

Organizational culture in social services – focused on the workers’ well-being

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Abstract. Objectives: In the field of social services, the organizational culture today is defined mainly through professional values, for individual social service providers by vision, mission, goal, or organizational values. In the context of increasing the quality of services and culture supporting the clients’ well-being, the workers’ well-being is an important subject of interest. The aim of the research is to find out the current state of the documents defining the organizational culture of social services. Materials and Methods: Review and theoretical analysis of the literature on the topic. Qualitative content analysis of documents. Documents defining the organizational culture of social service providers in Slovakia were analysed. The documents on the provider’s web page encompassing vision, mission, goals, and values were found. Results: From the documents, it was found out that support to employees is still neglected. At the practical level, the support to employees was expressed as the support of education, supervision of employees, a social fund for cultural or sports activities, rewarding of employees. Employee s’ satisfaction or a committed approach towards employees were expressed rarely. Conclusions: The provision of social services today faces many demands and dilemmas that “social work services,, bring with them. Incorporating support for employee’s well-being into the organizational culture of social services can be an essential step towards better client care and higher quality services.

1 Introduction

The practice in social services during recent decades shows that the search for other tools to support social workers (SW) is an important challenge due to several reasons: high occupational demands [1], risk of burnout and its negative consequences [2], the pressure on the quality of services, and the fact that social work is a profession in crisis [3]. SW support tools are insufficient: SW does not implement self-care to large extent [4], education and professional development imposed by law are not enough as the only form of support. Supervision as a support method suffers from few trainers, lack of time, distrust or reluctance [5]. The solution at the organizational level is as follows: changes in organizational culture (OC) over time gradually bring an emphasis on professional development, motivation of employees [6], quality models assume a satisfied client while SW is satisfied [7,8]. The organization should create conditions for the well-being of the worker, conditions for self-care and workplaces

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which are psychologically healthy [9]. Theoretical and practical building of a healthy, ethically sensitive organizational culture of social service agencies is one of the important goals of the professional ethics of social work in Slovakia [10]. If the organization perceives the employee's well-being as an important value, the employee's well-being will relate with the client's well-being and can thus contribute to a higher quality of service. In the context of increasing the quality of services, a culture supporting the clients' well-being through the workers' well-being [11] is an important subject to discuss.

Management can influence changes in organizational culture already today, at the level of formulation of OC pillars – vision, strategy, goals, mission, and organizational values. Incorporating support to employees into OC pillars means changing “mental programming” [12], which is gradually reflected in the behaviour and actions in the organisation.

1.1 Organizational well-being

“Feeling good at work” is a value that benefits both the individual and the organization as a whole [13]. According to Torri, Toniolo [14], organizational WB (OWB) can be defined as the ability of an organization to increase and maintain the physical, psychological, and social WB of workers at all levels and for every job position. Today, international organizations emphasize the support to the employee and the increase of well-being in the workplace. Kim [15] states in a WHO publication that workers make up half of the population and a healthy workforce is a prop for sustainable development and social WB. The International Labour Organization [16] presents WB of workers as the key factor in the long-term effectiveness of the organization with respect to research that points to a direct line between productivity, general health, and WB workers.

Bennet et al. [17] state that the growing interest in WB in the workplace gives rise to a new paradigm that represents the way today's society thinks and acts about the health and WB of workers. The authors summarize the conclusions of several studies that reflect the effects of increasing WB in the workplace:

- leads to greater involvement and productivity of workers,
- leads to job satisfaction, resp. to the greater satisfaction of the worker,
- increases optimism, a sense of meaning in life, prosperity and success,
- increases human growth and well-being (flourishing, thriving),
- improves the overall functioning of a person, from satisfying their basic needs through the ability to express and strengthen personality,
- gives opportunities for self-realization and spiritual fulfilment within the work.

Moon [18] presents the differences between the terms wellness and WB in the workplace. Wellness, a two-dimensional concept, traditionally focuses on physical and mental health, disease prevention, the absence of risk factors, and reduction of payments for health care (in case of diseases). Well-being is a multidimensional concept that takes into account the different dimensions of the human WB – physical, mental/emotional, social, financial, spiritual, with an emphasis on the presence of factors that support the improvement of workers' engagement and good work experience. These concepts are sometimes vaguely distinguished in literature.

