AASW

Australian Association of Social Workers

Scope of Social Work Practice:
Leadership and Management

Introduction

The Australian Association of Social Workers' (AASW) *Scope of Social Work Practice* series provides an overview of the role, scope and contribution of social work practice. The aim of this document is to highlight in a concise, accessible and informative manner the crucial role and services that social workers provide and that employers and clients can expect. Social workers, policy makers, managers and academics can use this scope of practice to articulate and promote the role of professional social workers in this field.

Leadership and management are interrelated terms whose meaning is somewhat dependent upon the context in which they occur. In this document leadership generally means 'a process of social influence, which maximises the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal.' [1] It is about vision, about people endorsing and supporting, about empowerment and, most of all, about producing useful change.

Management would usually encompass elements of leadership, but this is not always the case. Management can be defined as the function that coordinates the efforts of people to accomplish goals and objectives by marshalling and using available resources efficiently and effectively. Management includes planning, organising, staffing, directing and monitoring an organisation to accomplish the goal or target.

Management is underpinned by the authority (delegations) held by the position, whereas leadership is something that can be practiced by anyone in an organisation.

Social workers have had a long history of both leadership and management in the human services and health fields. Leadership and management theories evolve, develop and wane. However at the root of the approach of social workers to leadership and management are the core values of respect for all persons, social justice and professional integrity.

[1] Kevin Kruse, see http://www.forbes.com/sites/kevinkruse/2013/04/09/what-is-leadership/2/#1a7f9af4e825

The social work profession

The social work profession is committed to maximising the wellbeing of individuals, communities and society. We consider that individual, community and societal wellbeing are underpinned by socially inclusive communities that emphasise principles of social justice and respect for human dignity and human rights, including the right to freedom from intimidation and exclusion.

Drawing on theories of social work, social sciences, psychology, humanities and Indigenous knowledge, social workers focus on the interface between the individual and the environment and recognise the impact of social, economic and cultural factors on the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. Accordingly, social workers maintain a dual focus in both assisting with and improving human wellbeing, and addressing any external issues (known as systemic or structural issues) that may impact on wellbeing, such as inequality, injustice and discrimination.

Social work is a tertiary-qualified profession recognised nationally and internationally. The AASW is the key professional body representing social workers in Australia and is responsible for the accreditation of social work university programs.

The AASW requires members to hold the following academic qualifications: a Bachelor of Social Work, or a Social Work Qualifying Master's degree.

The curriculum provides entry-level professional social work education addressing the knowledge, skills and values that can be applied across the diverse range of practice settings, fields of practice and methods of social work practice, and includes an extensive period of field education.

Click here for a full list of AASW accredited courses.

Role of social work

Social work is a socially active and engaged profession within many and varied organisations. Within the profession there is an accumulated body of knowledge that helps in understanding individuals and communities within their wider social, organisational and political contexts. It promotes positive social values and takes political stances in order to defend these values.

Social workers apply their knowledge and values with skills in critical thinking, social research, policy development, counselling, case coordination/case management and networking. In essence, social workers bring a unique awareness and capacity to organisational practice. Social workers are active, engaged and reflective professionals who skilfully use interpersonal communication, interaction, ethical and political processes and change strategies to initiate and sustain positive social processes and outcomes for clients of human service organisations. They are active rather than passive change agents, engaged in taking risks rather than being risk averse, and are motivated by a professional community of social work professionals with shared practices, knowledge and core values.[2]

"Social work managers [and leaders] have multiple and often competing obligations to a wide range of stakeholders. As organisational leaders, they also have multiple sets of ethical obligations, especially those linked to public service (such as accountability to the public good) and those that are part of their professional identity. Managers have power and thus have responsibility to exercise that power in ethical ways, by recognising rights, being fair and just, and avoiding harm."[3]

The various settings and fields of practice in which social work leadership and management occur include:

- Federal human service bureaucracies
- State,Territory and Local Government human service bureaucracies
- The National Disability Insurance Scheme and the National Disability Insurance Agency
- Hospitals and community health
- Federal and State Commissions
- Not-for-profit organisations
- Universities
- Federal, State, Territory and Local Government legislatures

Social work leadership and management can take place at a project, team, service/unit, organisational and or systems level.

