

Training of Social Management Specialists for Participation in Social Innovation Teams

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Abstract – The main purpose of the research is to describe the elements of specialists' personality development by incorporating it into social innovations team. The main assumption is that encouragement of self-inclusion, volunteering, and active implementation in educational group sessions are significant factors for the professional progress of the specialist. The contingent of the research is students in Department of Social and Legal sciences in Technical University of Varna, Bulgaria. The students were involved through interviewing, monitoring and evaluation of the performance of activities of the social work during the education program. The main findings refer to the extended functions of the social worker in early intervention, individual mobile assistance, community-based social services, home-based counseling and mobile social activities.

Keywords – Social management, social innovation, higher education, leadership, encourage participation.

1. Introduction

The modern model of social work encompasses a complex of socio-economic, legal, psychological and pedagogical activities that support the needy individuals, their families and the communities to which they belong. The social work treats society as

a network of specific communities in the context of permanent exchange of resources, mutual assistance and life support. The individual development supports the community stability, and hence of the society as a whole. Social activities are more and more honestly subject to innovation, due to the ongoing changes in the structures of the society. The training of social work professionals, whose competencies and skills to meet the needs of non-profit organizations involved in the field of social innovation, is one of the main goals in the training of Bachelors and Masters in social activities in the Department of Social and Legal Sciences at the Technical University of Varna, Bulgaria.

According to the National Statistical Institute of Bulgaria, the share of innovative enterprises in the total number of enterprises is 26.1%, of which 28% (enterprises engaged in services with technological and non-technological innovations) [1].

According to a study of innovation in social work in Bulgaria from 2015-2016, under grant contract № BG 051PO001-7.0.01-0082-C-0001 included in the project "Innovative measures in the field of occupational rehabilitation, orientation, training and employment for disabled people" of the National Federation of Employers of Disabled People, innovative social work is most often part of projects in the field of social services, education, employment and consultancy services [2]. Varna and Burgas districts appeared in the third position after Sofia-city and Plovdiv by list of non-governmental organizations. The Varna region is in the first place by innovation ideas of social services, starting with the first shelters of its kind in Bulgaria, the first center for social rehabilitation and integration, the first trained foster care family, the first crisis consultancy group for victims of domestic violence, and the first civic advocacy group – all of these activities started like new idea in early 90s of the last century.

At the European level, social innovation is understood as a set of new strategies, concepts and ideas that address social needs related to working conditions, education, community development, healthy lifestyles, and civil society activities. Social innovation is a separate integrative area of science, practice, business, and public interests [3]. Examples

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of such activities in Europe cover different areas: new models of health care, energy systems, and new ways of engaging citizens in decision-making, environmental cities and comprehensive early education, social services [4, 5]. Social innovation as a phenomenon is multifaceted and its measurement is a complex process, as information accumulates in the presence and performance of not only the idea, but also the measurement of its sustainability and contribution to society over time [6]. The European Commission supports and complements Member States' policies on social inclusion and social protection. The vast majority of social work professionals by 2025 will be realized in the civil sector, for which the specialists must be specially prepared [7, 8].

Under these conditions of the global environment, the training objectives of social work and social innovation specialists are pursued through the application of Constructivist Learning Theory. As known, Constructivism differs from the traditional notion that knowledge exists independently of the individual. Constructivist learning theory perceives man as actively creating his / her own knowledge, ideas, development, and shaping his / her involvement in the life of the society. [9] Knowledge is obtained through individual participation and contact with information, not through imitations and repetitions, as is the case with traditional didactic subject - oriented models. The constructivist approach creates a higher degree of internalization and is more appropriate in practice of the learned [10,11].

The focus of the study is the relationship between the situation of social work education in Bachelor and Master Programs and participation of the students in real social activities of the non-governmental sector including social innovations. The research analysed extended functions of the social workers and the duties in the teams in which they were included (as trainees, practitioners, volunteers, junior employees). The plan follows the evaluation of the individual performances of the students' in-group training in social work and laboratory exercises. To accomplish the research we used group-training method [12], self-assessment method [13], and self-report of implementation method [14]. The lecturers stimulated the development of leadership skills, cooperative skills and rapid orientation in the cases of study. Performance appraisal is appreciated to improve public welfare.

The research began in 2015 under the project named "Development of sector competency model in the direction of 3.4 "Social activities" and mapping to assess the competence labour force in the field of social work", funded by the scientific and applied

program at the Technical University of Varna. After completion of the project, large part of the competency model elements was implemented. The lecturers revised curricula of the courses "Basis of Social Work", "Methods of Social Work", "Social Pedagogy", "Protection of Persons from Family Violence", and "Social Entrepreneurships". The lecturer continued conducting sustainability and change efficiency of student skills as part of a social innovation team.

