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## PERSONNEL POLICY ISSUES IN RUSSIAN SOCIAL WORK AGENCIES

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During the period of 20-ty year dramatic transformation in Russia social work appeared in the academic and professional fields. New legislation relating to social services was adopted, new concepts were brought to light and a wide network of social services was established. Recently in the midst of a global recession new serious problems of modern social work agencies have arisen. Among them: insufficiency of financing, restricted and inert reforms, systematic problems in the field of functional, organizational, methodological and procedural clearness, definition of priorities, measures of implementation of national, local and regional policies; planning and budget distribution; lack of human resources, control, reporting and assessment; lack of focusing on the preventive programmes; decentralization and local administration problem; lack of coordination of efforts (problem of intersectional interaction and social partnership)<sup>1</sup>.

Here in our article we will try to determine the main problems in every-day-life of social work agencies, to identify some peculiarities of managerial style in social work agencies and to give some recommendations for social work agencies' leaders in their personnel policy.

The literature on the personnel policy in social work agencies is very rare. According to a number of observations there is a phenomenon like common 'Russian managerial practices and decision making methods'. There are many reasons shown by Russian and Foreign researchers for failure in transition to market economy that included 'managerial' attitudes and behaviour of Russian managers, taxes, corruption, an ever changing regulatory environment that lacks transparency, a labyrinth of government bureaucracies, weak both shareholders' rights and contract law<sup>2</sup>.

Indeed reasons for such slow progress in transition efforts could be many and varied. The success of any change effort including economic and socio-political transitions is dependent on the existence of appropriate national culture, managerial values of market economy and personnel policy practices.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.anti-corr.ru/indem/2005diagnost/2005diag\\_present.ppt](http://www.anti-corr.ru/indem/2005diagnost/2005diag_present.ppt)

<sup>2</sup> Aleksandrova, A., Surkov, S. and Tesliuc, E. (2007) "When Support for the Poor is Poor Support: Income-tested Social Assistance Programs in Russia." Social Protection Team, World Bank Office, Moscow. Available at [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b07\\_13/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d02/06-01.htm](http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b07_13/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d02/06-01.htm) and [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/2007/b07\\_12/07-01.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/2007/b07_12/07-01.htm); Davydova N.M. Socialnyi kapital kak faktor formirovaniya i vosproizvodstva socialnyh neravenstv . Rossiya reformiruyuschaya. Ezegodnik . Red. K. Gorschkov Vyp.6. — M.: Institut sociologii RAN, 2007 s. 169- 182; Learning to Practice Social Work. International Approaches. Edited by Steven M. Shardlow and Mark Doel. London, 2000. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 272p.; Iarskaia-Smirnova E. and Romanov P. 2002: "A salary is not important here..." Professionalization of Social Work in Contemporary Russia, in: Social Policy and Administration, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 123-141 (Social Work & Society, Volume 2, Issue 1, 2004, <http://www.socwork.de/larskaia-Romanov-Lovtsova2004-1.pdf>).

We could formulate some basic questions in Russian social work agencies' personnel policy that are needed to be solved:

1. What do Russian officials think about the importance of personnel policy practices in social work agencies on recession times?
2. What would social agencies' senior managers and leaders actually decided when they were confronted with a specific human resource problem while the recent Russian labour market tough situation?
3. What are the real social agencies' personnel policy problems and how effectively to solve them?
4. How do Russian social sphere officials can use the overseas values and experience?

By our opinion personnel policy and practices in a given country would be influenced by managerial values and attitudes, organizational structure and many other organizational factors (such as culture, economy and politics). Personnel policy and practices in any organization is a product of many micro and macro variables that interact with each other in many ways (among them - cultural environment, the industry, complexity of operations, size of domestic market, attitude of senior management).

In a modern socio-cultural and economic Russian context, social work is an important partner alongside other professions, together with the State and citizens' initiatives, for insuring that the common good is not neglected. In these conditions the urgent need for effective and productive social work services becomes ever more obvious. In spite of this the quality of social work performance will largely depend on the level of professionalism of social workers and their managers.

Every year university graduates come to the different social work agencies, but many of them are aiming for higher paid jobs in a business sector. So the qualification of social workers continues to be a painful problem in the development of social services in Russia. Inadequate funds at all managerial levels have affected the quality of services and the motivation of social workers. Low salaries do not contribute to the prestige of social agency particularly and social work as a profession in general. The vast majority of social workers in the centers of social service have not got the diploma in social work<sup>3</sup>.