Moon [18] distinguishes the following dimensions of WB: organizational WB – presents measures such as feedback on needs in individual areas of employee support; financial – is associated with educational programs towards better financial literacy; mental (emotional) – refers to psychological WB, related to positive psychology (happiness, prosperity-flourishing, strengths of personality); the use of psychological capital (optimism, hope, resilience); social – fulfils the need for strong and loving relationships, feeling that a person is part of the

community; and physical – not only as the absence of symptoms of the disease, but the emphasis on physical activity, exercise, a healthy diet and rest.

The American Association for Veterinary Physicians has developed the OWB model, which defines nine dimensions of WB that can be developed in the workplace at both the organizational and individual levels. It defines areas that can be developed towards the overall WB of employees [19]¹:

1. Creative – a creatively well person is able to appreciate or participate in various fields of art and culture, which help them to understand and appreciate the world around.
2. Emotional – an emotionally well person is able to identify, express and manage the whole spectrum of their feelings and is able to seek help in solving the problem.
3. Environmental – environmentally well people can recognize the need to protect and improve their environment and appreciate the interconnectedness of nature and a human.
4. Financial – A financially well person is fully aware of their financial situation, condition and savings, they can manage and set material goals according to them.
5. Intellectual – an intellectual person appreciates lifelong learning and cultivates critical thinking, develops moral thinking, broadens the worldview, engages in further education and the development of knowledge.
6. Employable – a professionally well person engages in work to gain personal satisfaction and enrichment, consistent with their values, goals and lifestyle.
7. Physical – a physically well person provides them with an adequate amount of sleep, eats a balanced and dietary diet, tries to exercise 150 minutes a week, attends regular medical examinations, and limits the use of toxic substances.
8. Social – a socially well person has a network of support from people, based on mutual trust and respect, and has a developed sense of awareness of the feelings of others.
9. Spiritual – a spiritually well person seeks harmony and balance by discovering the depth of meaning and purpose of human existence, seeks a connection with this essence through dialogues and self-reflection.

According to the authors of the paper, the AVMA publication [19] is a suitable source of inspiration for a broader and deeper understanding of the possibilities of the organizational WB. It respects the holistic understanding of a person, takes into account the organizational context and various variables operating at the organizational level, therefore it is considered also in the research part.

1.2 Organizational culture in social services

An organization is a system whose inner life is shaped by the culture of the organization as a shared system of values and rules of conduct and action, which affects its functioning and success. From an objectivist point of view, the culture of the organization is a subsystem of the organization, which significantly determines its effectiveness, quality of working life of its members, reduces conflicts, ensures continuity, facilitates coordination and control, reduces employee insecurity, and affects their job satisfaction and emotional well-being. It can be an important source of motivation for employees, the meaningfulness of work, a sense of belonging and importance in the organization, identification with the goals and mission of the organization [20].

Healthcare and social care researchers have gradually begun to realize that research cannot be separated from organizational aspects, as both helping professionals and clients operate in a particular organizational context [21].

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Historical changes in organizational culture in social services bring new challenges also in the context of support for employees. Through the charitable, health-medical, and service models, social services are shifting to a human rights model [22], which represents the client's support for an active way of life in the natural inclusive environment of the local community (community services). New values and philosophies have a decisive effect on changing organizational culture. An important factor of successful change is also the position and support of the employee in the new system of services, from which not only professional but also human and personal competencies are required.

The current legislation reflects the support for social workers only in the area of professional development (further education, supervision, adaptation of the employee) and as a way to ensure the quality of services [23]. The legislation does not deal with other dimensions of support for a social worker and their well-being. The specificity of the profession is that it takes place basing on a close interpersonal relationship. The personality of SW itself, its values, and human qualities are part of its working tools. However, this human capital, which social workers invest in their work, has its limits and needs to be renewed and supplemented, otherwise, there is a risk of emerging burnout syndrome. Research shows that workers in more demanding positions neglect self-care [26]. As this is a non-instinctive activity resulting from learning through interpersonal relationships, it is important, in order to protect social workers, to stimulate well-being activities through training, education, or support from the organizational environment.