2. Methodology of Research

Subject and contingent of the research

The study subject is preparation of the students in the "Social Management" specialty to be contributing participants in teams for social innovation. The main purpose of the research is to estimate the impact of volunteering, active participation in seminars and laboratory exercises, and involvement of the students in the social problems of the society. The main assumption of the study is that included in real profession students show at least moderate engagement with specific social issues and are most likely to become part of social innovation teams in non-profit organizations by employment contract in near future. Over 80% of the organizations involved in the contingent of the research have been assigned and perform extended functions in the field of social activities, which will prove the contribution of these specialists to the changing society.

The research includes 152 students within that number:

- 126 students in Bachelor program (third and fourth year of study) in "Social Management", full-time and part-time education – 85 % of the sample;
- 14 students in Master programs (first and second year of study) in the specialties "Social Management" and "Healthy and Safe Working Conditions" - 34% of the sample;
- Students participate through a request to the social work lecturer.
- All the students who stopped self-reporting at some time during the research, were not included in the study.

In the process of research, there are 26 organizations (non-profit, business, municipality and governmental) that are in contract with the Department "Social and Legal Sciences" to develop volunteer groups and/or manage social entrepreneurship, work on innovative methods, apply innovative practices and where students from the Department participated in their activities [15].

Methods of research

The *qualitative methods* are divided into two types according to the objectives of the research.

The methods applied for studying individual student development are interviewing, monitoring and evaluation of the performance of the activities of social work during the education program:

- Self-assessment method of the development personal view of performance level was applied at the end of each semester by in-depth interviewing;
- Self-report of the implementation method: each of the participating students at the end of each semester summarizes a personal self-report that is being discussed between the lecturer and the representative of the organization in which the student was engaged.
- Monitoring over the students' implementation in activities of social innovation skills during the semester by schedule.

The methods studied the level of beneficial behaviour of students in a team of social innovations in organizations and the way they included students in the activities:

- In-depth interviews by questionnaire "Study on the readiness for innovative practices" which was developed and trained under the Project BG051PO001-7.0.01-0124-C0001" of the Business Agency Association, Varna, BG and the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Services (IRISS) and "Exelia" EOOD, Varna, BG (the only accredited representative of the Institute of Leadership and Management, UK). All 14 participants are included in the focus groups after finishing the interviewing session.
- Three focus groups with representatives of organizations in whose activities the students are involved. The groups were conducted in the beginning of the research. The topics of the group sessions were "Detailed Analytical Competence in innovative social activities", "Evaluating strategic competence and creativity in innovative social activities", and "Assessing leadership skills in innovative social activities".

The *quantitative method* applied in the study has the purpose to present number of students included in the research who contracted the organizations deal which social innovation during one year of training, volunteering, junior employment and group educational training in the Department "Social and Legal Sciences".

3. Results and Analysis of the research

(A) "Description of its requirements of participation in the social innovation team " (14 presentative persons from organizations from Varna region have been included in interviewing) – summary.

Cognitive Skills

- Identify major issues and analyse
- To choose the approaches, means and methods of social work;

Interpersonal Interaction Skills

- Combining values, ideas, goals, priorities and urgent needs;
- Building a realistic image of the person about the person, changing and developing, in view of the social problems and their solving in different periods of life;
- Partnerships and collaboration with colleagues from their own and other professional spheres in the social support network.

Skills for decision-making

- Timely and adequate decision-making;
- Contracting, planning and realization of every step of solving the problem with the client, reaching agreement between the parties;
- Determination of decisions in achieving the necessary degree of co-ordination, co-operation and consistency in the assisting process;

Skills to identify resources and opportunities

- Assessment and optimal use of the opportunities and the resources of social networks and connections between systems of varying degrees of activity and importance;
- Professionally motivated selection depending on each case of approaches, models, forms, methods and means of social work with regard to values and theoretical knowledge in everyday practice in different working fields.

Administrative and business skills

- Cooperation and partnership with colleagues in mutual respect, respect, empowerment, trust, benevolent and constructive cooperation;
- keeping clear, structurally sound protocols to reflect the planned and the realized work, preparing reports and skills for their presentation to the direct administrative heads and the professional community;
- Collecting and processing information using modern and accessible tools and technologies.

The profession of social worker is not among the most attractive in Bulgaria. It is not highly paid, and communicating with people who, due to health or other problems, cannot cope with their lives alone, is often a test of humanity. That is why it is considered that only altruistic young people of their own will go to work in the social sphere, dealing

with citizens' problems, searching objectivity in variety of cases. Social workers will certainly survive in a financial and economic crisis if they develop cognitive and interaction skills. They will become even more demanding and sharp in decision-making. The citizens and their organizations expect from the social workers to identify resources and opportunities. In today's economic downturn, the "customers" of social welfare services will increase significantly and the skills and knowledge of the social workers will be more than needed. The social worker keeps all the documentation on the allocation and accrual of various types of benefits. It is highly individual.