Scope of social work practice: Leadership and management

The **scope of social work practice in leadership and management** includes:

- Setting clear directions via vision and mission statements, goals, and purpose, and facilitating the planning process itself
- Confronting challenges as well as leading and managing change and innovation within an organisation
- Attending to the major strategic trends that affect an organisation's clients
- Providing a framework for thinking about the business aspects of service delivery
- Linking systems of relevant organisations to ensure future resources and promote growth
- Building commitment among staff, volunteers and other stakeholders who share the organisation's goals
- Managing staff and human resource systems and ensuring quality effective supervision and professional development
- Promoting excellence and innovation in service delivery

[2] Hughes M & Wearing M (2013), *Organisations and management in social work*. Sage. p.10.

[3] Healy L & Pine B (2007), 'Ethical issues for social work and social care managers', in J Aldgate, L Healy, B Malcolm, B Pine, W Rose & J Seden (Eds). *Enhancing social work management: Theory and best practice from the UK and US*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, p. 84.

- Establishing processes within an organisation that ensure both organisational and environmental sustainability as well as both internal and external accountability
- Leading and managing collaborations and partnerships
- Developing new models of practice
- Designing and facilitating consultations
- Establishing, monitoring and overseeing efficient resource management systems including budgeting and expenditure monitoring
- Driving evidence-informed continued quality improvements and efficiencies

Contribution of Social Work

Social workers through their professional qualifications or training and adherence to the Code of Ethics bring with them a commitment to social justice, respect for persons and professional integrity that remain constant when they become leaders and managers. Indeed social work leaders and managers are well positioned to work within the more recent developments in understanding of leadership and management that have moved away from hierarchical control and command models to more inclusive, transformative and respectful models.

Social workers also bring strong skills in communication that are fundamental to leadership and management. This allied with a background in dealing with ethical issues in complex social systems means social work leaders and managers can offer unique and valuable contributions to human service and health organisations and bureaucracies that must manage such complexity daily.

The holistic social work understanding of the person in their psychosocial context further enhances social work leaders' and managers' abilities to support employees and volunteers, enhance staff morale and deal with complex behavioural and emotional issues.

The commitment of social work to critical reflection enables leaders and managers to better understand the wider context and act strategically as organisations attempt to assist the most disadvantaged. Such critical reflection also results in social work leaders being prepared to listen to and act on the multiplicity of voices, especially those who might otherwise be silenced.

Conclusion

Social Workers provide a vital contribution in the smooth leadership and management of organisations. The training in working positively with people and systemic processes is invaluable in ensuring staff are able to work to their best ability and in a stable environment. This can increase productivity while reducing staff turnover. The profession's commitment to the ethical foundations of social justice, respect for persons and professional integrity, place social workers well to take up leadership and management positions that are respectful and transformative.

Evidence informing practice

Books and Articles

Aldgate J, Healy L, Malcolm B, Pine B, Rose W & Seden J. (Eds) (2007). *Enhancing social work management: Theory and best practice from the UK and US*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Collins J (2005). Good to great and the social sectors: Why business thinking is not the answer. Harper Business.

Gilligan P (2016) 'Electronic information systems and human service organizations: The needs of managers'. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership and Governance.* 40:1, 51-61.

Healy L & Pine B (2007), 'Ethical issues for social work and social care managers', in J Aldgate, L Healy, B Malcolm, B Pine, W Rose & J Seden (Eds). *Enhancing social work management: Theory and best practice from the UK and US*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Hepworth D H, Rooney R, Dewberry Rooney G, Strom-Gottfried K, Larsen J (2010). *Direct social work practice: Theory and skills* (8th edn). Brooks/Cole.

Hughes M & Wearing M (2013). *Organisations and management in social work*. Sage.

Key Journals

Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance

Social Work in Healthcare

Australian Social Work

Australian Resources

The Centre for Leadership and Learning (2014). 'Thinking about leadership – A brief history of leadership thought', Australian Public Service Commission, Canberra. http://goo.gl/CDvxq4

AASW (2016). 'Social Work Leadership and Management', *Social Work Focus.* 1:2, 19-32.

Websites

Kouzes J & Posner B. (nd). The Leadership Challenge at http://www.leadershipchallenge.com/home.aspx

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