Lovašová [27] presents organizational conditions influencing self-care: the functioning of the organization, the management of the organization and efforts to create psychologically healthy workplaces. The activities that the organization has to perform are supervision, education and well-being. In this context, organizational WB should be a part of OC also in the social services area. OWB perceives the needs of the worker holistically and helps them to create regular habits and rituals to support WB. It calculates with the employee's own activity in taking care of them at the same time providing incentives for the organization to support employees.

The culture of the organization in social services and its support towards the well-being of the client and the employee can be a systemic solution to support the social workers that we need today. Building a "culture of well-being" [28, 29] in social services primarily presupposes an audit of the existing organizational culture. It is necessary to focus on the goals and values formulated in favour of the well-being of the client and the employee as pillars of organizational culture. Management can influence changes in organizational culture already today at the level of formulation of OC pillars – vision, strategy, goals, mission, organizational values. Incorporating employee support into OC pillars means changing "mental programming" [12], which is gradually reflected in the behaviour and actions in the organisation.

1.3 Good practise examples

Some foreign health and social services formulate vision, mission and organizational values, where the support of a WB worker can be gradually included and deliberately transferred to the functioning of an organization providing social services.

The British organization Be Caring [30], which provides home care services, in defining organizational culture states that the needs of clients always come first, while taking into account the needs of employees, colleagues, families and communities. The basic value of "be careful" is described as follows: Be Caring was born from a desire to recognise that at the heart of everything we do is care. Care for our colleagues, care for our customers, and care for our friends, families and communities. Working together to support and encourage

our people and customers to reach their goals, however large or small they may be, is what we are about.

The UK Home Care Agency ‘Helping hands’ [31] defines its culture through its core value and four pillars. “Kindness“ is considered to be the basis - the best performance is expected of employees, but at the same time everyone has the right to make mistakes and learn from them. The pillars of the company and its organizational culture are: team (mutual listening and understanding), values (together we can “empower” each other), safety (well-being of the client and employees is the highest priority, trust is built by providing a safe environment) and performance (success is achieved by working together).

An example of good practice in the field of OWB is the professional organization American Association of Veterinary Workers [32]. It defines its activities as follows: we protect, promote and advance in meeting the needs of all veterinarians and those they serve (AVMA, online). Key values include ethical, inclusive, science based, supportive, fiscally responsible, efficient, and innovative. AVMA also formulates two values that show how an employee can be “centred” but the benefit of the clients is the priority: 1. “client-focused” - employees are supported in the service provided; 2. “member-centric” – the responsibility for the needs of our members is perceived by the organisation (AVMA, online).

AVMA [19] offers an WB model in an organization that divides competencies and tasks in each area between the individual and the organization. Authors of this paper are also inspired by this model.

2 Material and methods

The theoretical analysis of literature was made on the topic, the examples of good practice were searched from organizations that formulate support for employees in their vision, goals, mission and values were looked up and used: Helping Hands UK, Be Caring (United Kingdom), AVMA (United States). AVMA [19] has published a handbook defining 9 dimensions of well-being in an organization, the division of responsibilities and tasks between the individual and the organization. The focus on the client and employees at the same time is expressed by the values: client-focused, member-centric – the needs of our members are taken in account. Similar formulations and areas of WB in the documents of Slovak social service providers were searched for.

Aim of the research was to find out the current state, such as if the employee support is embedded in the documents defining the organizational culture of social service providers.

Research method was qualitative content analysis of documents. Documents defining the organizational culture of social service providers in Slovakia were analysed. Searching social services providers’ vision, mission, goals, and values on the internet, we obtained the documents from the provider’s web pages. Research sample was created by intentional selection [33]. The selection criterion was that the organization had published documents: organizational vision, mission, goals and values, and at least two annual reports from 2018–2020. Twelve residential social care homes (7 public, 5 private) were chosen for the analysis. In Slovakia there are 199 residential social care homes, half of them are private. We adjusted the ratio in the sample to the total number of facilities in Slovakia.