(B) "Extended functions of the social activities specialist in team participation developing innovation in the organization" (20 organizations from Varna and the region were studied) - summarized results.

Participant in setting up and managing NGOs

- Leader and member of a board of a civil organization
- A member of the general assembly of the organization
- Project developer, implementing project activities
- Facilitator decision-maker, assistant, job assistant,
- A member of the organization's team in terms of innovation
- A participant in a multidisciplinary team
- Organizer of individual work with clients (leading social worker case, field work on innovative methodology)
- Organizer of group social work (on innovative methodology).

Client Plan Therapist (Project Participant)

- Trainer and lecturer of families and personalities
- A member of a "pressure group" of a civil organization
- Initiator of public activities to support people
- Innovator (conceptual developer) in building a policy to support people
- Presenter (public speaker) and organizer of public activities with new approaches, useful to the public
- Intermediary (between state institutions and citizens).

Among the basic attitudes of the professionals, closely related to their values are: understanding of customer acceptance, empathy, tolerance, optimism, moral responsibility, consistent with itself, creating and maintaining a relationship of respect for the customer, providing support in crisis situations, long and patient discussion of difficult customer

problems, searching innovative solutions attitudes for continuous training and qualification, rejecting any kind of discrimination: race and gender, minority, and others.

Leadership is the ability to establish vision and direction, to influence and align the others towards a common purpose, and to empower and inspire people to achieve project success. It enables the specialists activities to proceed in an environment of change and uncertainty. Leadership provides: constructive and immediate feedback. The social work activity manager is a leader – provide services to those who lead. The professionalism and ethics both relate to proper conduct and adequately to the existing regulations in the professional field. Professionalism is demonstrable awareness and application of qualities and competencies covering knowledge, appropriate skills and behaviors. Ethics covers the conduct and moral principles the recognized as appropriate within social policy management level.

The innovative team in organizations needs short-term action in a number of important policy and practical areas - action that will address and solve security issues, strengthen support for organization, maximize the availability of documents and information, and lead to a better quality consultation and expansion of organization's access to new areas of the interaction process between citizens and governmental organization.

While considering and addressing these short-term goals, the team should develop a long-term vision about the role of innovation at the organization in two, five or ten years. In this globalizing world, with changing roles for states and non-state actors, and radical shifts in communications technology, the specialist in social innovations must be able to think about how the organization will interact with a changing world, and will survive.

In other function, the social activity specialists can be described as a leader of a social work group or project participant. In the research the project function was taken as subject, because in the projects, the ideas are not covered by regulations restrictions and within the social work administration.

The selection of adequate criteria for the evaluation of project success will ensure its implementation in practice. For this reason, the problem can initially be solved in a small, clearly defined group. The analysis of the ideas and actions that led to success can be summarized. The application of the project results to the principles of the specific state social policy towards the results of the project will change the approach to the existing problem. The path of inclusion in the team must be accurately described; the students should be involved to cooperate, where possible, to ensure project

success. There is a correlation between the student's readiness for active participation in the activities and the level of acceptance by the team. The exact formulation of the positive changes that will achieve the project is of utmost importance. Indeed, positive changes are the real social cost of the project.

Project management refers always and in all cases to analysis of the problem, planning, organization, leadership, control and motivating teams and social groups. Clear work plan is the only way to accurately prosecute targets. Develop the plan and act on it. Planning has its peculiarities: sequence of activities and practices, monitor implementation, team modeling, the choice of method of implementation, financing, resource allocation and work, planning of spending, accounting for the stages, a statement of the objectives.

Resource allocation is required before the overall planning of the work.. The main reason for this is that resources are always limited. Resources may be tangible or intangible. The tangible resources are all material products, finance and facilities that are needed. Intangible resources are the abilities of those involved in the team, the works of the goals of each member of the team and cooperation of the target group.

The choice of technology, methods and tools to perform tasks to achieve the objectives depends on the complexity, length and specificity of the positive change that is sought. In developing and implementing projects for social change, the selection of methods depends on the specifics and the level of cooperation of the target groups. The choice depends on the existing legislation, of course.

Implementation mechanisms of the volunteering (trainee or young employee) can be direct or indirect. Direct mechanism is one that puts the project team at the center of the performance of the basic tasks. The indirect mechanism is the one which uses the levers of law, other organizations or professionals, to achieve social change. There are tangible and intangible tools for achieving social change in use and they always combine planning and execution of the social projects. Tangible tools are materials, finance, database, affecting change. Intangible tools are the personal and the peer influences, training, corrective measures, suggestion, acts of informal leaders in a changing community.

(C) "Percentage distribution of the contingent participated in volunteering or social activities, or have work place already in the team an year after graduated" (the result of 1 student is 0.65%, n = 152).

