

Motivation and Leadership in Social Service Management: A Review of Theories

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Abstract

Leading and motivating employees to success are one of the important responsibilities of social work managers. Often when these managers combine practice together with theories, it will produce significant results. The conceptual paper is aimed to assist social work administrators and educators via an overview of relevant theories of motivation and leadership including its application in social work practice.

Keywords: Administrators, educators, motivation, leadership, theories

Introduction

Social service can be in a form of formal systems for instance government welfare programs, education, mental health services, mental health organizations, physical health care establishments and the correctional services of the legal justice system. Some authors claimed that social services is an essential feature or known as new consciousness in the formal helping system. In contrast, some others viewed social services as a concept that represents an integrated delivery of services to consumers. Likewise, it can also be defined as a socio-political movement that has aspects of a subtle revolution. Others may see social services as a platform which focuses on individual to manage social welfare problems, psychological, behavioural, or natural conditions. Any person who involves in social service, depending on the training, experience and personal goals may focus on one or more of these elements.

Social Service Organization

Mehr (1995) identified social services organization as group activities that focus on assisting, improving and supporting people's life to achieve their well-being. There are unique characteristics that can be found on social service agencies. As non-profit agencies, they rely on the political trends such as policy making and budgeting in favour of achieving their goals, which is ultimately providing services to clients (Kettner, 2002). In order to organize social service organization, social policies deemed as crucial. Mehr (1995) asserted that social policies are principles, guidelines, and concepts which governed by laws, regulations and rules to guide a society's actions towards its members.

In addition, the primary source of funding for social service agencies originated from federal and state government (Gates, 1980). Only selected problems are dealt by cities, countries, or regional associations, but generally programs funded by local governments depends so much on federal and state funding sources. Kettner (2002) discovered that government funding is directed more towards population groups and problem areas. Even though mainstream programs at both federal and state levels are likely to receive continuous funding, there are political and financial factors that affecting the budgeting process of the funding, such as prominent social issues, high visibility media coverage and effecting lobbying efforts. Hence, a fund raising strategy that targets government funds must be developed first. This can be done by identifying domains where the agency fits and able to provide services.

Providing services is another distinct aspect that can be found in social service organization. Social service organization comprises of specialists who provide services to the clients (Werham, 1967, 1975). Therefore, the head of social service agencies must ensure that their social workers and others are able to deliver quality services and fulfil clients' need, subsequently achieving the agencies' goal. Werham (1967, 1975) also emphasized that a broader and long term approach must be taken by agencies in order to meet the needs. Instead of just focusing on serving existing clients' need, unmet needs must be taken into account and planned for.

Another important element for social service organization in providing services to clients achieving their well-being is social work value. Social work value including respect for individual worth and growth capacity and also freedom to access rights in general and professional (Werham 1967, 1975). Hereby a social worker administrator in a social service agency must believe that social work is a way to serve the agency's purposes. In any occasion, social agency's administrator always involved in decision making which often employs the use of value judgments, not just as a neutral party. In addition, the administrator should manage human resources creatively, as social work values respect the client's needs and potentialities.

Being democratic and professional authority is crucial in running social service management. A social worker working in a social service agency may accept the authority of an administrator due to his or her position, legal sanctions or pure respect. Professional social workers, who are trained professionally, should be able to take up their own responsibility in delivering quality work. This can be achieved if the authority of the administrator is democratically implemented and focused towards better social work service functions (Werham 1967, 1975).

Philosophy, Values and Ethics in Social Work

Social work often comprises of elements that are related with each other and coupled together with social work practice. Social work can be defined as a service-focused career which revolves around problem solving and improving social functioning that associated to capacity and quality enhancement of life of an individual, group or community. Social service organizations also shared the same definition of social work as they are also focused on providing assistance to the community. The philosophy of social work is usually adopted as an ideology in social work.

Philosophy is characterized as a study of general and fundamental problems concerning matters such as existence, knowledge, values and belief, reason, mind, language, and a system of principles for guidance in practical affairs. In social work context, philosophy is used to embed rationale in the value of social work profession and help the workers to pursue the objectives for the development of community services. Both moral values and social norms become the foundation of social work philosophy.

Social work value includes orientation, thought and a clear picture in each of assumed situation that possibly exists in the society and deliver the appropriate solution to meet the human needs. Hence, social service organization should not neglect the value of social work because the value is the key for the employees to provide effective services.

Furthermore, social work ethics influence the social work practice. Ethics obtained based on value, concerning how a social worker behave and serve the people. Elements included in ethical principle of social work such as receiving, forgiving, self-determination, maturity, emotionless in problem solving and personality. These elements should be accompanied with the social service organization. Philosophy, values and ethics of social work can become as guidelines for organization to provide better services.