Professional training of social workers has been established in more than 120 higher education institutions all over Russia. The quality of such education has achieved good standards of performance. The professionalization of social work, however, has been hindered by several parallel disfunctions, both internal and external to social work itself. The basic strategy of professionalization may cause serious conflicts between professionals and those who attempt to break their monopoly of status and expertise. Regarding social work, there are two main points of such conflict.

First, graduates of social work departments often encounter hostility when coming to work within social services where the majority of positions are occupied by people

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<sup>3</sup> Iarskaia-Smirnova E. and Romanov P. 2002: "A salary is not important here..." Professionalization of Social Work in Contemporary Russia, in: Social Policy and Administration, Vol. 36, No. 2, pp. 123-141 (Social Work & Society, Volume 2, Issue 1, 2004, <http://www.socwork.de/larskaia-Romanov-Lovtsova2004-1.pdf>).

with an inappropriate educational and professional background. Those ‘professionals’ who started work without diploma have not merely been occupying positions presumably open to qualified social workers; they have also been shaping written and non-written criteria of professional activity and notions of quality of service: practices which may or may not correspond with existing models of social work.

Second, social work as a new profession overlaps with new and traditional ones which may also be experiencing renovation. Examples of these are social pedagogy and practical psychology. Simultaneously with the rise of social work, there was great concern over ‘practical psychology’ in Russia. Many universities started providing education and short training programs<sup>4</sup>.

The restructuring process of economy in Russia have led to the appearance of jobs in the ‘social services sphere’ opened a perspective of employment for hundreds of people, the vast majority of them being women. But still it is difficult to find a single social worker with university training diploma in social work. It seems the vertical mobility inside social work agencies is low and could be determined mostly by informal relations with CEO than by such formal attributes as education, competency and capability for innovations in a workplace. One of the proper explanations of this situation is that such a managerial order has been introduced by the street-level bureaucracy in order to protect its own interests. However, the higher levels of hierarchy within the social work also agree that formal training is a secondary factor for careers in social work.

Nowadays the complex center of social services is the most disseminated organization for developing social work practice in Russia. The working conditions and everyday problems here are similar throughout Russia. The annual staff turnover is about 15-20% (higher in rural than in urban areas). Usually a position ‘Specialist in Social Work’ may or may not be included in the staff of agency, it depends on this organization’s Charter, as approved by local administration as well as by Federal Ministry of Public Health and Social Development. But there obligatory should be a position ‘Social Worker’ within the staff of a particular social agency. The specialist in social work’s salary is about \$2000 per year, which is about the same as a nurse and 2/3 of a school teacher’s salary. The social worker’s salary is about \$1500 per year (June 2007). Even so, university graduates (not necessarily from a social work program) sometimes take up such a low paid position, because of the lack of other jobs available. So it is difficult to find anyone satisfied with their salary amidst social services personnel<sup>5</sup>.

Social agencies’ bureaucratic structures have been practically formed and fixed. It means that practices of administrative control and managerial methods become stable and widespread. Such practices reflect the peculiarities of social welfare in modern conditions; the specific organizational culture inherited from the soviet “sobes” (welfare agency); and also the influence of Western social work experience evident at both the federal and the local level in Russia.

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<sup>4</sup> Learning to Practice Social Work. International Approaches. Edited by Steven M. Shardlow and Mark Doel. London, 2000. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. 272p.

<sup>5</sup> <http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/100.html>, Source: Human Development Report 2007/2008, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/141.html> and <http://hdrstats.undp.org/indicators/144.html>; <http://go.worldbank.org/WAGGCTSHY0> [accessed 11 March 2008]

For social workers to function at their best, every agency employing them should have policies pertaining to personnel administration developed by a cooperative process involving staff and administration. These policies or *standards* should be available to all members of the staff. As standards of good practice, they apply equally to administrative personnel and, except when indicated, to professional and nonprofessional staff.

These standards should be based on the principles that effective social service depends on qualified staff and that staff members can give their best service when they work under conditions of employment that are conducive to the maintenance of high quality and quantity of performance. Because the provision of responsible services to individuals, groups, and communities is the paramount concern of the social work profession, these standards are issued with the understanding that they will always be applied within the framework of this fundamental concern of the profession.

It was rather complicated period (almost 15 years) for Russian social agencies to exist and perform without ethical and professional standards. Only in 2005 *administrative regulations* were endorsed by Federal Ministry of Public Health and Social Development and recommended to practicing social workers, to employing agencies, and to the supporting public as being basic to good personnel administration and good social work practice. These administrative regulations represent principles of sound personnel policies and practices. They are not intended to substitute for specific personnel policies formulated by individual agencies. These regulations serve as a basis for recommendations to improve them<sup>6</sup>.