Research questions:

RQ 1 How is the support of social workers in residential care homes formulated within the documents defining the organizational culture (vision, mission, goals, and values)?

RQ 2 What elements of support for the well-being of a social worker are implemented in the normal course of the organization?

The above documents were analysed to answer RQ1. The annual reports to determine the existing state of support for employees were analyzed to answer RQ2. To obtain data we used inductive and deductive content analysis procedures [33].

3 Data analysis

In the analysis of data, the qualitative methodology was implemented. In the first research question, inductive analysis was used, the unit of analysis was selected as follows: **support of the employees in the organization**. The content and qualitative elements were recorded. In the first research question, inductive analysis of organizational documents proceeded: vision, mission, goals, and values. The staff support was only included in organizational goals. Only one of the 12 facilities mentioned the support for the worker within the vision, one of the facilities mentioned the support for the workers within the values. Within the goals, 20 codes that indicated different forms of support for social workers were identified and categorized. The categories represented different areas of the OWB inspired by the 9-dimensional model [19]. The results of the analysis are shown in Table 1. In the second research question, categories as OWB dimensions were recognized deductively, and their subcategories in the annual reports as OWB elements. In addition to the elements of OWB, which have already been marked in the organizational goals, codes and categories from the area of emotional and physical WB were identified. Annual reports have been conceived in various ways, often as financial statements. Only some of them provided relevant information on staff support. The results of the analysis are in Table 2.

4 Results

Organizational goals analysis showed that management of residential providers of social services focuses on the support of the workers especially in the field of education and training (professional WB), teamwork (social WB), improvement of working conditions, and the working environment (occupational WB). As to the goals, the identified areas were as follows: professional WB (increasing qualifications and professional competencies, continuing education, supervision, adaptation); social WB (teamwork, the atmosphere of open communication, improving relationships); intellectual WB (shaping the thinking and attitudes of employees, setting individual goals and lead to personal responsibility); employees' WB (to create or innovate a suitable work environment that supports responsibility, motivation, participation, partnership, intentions to improve working conditions, adhere to the maximum number of employees per client). While the organizational goals represented the intention ("mental programming"), the annual reports showed the real state of implementation of WB. Annual reports have shown that training and supervision are the most common methods of supporting workers. Other categories and dimensions of WB are presented in Table 2.

The chosen method of data collection and interpretation of data was limited mainly by insufficient and uneven sources of information on the goals, vision, mission, values as the quality of these key documents differs in the relation to OC of the concrete social services provider. To obtain more detail data, it is appropriate to proceed the interview with social workers and the manager.

5 Discussion

The topic of organizational well-being (OWB) of social workers is little addressed in research. Such research in the field of social services is unique, mostly reflecting the relationship of organizational variables to the subjective or psychological WB [34, 35, 36]. Samson et al.

Table 1. Content analysis of the organizational goals.

Dimension of WB (categories)	Subject (subcategories)	Frequency	Content (codes)
Professional WB	Increasing qualification	4	Education, supervision, new methods of work
	Continuing education	8	Individual planning Development of clients' work skills Human rights, ethical approach, social work supervision, courses, lectures, Self-education Transparency of services Human rights, ethical approach, social work Professional methods of work Human resources and quality management processes Experiential form of training
	Trainings	1	Method of the working with the client
	Regular supervision	1	
	Life-long learning	1	
	Adaptation plan	1	
	Standards of quality	1	Content and goals of standards, application
Social WB	The atmosphere of open communication	1	
	Teamwork	4	Meetings, supervision, training
	Relationships	1	Improving relationships
Intellectual WB	Shaping the thinking and attitudes of employees	1	Promoting individual approach and dignity
	Personal responsibility of employees	1	Personal responsibility of employees
	Setting individual goals	1	
Occupational WB	Suitable workplace	2	An environment that supports responsibility, motivation, participation, partnership
	Material stimulation	1	Realization of material stimulation
	Working conditions	2	Improving working conditions
	Maximum number of clients per 1 employee	2	Increasing the number of employees
	Employee safety	1	Evacuation lift

Table 2. Content analysis of the annual reports– recorded elements of the well-being in organizational culture.