Theoretical Approach to Social Services Management

There are several perspectives in management of social service. Management can be seen as a system of interconnected parts that focuses on effective and efficient delivery of services (Miringoff, 1980). It is a process of designing and maintaining an environment in order to achieve selected goals efficiently. Previous studies associated to management show that organization should carries out the functions of planning, organizing, staffing, leading, and controlling. Hence, concept, principle, theory, and techniques of management are clustered based on these five functions.

Every small and large organizations, whether profit or non-profit enterprises, manufacturing as well as service industries applies management in their activities. Usually managers have to take responsibility by taking appropriate action and also apply five managerial functions which subsequently drive employees to contribute to the organization as effective as possible. Theory plays a role as a way to classify significant and pertinent management knowledge (Miringoff 1980).

Theory X and Theory Y

The classic book "The Human Side of Enterprise" by Douglas McGregor (1969) stated an interesting theoretical approach on organizational effectiveness and efficiency. Two different attitudes, which are demotivated and motivated employees towards workforce motivation were identified.

These perspectives, known as Theory X and Theory Y, have been used extensively in human resource management, organizational behaviour, and organizational development. Each of them took a contrast and extreme view of human nature in working environment context. Furthermore, each of the views has dramatic implications on the practice of management.

Often managers practice Theory X, which management presumes that an average person is fundamentally lazy and will try to avoid work as possible (McGregor, 1969). The workers naturally dislike work. For instance, employees will be likely to show less ambition and to try to decline any responsibility that they have. Hence, Theory X is associated with managers' pessimistic and distrustful attitude towards employees. Then employees need to be monitored closely and checked constantly. This theory emphasizes on supervision in managing employees and organization. Wise managers should be able to manage the good and poor quality employees in order to build up potential and strong organization, which consequently leads to effective services for the client. To overcome this, Theory X managers generally adopt a rigid stance towards their employees for better work in control-oriented situation. Every so often, Theory X managers in this situation employs threat and pressure heavily in order to obtain their employees' compliance. In social service context, an effective supervision is required by the management to monitor these employees for the sake of providing professional service to meet the clients' need.

Moreover, a manager responsibility is to motivate employees and to modify their behaviour so it fits to the needs of the organization. Employees are only motivated on money to sustain their life. Money, which seen as a basic need to fulfil pay and job security of human being, belongs to lower level of Maslow's Hierarchies of Needs (1943). Should these needs are satisfied, then the source of motivation is lost and this revert the employees to the previous behaviour. Maslow (1943) also added that management style that adopt Theory X deters the satisfaction of higher-levels needs, in favour of employees' better performance. By doing this, employees will set their focus to satisfy their higher level needs by seeking particularly monetary rewards.

Further suggestion by Sigmund Freud on Maslow's Theory of Human Needs (1940; 1943) stated that appropriate management style of Theory X often uses rewards, coercion, intimidation and punishment in order to get the employees to work. This method is known as "stick and carrot", a philosophy of management to transform the employees' attitudes. Stick and carrot method normally comes with two approach, whether the behaviour is changed by force or by choice via use of rewards. In this context, fear is a "convenient" tool for Malaysian managers and organizations. Nevertheless, fear can has its weakness, since it can cause pressure, stress and worse, revolt. Such situation can be illustrated by fearful workers that had been forced to deliver their job, which in the end leads low quality service and the worker could not fulfil the clients' need. Hence, this situation is against social work value and philosophy. "Stick" or fear will bear positive result if it is used appropriately. Additionally, it is also beneficial for short term period; while little force is applied to the employees, it may increase their performance without provided incentives or financial remuneration.

On the other hand, the carrot approach emphasizes on employees' contribution or productivity because they are presented with incentives, salary increase, promotions, or others relevant rewards. It can work definitely as long as adequate rewards are provided. Conversely, it is only effective for severe demotivated employees, for instance those who are not satisfied with the working environment or lost their interest in work. By implementing this approach, rewards may be able to attract and motivate the employees. For example, attractive compensation can be given to social worker as a motivation for them to improve their work performance. The carrot concept only works if the rewards are superficially attractive enough. Else, it may backfire the organization. As an illustration, should the employees receive merely compliments after performing their task exceptionally, it is quite demotivating because the rewards was below their expectation.

In contrast, some researchers provide different explanations regarding rewards and performance. Rewards can be seen as a tool to encourage people to set their sight solely on a task, to complete it as fast as they could, and take less risks (Amabile, 1985). On the other hand, rewards can be perceived as a mean to control the employees, which can lead to reduced creativity to some extent. Therefore, extrinsic rewards can destroy intrinsic interest. Individuals who are working for money, approval or competitive success generally find their tasks less enjoyable, and subsequently avoid this as well. For that reason, a responsible manager should be clear that rewards and punishment need to be provided at the right timing and place in favour of satisfying employees' needs and booting their work performance. Simply put, a responsible manager should not always offer rewards to their employees.

