Professional Competencies of Management in Social Service Organizations

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For non-profit organizations / social economy organizations and their management, influences by economic demands and guidelines, seem to be mostly the result of welfare policies on deregulation, of market-oriented forms or quasi-markets of control in public professional services. Moreover, privatisation and the growth in service production, with varying aims, such as the division between politicians / executives as purchasers on the one hand, and professionals as providers, on the other, plays a role. Instruments and phenomena such as contracting, marketing, payment by results and strict target-setting are very well known in this discussion. It is expected for the german welfare system, that challenges posed by the economic and financial crisis will effect the system of social economy and public organizations in social services latest in 2010 and 2011.

The ‘outcome’ of these developments are interpreted and are ambivalently discussed. On the one hand, local players such as politicians, managers or professionals seem to have won much more room for manoeuvre, as far as structuring the administrative and organisational basis for professional work is concerned. On the other hand, professions (in different positions) seem to be heavily influenced by the logic of the market and by a new strength of public service organisations. Therefore, they are much better integrated "in a dialog for planning and performing the work" (Svensson 2006: 582). Here, management and supervision in (social) welfare and social service organisation must be seen as new leading positions and there has to be examined a new meaning of this ‘professional’ work. This seems to be a result of changing framework conditions and its faced now again with a far-reaching change.

Freidson (2001), who examines latest the logics of three different methods of organizing work in contemporary societies (the market, organization and profession), perpetuates his optimistic view of professionalism, for the best way to organise a work of special value either to the public or to the interests of the state (Freidson 2001: 214). The professional practitioners and self-regulated professional–user relationships are affected by the growing influence of economic-orientated control requirements “in management by objectives, target-setting and evaluation” (Svensson and Evetts, 2003: 9). Only Julia Evetts (2005) latest started to examine the professionalization of actors in management-contexts from the sociological viewpoint.

This theoretical background is leading for the empirical evaluation-study, which is called “professional new public management between academic qualification and social work identity”, from march 2007 to September 2009.

The study intends to empirically comprehend the ‘state-of-the-art’ in social management vocational training and further education in terms of a ‘core curriculum’ and to contrast these with the demands on social-welfare work social management, which are being re-constructed with methods of field research. For the project, there are two key research questions:

Research question A: Which main focuses for management and organisation competences are implicitly recognised in the degree programmes in the domain of social work management/social economy (core-curriculum)?

Research question B: Which main focuses concerning qualification, knowledge, competences and experience are observed and analysed in social managers in social-welfare work institutions?
With my paper I will discuss the results on research-question B, that is surveyed in an exploratory way and analysed via the participating field research in three different social service organisations as well as via 18 interviews with non-profit managers.

As one main outcome of the examination can be stated, that non-profit management is characterized by a specific set of expert knowledge, competencies and abilities in different rationalities of actions. These competences can be divided into two general (or ‘meta’) areas of competencies and a group of seven ‘performance’ competences. These competencies are the framework that ‘drive’ the performance of decision making.

General competencies:

First is the competence of stetting and fulfil the managerial role in different organizional contexts. The performance of ‘role making’ is caused by dynamics in social markets, help-networks and individualized care standards. Second is the competence for decision-making in dilemma-situations with conflicting values or targets. Decision making includes strategies of building up specific proceedings in gaining commitments, sharing knowledge and including professional expertise by team-management.

Framework of performance competencies

The role and the problem solving is related to seven competence area with different challenges, aims, rationalities of decision and expert-knowledge. Professional Managers are challenged and able to include knowledge out of seven different expert area for their decision-making (organisational management and -development, leading professionals as personal resources, expertise development and coaching, care planning and community development, local governance making, social controlling).

The development of these competences are strongly connected to the new needs, challenges and developments of non-profit organisations within dynamic and deregulated social-service policies: The increasing need for legitimation of non-profit organisation will be solved by political-socio-economic expertise-based competences in specific local policies. These specific competences are strongly connected to the circumstances of risk, contingency and unexpected change in political regulated context.

As a result it seems: Professional Management is very well prepared for facing crises – this seem to be its daily business.