Categories / OWB dimensions	Subcategories / Supporting activities	Frequency	Codes / form and content of the activities
Professional	Education	8	Training and professional seminars Internal lectures and seminars within the project of deinstitutionalisation of social services Methods of work with the client
	Supervision	6	Focused on: - problematic client - methods of work with the client - personal development of the worker - better WB in the workplace - process of the deinstitutionalisation Internal and External form
Social	Employees meetings	1	Employees trips Christmas party
	Building good relationships	1	Good relationships in the workplace
Emotional	Creating an atmosphere	1	“Home environment” in organization
Physical	Food provision	1	Principles of healthy nutrition Rational diet
Occupational	Employee vacation	1	Funds used for employees’ vacation
Other	Opportunity to express an opinion	1	Comments and suggestions on the functioning in organization

[37] propose the integration of well-being elements in social service providers, which can improve both the self-care of social workers and the quality of service. The content analysis of the annual reports showed that the area of supervision is one of the most mentioned possibilities of supporting social workers. Samson et al. [37] cite supervision as an important tool for supporting individual and organizationally integrated well-being programs for social workers. Other studies by Conway [38], Graham, Shier [34] also show that social workers consider supervision to be an important factor in their well-being. Supervision is a tool for professionalization, but also for emotional support. As an active tool for SW support, it can be a decisive factor for future changes towards the well-being of social workers.

The most frequently formulated area of support within the documents (objectives, annual reports) was education, professional growth and increasing qualifications. These are supported by law [39, 40] and by professional associations of social work (Slovak Chamber of social workers and assistants in social work). Opportunity for professional development affects not only the acquisition of skills of social workers but also job satisfaction, strengthens professional identity, and it is a source of social change in the field of social work [34]. The possibilities of regular education and its financing within social service providers need discussions.

The results of the analysis showed the dimension of supporting good relations in the workplace, between colleagues, and in the team. The level of subjective WB is related to relationships in the workplace – with clients, colleagues, superiors, in terms of mentoring, sharing ideas, professional and friendly conversation [34]. According to Van Petegem’s model of well-being [41], the nature of relationships and the degree of well-being in the organization are interconnected. Authors of this paper, therefore, agree that it is necessary to create qualitative working relationships between managers and employees, an environment that positively affects the quality of services to the client.

In the area of physical well-being, the annual reports showed only interest in the nutrition of employees. Workers consume the same food in the workplace as clients therefore attention is paid to the standards and principles of the so-called rational nutrition. At the level of objectives, the categories of occupational WB were mentioned, in concrete occupational benefits, which are also endorsed by law. Other areas of WB (emotional, spiritual, creative, environmental, etc.) were not recorded.

The authors of this paper believe that a holistic view of a person and their well-being in social services should not only concern the client and their well-being, but also WB of the employee performing the service. This does not mean that the view is shifted from the client to the social workers, but it is a new optics – organizational well-being, which the organization transmits to its members through the organizational culture – its goals, values, daily habits, and rituals. Understanding the perspective “client-focused” and at the same time, “member-centric” [32] can improve social services and social work. Examples of good practice from abroad show the way to initiate the change in terms of thinking and using language, by formulating support for employees in terms of vision, goals, and organizational values. Future practical changes at the level of the organization should be preceded by further research and development of a theory in social work, which counts on the well-being of SW as an important cultural aspect in the organization.

6 Conclusion

Social services or, as called by Musil, social work services [42], today face many challenges and dilemmas that affect the quality of services. If we understand the need for cultural change at the level of service organizations, and changes to support workers are made, the expected increase in service quality may be fulfilled. Taking co-responsibility for the well-being of the client and the employee is certainly a step forward and a possible solution or prevention of the difficulties appearing in today’s social services.

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