Motivation can be seen as an approach to activate or energize goal-orientated behaviour, but managers and supervisors should always consider actual employees and adapt general principles to expectations, values and skills they have. Achievement and any creative work are hard to come by if the manager and the workers work in oppressive and frustrating atmosphere. Therefore, Theory X employs hard approach towards the employees. Hence, McGregor confirmed that neither approach is suitable due to unrealistic assumption of Theory X. He, however, saw that Theory Y is more viable compared to Theory X (McGregor, 1969).

Theory Y can be illustrated where a management assumes average employees may be ambitious and self-motivated and exercise self-control. Employees are believed to enjoy their mental and physical work duties. In addition, Theory Y has the ability that sought for in social work, which is creative problem solving. Under certain conditions, Theory Y managers believe that employees, who is accomplishing objectives or tasks, will learn to find and accept responsibility and to exercise self-control and self-direction. In social service context, being creative is crucial for social worker to serve the clients' needs without or least supervision. Good social workers who are fairly remunerated and rewarded will enjoy bringing their energy and determination, plus sharing the organizational goal in their line of work.

Furthermore, Theory Y noted that creative, committed and hardworking employees in the right conditions. Such characteristics are vital in social service practice because a worker that is resourceful should be able to come up with various approaches to tackle any problems related to clients. While humans are unique and have different needs, therefore good social workers are required to formulate in any possible way to address clients' need and to achieve their well-being.

In human resource development, McGregor (1969) hypothesized that Theory Y managers tend to develop trust better with employees in comparison with Theory X managers. Hence it is important for managers to communicate openly with subordinates, minimizing the difference between superior-subordinate relationships and creating a comfortable environment in which subordinates can develop and use their abilities. For instance, a social worker can always revert to his or her supervisor comfortably should there is any difficulties arise particularly in managing clients' need. Through fruitful discussion between worker and supervisor, efficient solution can be developed to address clients' problem.

In the meantime, relationship between management and employees help to retain confidence and lessen fears among staff members. Often better relationship between management and employees affect the relationship with clients too. Hence, having such employees is quite crucial to serve people. This environment allow subordinates to voice their opinion in decision making process. Additionally, Theory Y managers have confidence on people to do well at work under proper conditions. A strong motivation can come from the satisfaction of doing a good job. In Malaysia, particularly social service, Theory Y is seen as a positive set of beliefs in delivering effectively services to people.

Other than McGregor's studies, Likert (1967) also focused on human aspect of organization. Likert claimed that the efficiency of an organization or its departments is influenced greatly by their system of management. He added that optimal performance can only be achieved if the human aspects of subordinates' problems and behavioural aspects are observed. Operating characteristics such as motivating forces, communication processes, interaction-influence processes, decision making processes, goal setting processes, control processes and performance may affect the leadership style. The style can be either job or employee centred, and then further breakdown into exploitive authoritative, benevolent authorities, consultative system and participative group. Likert's systems are quite similar to McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y.

Social service requires employees to bring their energy and ambition to work in the service of a shared set of organizational goals. Moreover, creativity also play as key role when dealing with customers because it can help in building trust and good relationship. Sustaining this relationship can be good for referrals and future problem solving. Patti (1983) concurred that individual are unique among each other and there is no one for all solution to serve people. Hence, building a strong relationship demands a good communication flow. Should the communication flow become too rigid, it would disrupt the efficiency of helping process. Other than communication and understanding, managers should make a cooperative decision that includes the workers. This characteristic, which included in participative group systems, serves as a distinct differentiator against other three management systems that focus on authoritative managers.

As outlined by McGregor, a practical manager should practice the system that is similar to Theory Y assumptions. It means that managers can adopt participative group system which focuses on delegation of responsibilities to employees, fully confidence and trust and also personal growth. Communication should occur a lot between the manager and employees and employees are fully involved in decision making process. Since employees are directly dealt with client and have better understanding of the client, they should be given the opportunity to participate and give opinion. When employees feel comfortably to express their opinion, teamwork emerged. Teamwork are connected together by people, who are members of more than one team. These people, who belong to more than one group, are known as “linking pins” by Likert, feel responsible to achieve the organization’s objectives.

