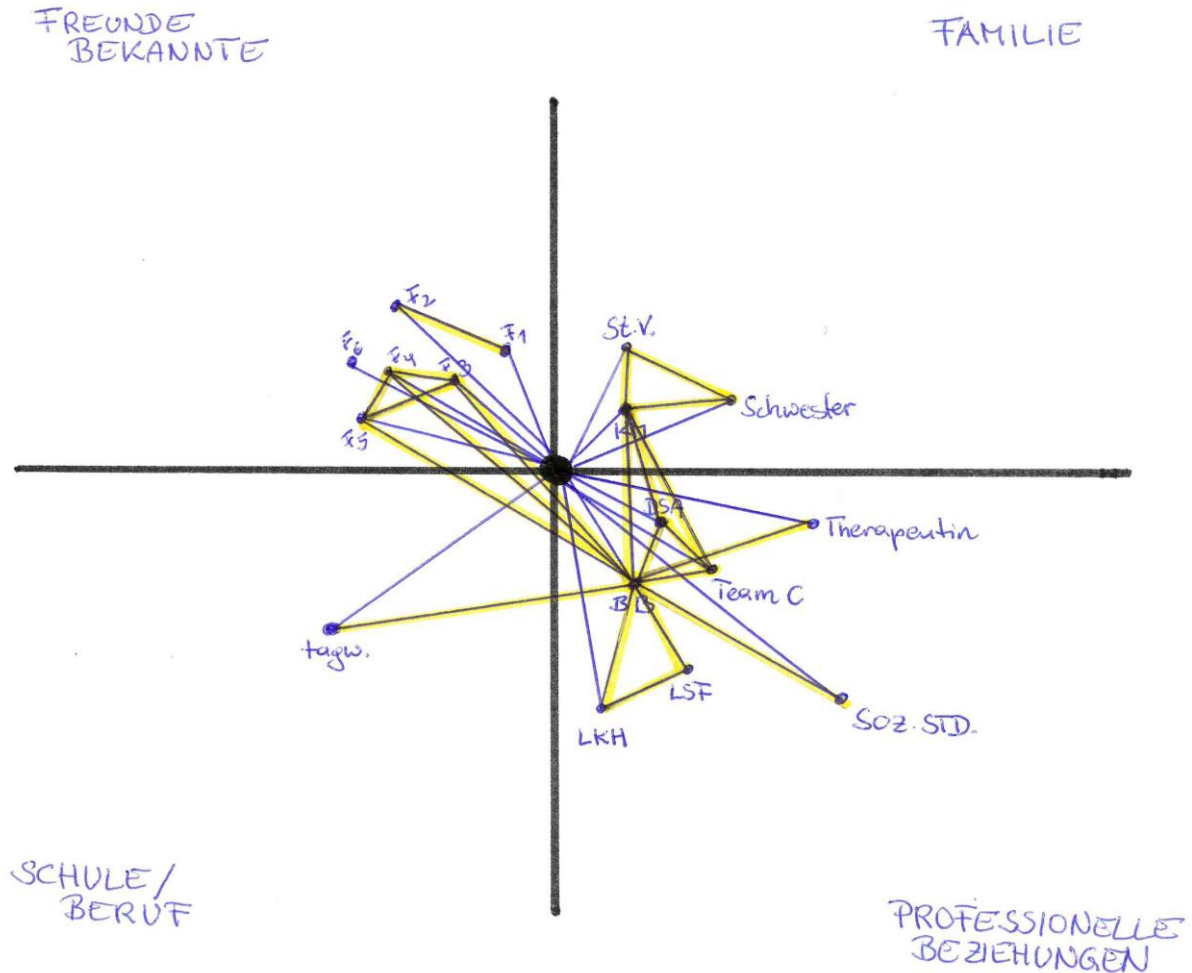
⁵ Cf. ibid. p. 189

⁶ Ibid. pp. 189

⁷ Cf. ibid. p. 190

the more useful and promising activities to update the weaker relationships in the network might be.⁸

Example of a network of a 17-year-old girl in residential care:



N__ network size: 17

n__ pairs of persons in the network: 22

Density: 0.16

The density of 0.16 in this example is very low. It is striking that the anchor person is intensively supported by professionals, but has no professional assistant on her own. All come to agreements with each other in a certain way. It is equally striking that the anchor person has few autonomous relations.

⁸ Cf. *ibid.* p. 190

The possibilities for interpretation increase when you know **central network research concepts**, which are used to describe typical positions within the network and characteristic forms of relationships.⁹

- **"Star:** Member with many connections to other members
- **Liaison:** Member who connects two clusters that would otherwise be unconnected. This connection is made by an exclusive contact of the member with at least one member of the other cluster.
- **Bridge:** Member who belongs to two clusters.
- **Gatekeeper:** Members who control the flow of information from one sector to another.
- **Isolated:** Member without any connections to other network members. Isolated ones play an important role as impartial advisors to support the autonomy of the anchor person."¹⁰

Forms of relationships within the network play a considerable role in the differential diagnosis. Three different forms can be distinguished:¹¹

- **"Uniplex/multiplex relations:** These relations represent the number of roles in which the partners (in their functions) meet. Uniplex relationships have only some functions; more uniplex relationships within the network are more resistant to stress than fewer multiplex relations, since the strain is distributed to several supporters. Multiplex relationships can be recognised by the fact that the partners perform several functions. The boundaries are not clear, and, under stress, there is the risk of the over-strain of one person causing a termination of the relationship. Such a loss can adversely affect the performance of a network.
- **Direct and indirect relationships:** Direct stands for actual face-to-face contacts. However, these are not permanently necessary for the functioning of the network. Indirect interactions are increasingly growing (mobile phone, Internet).
- **Strong/weak relationships:** Strong relationships usually have a high frequency of interaction and are, mostly, intensive. It is a disadvantage that this restricts freedom. Weak relationships are characterised by the fact that only few people are involved."¹²

Possible application of the network card¹³

	Application	Point within the process
Brief counselling	No	
Brief intervention	No	
Counselling	Yes	End of the starting phase, if possible, before completion of the medium-term support planning
Reconstruction of everyday life	Yes	
Accompaniment	Yes	
Field substitution	Yes	

⁹ Cf. *ibid.* p. 193

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 195

¹¹ Cf. *ibid.* p. 195

¹² *Ibid.* pp. 195.

¹³ *Ibid.* p. 197