However, they have been formulated to serve as a guide in the development of personnel policies by social agencies and other institutions employing social workers, such as health agencies, schools, and courts. The agency should define such issues as probation, suspension, demotion, dismissal, resignation, layoffs, and severance pay. A formula should be established to govern the order in which social workers will be laid off and rehired when a position is abolished because of reorganization or retrenchment. Adequate notice of these changes should be defined. Both employer and employee have obligations, rights, and responsibilities with regard to employment termination that should be defined clearly in writing. There is a need for social work professionals to be supported to develop their own personnel policy and practice in accordance with the branch of social services as well.

As was said above the main problem connected with the managerial principles introduction to the social work agency personnel policy is the national culture of management. It has one particular trend: the rigid system of information secrecy developed in many Russian organizations which are functioning as closed bureaucratic systems and as a result of a lack of knowledge of principles of efficient management. Such organizations restrict and strictly regulate the exchange of information between departments and management levels. The guiding principle of

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<sup>6</sup> Aleksandrova, A., Surkov, S. and Tesliuc, E. (2007) "When Support for the Poor is Poor Support: Income-tested Social Assistance Programs in Russia." Social Protection Team, World Bank Office, Moscow. Available at [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b07\\_13/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d02/06-01.htm](http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b07_13/IssWWW.exe/Stg/d02/06-01.htm) and [http://www.gks.ru/free\\_doc/2007/b07\\_12/07-01.htm](http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/2007/b07_12/07-01.htm)

such system is 'employees need not know anything except their direct duties (which are already narrowly defined)'. This principle gives rise to low motivation of the social agencies staff.

The essence of *motivation* is to give people what they mostly want of their work. The more the organization can supply employees' desires the more chances it has to receive efficiency, quality and services. It is very important for social workers to be motivated positively. Meanwhile there are some obstacles on the way to positive motivation of social agencies' personnel. There are some stereotypes and attitudes which are not easy to overcome. So social worker may think that she does not receive the additional charge for reinforced work or she always operates such way; or there is said nothing about this case in her official instruction. Sometimes she is unsatisfied with her chef who understands nothing in what she is doing and she decides to do absolutely so much, how much is needed not to be dismissed<sup>7</sup>.

At the same time it might be the ordinary social worker want: more interesting work, more successful chef, to see the final results of her work, more high level of social care, acknowledgement of her merits, the new trials and more opportunities for growth. Usually the specific of management development 'motivational conditions' are identified like autonomy, responsibility, recognition and development but it is very complicated to incorporate them to real managerial practice in Russia as a system.

Among the things that really irritate and annoy managers what could have been a motivating workplace into a drudgery are: chefs who do not recognize them for their efforts, or worse still, take the credit themselves; a lack of feeling of "team"; constant implied or implicit threats of demotion or dismissal; insufficient salary (by comparison to others in the agency or in the social sector).

Recent sociological investigations into the turnover rates for young social workers (20 - 30 yrs) shows that in some cases, the turnover rate of young personnel is as high as 25% annually due to lack of perceived career development and training, and limited opportunities for involvement in other areas of the agency and their profession. These younger people, by comparison to their predecessors: are more opportunistic in taking new jobs, are more mobile, have greater expectations, are easily bored<sup>8</sup>.

It seems for better social workers' motivation their leaders and supervisors need to:

1. *Communicate*: be honest during interviews, be serious about performance reviews, do more career mapping and create a forum to develop a greater spirit of involvement.

2. *Tailor the workplace*: provide more job rotation, arrange more rotation between offices, develop specific training, introduce variety and develop forums for social interaction.

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<sup>7</sup> Shekshnia S. Kak eto skazat' po-russki? (sovremennye metody upravleniya personalom v sovremennoy Rossii). - M., OOO «Jurnal «Upravleniye personalom sovместno s ZAO «Biznes-shkola «Intel-Sintez». 2003. 232 s.

<sup>8</sup> Socialnaya politika i socialnye reformy glazami rossiyan. M.: Institut sociologii RAN, 2007. 108 s.

3. *Be flexible*: Consider providing sabbaticals (so they can travel without resigning)<sup>9</sup>.

One characteristic of motivated employees in social work agencies is their ability to move from one task to another with ease and without long delays or "stall-time" between tasks. Employees who easily move from task to task are known as having "flow." Low motivated social workers often demonstrate such phenomenon which is known as *procrastination*. Procrastination reduces employee motivation when it interrupts workflow.