- They are practicing in social activities (by civil contract) or are already part of a team (employment contract) - 11%

- Participate actively in volunteering or have free program participation in social activities including projects, group work and fundraising – 37%
- Have experience in volunteering and would have participated again but currently do not have contract – 35%
- Have not been involved in volunteering and do not have such an intention at present – 17%

(D) "Percentage distribution of the contingent of students in terms of evaluation of participation in seminars and laboratory exercises on social work and social pedagogy (self-reports)" (the result of 1 student is 0.65%, n = 152)

- Participation is active, committed, satisfying - 43%
- Participation is active, engaging but not always satisfying - 19 %
- Participation is passive, noncommittal but satisfactory - 27%
- Participation is passive, uncommitted and unsatisfactory - 11%

(E) "Percentage distribution of satisfaction and active participation in seminars and exercises of student volunteers and participants in teams" (the result of one student is 1.61%, n = 62)

- Participation is active, committed, satisfying – 73 %
- Participation is active, engaging but not always satisfactory - 12%
- Participation is passive, noncommittal but satisfactory - 15 %
- Participation is passive, noncommittal and unsatisfactory - 0%

(F) "Description of useful skills acquired during seminars and laboratory exercises according to student volunteers and participants in teams" - summary

- To participate in an early intervention team - knowledge of the early intervention service, how it is applied, who needs it, skills for cooperation, active listening, management of difficult relationships, etc.;
- To participate in a team for mobile social services - correct timing, cooperation, negotiation, decision making, helping the client to make decisions, empathy;
- To participate in family-based social assistance - build a trust relationship by fulfilling commitments, accountability, co-operation, solving case studies of everyday life;
- Consultation and referral to specialists - active listening, knowledge of the legal

framework of social services, building a trust relationship through fulfilling the commitments, etc.

Activities that are useful to society are not able to arise on their own – there need to be a generator of ideas and prepared teams for implementation. This suggests that social practices from other countries should not be enforced and imposed in our country because there are good ideas in Bulgaria as well. However, qualified specialists meeting the requirements of the society and the organizations are insufficient. The preparation of the social work specialists generally accepts a cardinal structure of social work (for example, in social administrations or in community services). The curricula based on fundamental law, psychology, sociology, and practical focus is available after the 2 semester. Previously, "practitioners" (especially those in the first year of study) are not familiarizing with social work methods, but innovation ideas in field are well established in the "Basis of Social work". This is logical - a matter must first be studied very thoroughly, then supervised, and ultimately - on its own. Contrary to this, however, it is the expectation of the society that the students in social management have at the beginning the necessary knowledge base about the structure of the society, its regularities and the availability of relevant sensitivity to social problems.

Students with richer living experience would seem to be doing much better in training and then in their realization in the "social activities" direction.

The requirements of the developing society in Bulgaria and its organizations in terms of skills, and sphere of activity, the type of participation and even the way of thinking of social work professionals are increasing. The in-depth training of social work professionals goes through systematic training on the social work (basics and methods) as well as training on methodologies for working with various vulnerable groups such as children and the disabled, youths in conflict with the law, the unemployed, victims of violence, etc. At each stage of preparation, students who intend to practice, whether they will be able to do so later, stand out. These students

participate conscientiously, on regular basis, precondition the materials and tasks from the seminars and laboratory exercises on time. It is right to clarify that not all of them excel. We assume that if the problem is studied in the field of interest of the students, the satisfaction of their participation increases. This also increases the rating of the subject. The participation in group dynamics of the field of social work motivates students differently and it depends of the self-assessment. Such a conclusion leads to a combination of facts. For example available satisfaction of participation in teams leads performing social activities and developing innovative approaches. Volunteering in providing assistance helps students to engaging in social cases where they could help with time, information or support – so they opened a behaviour sphere of positive interaction dynamics. It can be concluded that encourage students to participate in the above-mentioned initiatives would actually contribute to their lasting motivation to practice in the "social activities" direction.

4. Conclusions

The results proved the main assumption of the study.

The encouragement of self-inclusion, volunteering, and active implementation in educational group sessions helps students to develop their opportunities to participate actively and meaningfully in social innovation teams. Social work professionals have made a significant contribution to transforming the attitude of team activities and self-assessment. They started to use these technics in active work implementation.

The requirements for social work professionals are widespread and inflated. Universities should keep in mind that society will need almost double the number of well-trained social work professionals by 2025. The Bachelor degree of "Social management" needs to include programmes of self-development and self-assessment, along with practical and theoretical knowledge. The students were most often employed in the civic sector, requiring quality knowledge and personal competencies. The extended functions of social workers and their participation in social work innovation teams are very important factor for the implementation, assessment and sustainability of the projects on which civil organizations work.

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