Likert (1967) recommended all organizations, whether profit-oriented or human-concerned organizations to adopt the participative group system. Obviously, change management may be painful and long-winded, nevertheless it is for the betterment of the organization. In this system, the optimum solution utilized maximum use of participative approach. Leaders should engage with employees in decision-making and have complete confidence in their subordinates. In addition, motivation can be driven by economic rewards based on goals which have been set in participation. All personnel at all levels will feel the real responsibility for the organizational goals which include communication and a considerable amount of cooperative teamwork. At this stage, people across the organization are psychologically closer together and work well together at all levels. In fact, combination of great teamwork and experts helps to achieve clients’ need better.

Furthermore, confidence level among social workers can be built using participative group system in order to deliver service to clients effective. In contrast, it is quite different than exploitive authoritative system and benevolent authorities system where both systems focus on Theory X. Confidence and trust does not have a place for these systems. Employees are restricted to discuss things concerning their job with their superior and often neglect teamwork practice. In worst-case scenario, the employees are demotivated and under pressure.

Considering the job-centred system, employees are kept busy through a prescribed work cycle at a satisfactory time rate. The job is broken down to component parts, then executed by trained people and applies constant pressure in order to achieve output using all the resources available. Exploitive authoritative system is one of the job-centred practice, where employees are required to obey the decision made by managers or higher status person in the organization. This top down approach does not distribute the responsibilities among the leaders and employees. Consequently, leaders bear significant responsibility, have complete distrust towards employees, and lacking of two-way communication flow, whereas employees are purely ignored and their voices are unheard. The gap created in this system actually fuelled by fear and threat in order to ensure employees’ compliance. Hereby the job become the main concern and the employees’ feeling are distanced, which leads to demotivation and low morale.

Another system, known as 'benevolent authoritative system', includes employees’ concern in managers’ decision. Instead of threats, management rewards employees to encourage performance, motivates them and listens more to issues at lower level of the organization. However, the voices heard by managers and higher ups are often rose-tinted. In other words, information may flow from subordinates to managers but it is constrained to “what management want to hear”. There is relatively less teamwork due to lack of delegation of decisions and major decisions are still made centrally. Literally, there is no teamwork at all.

A different system, namely consultative system, is seen to generate average productivity and services. In this system, leadership is held by superiors who have extensive but not complete trust in their subordinates. Motivation is driven by rewards and some involvement, where quite a number of personnel, particularly those at higher levels has sense of responsibility to achieve organization goals. Communication not only does exist in both vertical and horizontal, but also moderate amount of teamwork can be found in this system. This management system motivates subordinates by rewards and degrees of involvement in the decision making process. The ideas and opinions provided by subordinates are used constructively. Even though this system is perceived as people centred approach, there is lack of involvement and major decisions are determined by the senior management. The flow of information from subordinates to management is greater compared to benevolent authoritative system. Such information flow is subject to euphemism and incomplete. Communication has a great impact in organization management. It can be utilized by managers to establish and maintain interpersonal relationship, pay attention to others, and gain the information needed to create encouraging workplace. However in job centred context, system is seen as manipulative and may result to low productivity.

Limited communication and participation may hinder social workers' performance to deal with the clients and they have to work under pressure. In order to deliver a successful social service, social workers have to develop relationship with client without emotionally attached and having a sense of humour for sure will be helpful. As a result, trusting relationship among clients and social service is established and leads to better service for clients to fulfil their needs. Townend (2006) claimed that client's dependence on social workers expertise progresses steadily and their professional networking help them to meet current and long term needs. An organization should stand as one regardless of incidents or problems occurred. Participative group management system is recommended and ideal for organization to achieve optimum effectiveness (Likert, 1967). Managers and supervisors should consider actual employees involvement and adapt general principles to expectations, values and skills that employees have. These conditions should be developed by organizations in order to encourage every manager to deal the employees with utmost care.

Last but not least, four system approaches resemble Theory X and Theory Y respectively. Each of the theories created self-fulfilling prophecies. Theory Y, in short means that by treating employees well at work and given them responsibility, they will respond positively. On the other hand, Theory X behaves oppositely.

Conclusion

There are number of perspectives when describing on management of human service. Miringoff (1980) theorizes management as a system consists of parts that interacting with each other in order to provide effective and efficient services. It can also be defined as a process that involves design and maintenance of an environment in favour of accomplishing selected objectives. Pattie (1983) described that a good management and social practices should carries out functions of planning, developing, organizing, staffing, motivating, and controlling.

Usually managers in organization strive for information, influence and resources. Top managers have responsibility to craft an environment that is conducive and in line with organizations objectives and goals. Hence, leadership is a crucial aspect in management. Each situation is unique and requires different leadership styles. Leadership can be defined as a process of influencing people so they could contribute willingly and enthusiastically towards organization's objectives and goals. Moreover, aspects including communication, motivation, participation, teamwork and creative problem solving are important in managing organization and ensuring employees can progress dynamically.

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