Procrastination is a behaviour that is caused by negative feelings and negative thoughts. The negative emotions that lead to procrastination include fear, anger, and hopelessness. The negative thoughts that lead to procrastination include *perfectionist thinking, last-minute-crisis thinking, and denial deny thinking*. Procrastination stops social workers from moving from task to task and therefore it stops their flow. Procrastination undermines flow because it causes the employee to stall between tasks in order to focus on their negative emotions.

Social administrators and supervisors can help their personnel to overcome such behaviour. A supervisor, who notices that a social worker is constantly late with her tasks, should check to see if she is procrastinating. Simply ask her if she sometimes postpones starting her projects or tasks, until it is too late to complete the type of high quality work that is expected within the agency. Once the social worker admits that procrastination is the cause or part of the cause of their poor work performance, a supervisor's next step is to discover the negative feeling and/or thought causing procrastination to develop and hinder the worker's workflow. Usually procrastination can be caused by different negative feelings (such as fear, anger or hopelessness) or thoughts (perfectionist, thinking, last-minute-crisis thinking or denial thinking). A supervisor can help social workers procrastinating due to denial by offering time management training.

Thus social work is a genuine and valid first step in the development of an emancipated civil society in resent tough times of global recession. Recognizing the major constraints and problems, the role of management is to oversee incremental responses, maintain accountable and professional operations, and make the difficult decisions about the most equitable and effective ways to use pathetically limited resources.

Leaders of social services are the conductors for disseminating new approaches to dealing with social problems. They can educate the politicians, and they have to take the lead on the moral and ethical, as well as operational dimensions. They must develop public understanding of social services, and the role of the social worker.

We want to give some recommendation for social agencies' leaders, which could help to improve their managerial methods and personnel policy:

1. Social workers need to be orientated to the social agency's *vision* in addition to learning their coworkers' names, agency policies;
2. Set a *direction* for each social worker that is in alignment with the social agency's vision statement;

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.employer-employee.com/>

3. Supervisor's job is to *listen* to his new employee's ideas as to how she can change in order to help the social agency reach its goals;
4. *Guide* the social worker's feedback;
5. *Measure* and *give feedback* are the last steps before social worker's evolution can occur.

**ՍՎԵՏԼԱՆԱ ՍՆԻՍԱՐԵՆԿՈ – Կադրային քաղաքականության հիմնահարցերը ռուսաստանյան սոցիալական ծառայություններում** – Հոդվածում վերլուծվում են ռուսաստանյան սոցիալական ծառայությունների առօրյա աշխատանքում փոխակերպման գործընթացներին առնչվող հիմնախնդիրները: Հեղինակը քննարկում է սոցիալական ծառայությունների կադրային քաղաքականության «ցավոտ» հարցերն ու դրանց օպտիմալ լուծման տարբերակները: Ազգային կառավարչական ենթամշակույթը, որն ազդում է սոցիալական աշխատանքի արդյունավետության վրա, այս դեպքում հանդես է գալիս որպես բացասական գործոն: Հոդվածում քննարկվում է հաճախորդների հետ անհատական սոցիալական աշխատանքի ընթացքում կառավարչական որոշումների ընդունման հատուկ ոճի ներդրման անհրաժեշտությունը: Քննարկվում են նաև սոցիալական ծառայությունների ոլորտում առկա կադրային քաղաքականության փորձի նորացման ձևերն ու եղանակները: Արդիական են համարվում սոցիալական աշխատանքի միջազգային փորձի ներդրման հնարավորությունն ու հարմարեցումը ռուսաստանյան սոցիալական ծառայություններում: Ամփոփման մեջ տրվում են խորհուրդներ, որոնք կարող են օգտակար լինել սոցիալական ծառայությունների կադրային քաղաքականության իրականացման գործում:

**СВЕТЛАНА СНИСАРЕНКО – Вопросы кадровой политики в российских социальных службах.** – В статье анализируются основные проблемы трансформационного процесса в повседневной работе российских социальных служб. Речь идёт о реальных болевых точках кадровой политики и оптимальных путях их решения. Национальная управленческая культура, влияющая на результаты социальной работы, определяется как один из недостатков социального обслуживания в целом. Особое значение придаётся современному стилю в индивидуальной работе с клиентами социальных служб. Рассмотрены формы и методы обновления кадровой работы в этой сфере. Поднят вопрос о возможных способах адаптировать международный опыт к российскому социальному обслуживанию. Даны рекомендации по совершенствованию кадровой политики, которые могут быть полезны руководителям разных уровней.