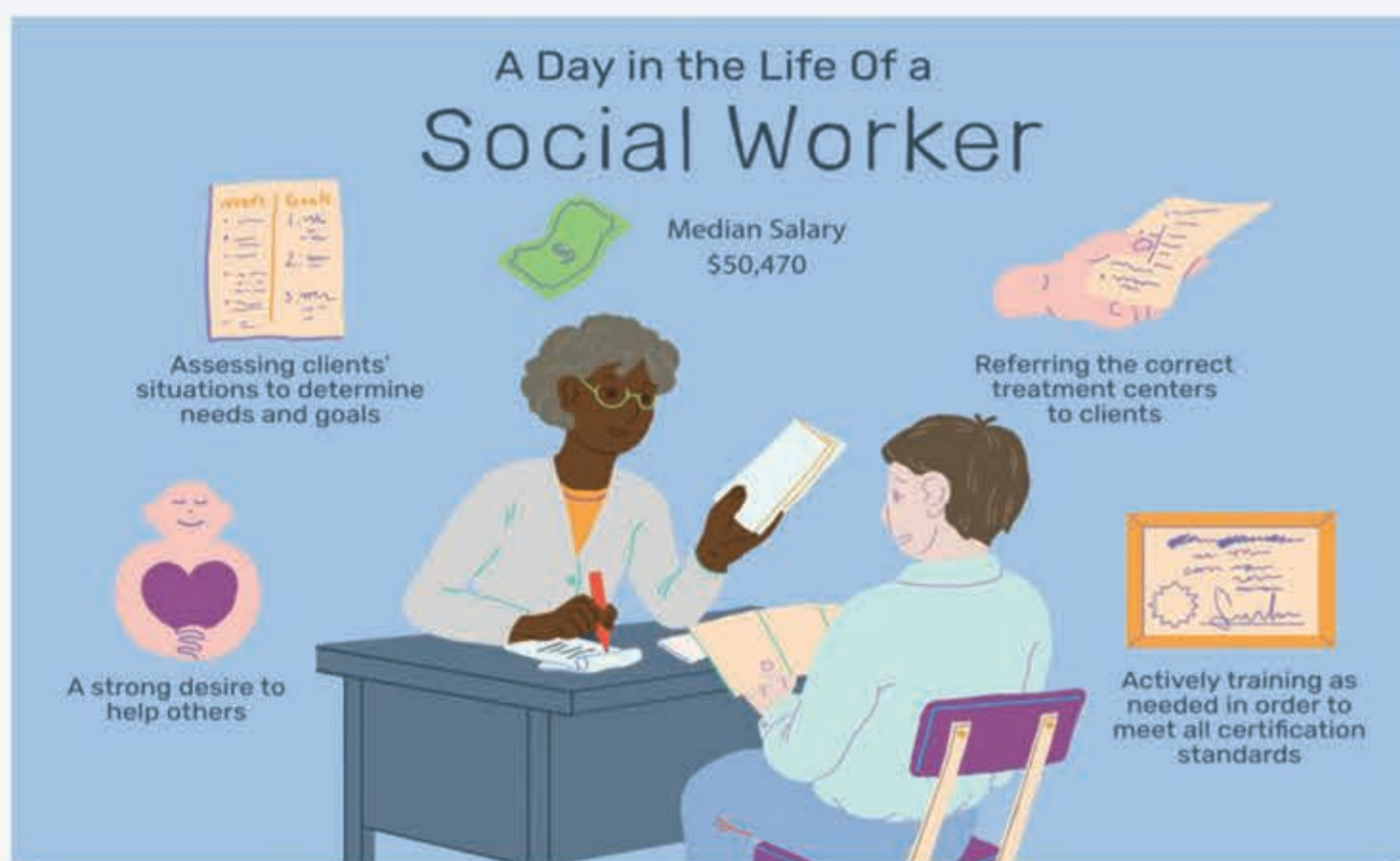


Research Group
3.4

Research Area
Social Sciences (Social work)

VALUES AND HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL WORK – DIMENSIONS AND INTERRELATIONS

(Second phase: Managerialism in social services study)



INTRODUCTION

"Human service agencies are the "first responders" for people in need. However, during the last three decades, new policies that draw on business principles, methods and goals have restructured the human service in ways that dramatically affect agencies, workers, and clients in both the public and non-profit sectors. Increasingly referred to as Managerialism, these trends have created a sea change in social work (Abramovitz, M., Zelnick, J. 2018. Human Service Workforce Study. NY) Internationally, **Managerialism** adds the business perspective to human service organizational practices. Typically initiated by public and private funders, Managerialism encourages human service staff – front line workers, program managers and agency directors – to maximize agency productivity, accountability, and efficiency. Focused on outcomes, it calls for the use of quantified measures and standardized procedures to assess and evaluate the performance of agencies, workers, services, and clients. Managerialism is Associated with Barriers to Quality Service Provision. A commitment to Managerialism conflict with the organizational factors that typically determine a high-quality work environment in the social and human services. We found that where agency commitment to Managerialism was higher, workers reported the following threats to key conditions associated with high quality services.

PROJECT GUIDELINES

The scientific problem of the dimensions and interrelations of values and human resource management in social work, which is the subject of research by the presented project, is complex, multidisciplinary and innovative in nature. It has not been sufficiently studied in its constituent components in the Bulgarian context, and in terms of interrelations of the phenomena studied and comparative analysis with studies in other countries, it has not been studied internationally. This determines the relevance and significance of the topic under study, and the results of the study are expected to be of a contributing nature to the specialized scientific literature on social work in Bulgaria.

The study of the specifics and dimensions of human resource management in social work organizations is a significant scientific problem on which relatively few researchers in Bulgaria have worked, some of whom are members of the research team (Simeonova, R., 2020; 2019, 2011, 2009, 2008; 2007, 2006, 2003; Genchev, A., 2019, 2020, 2021). Continuation of research in this field, comparative analysis with studies on the topic in other countries, as well as the interrelations of human resource management with values in social work are important research tasks of an innovative nature, on which this project focuses.

Research task for the second phase of the project was to study the specific approaches to human resource management in social work organizations with adapted research instrument and implementation of comparative analysis of the Bulgarian data with international ones on **managerialism in social services**.



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METHODOLOGY

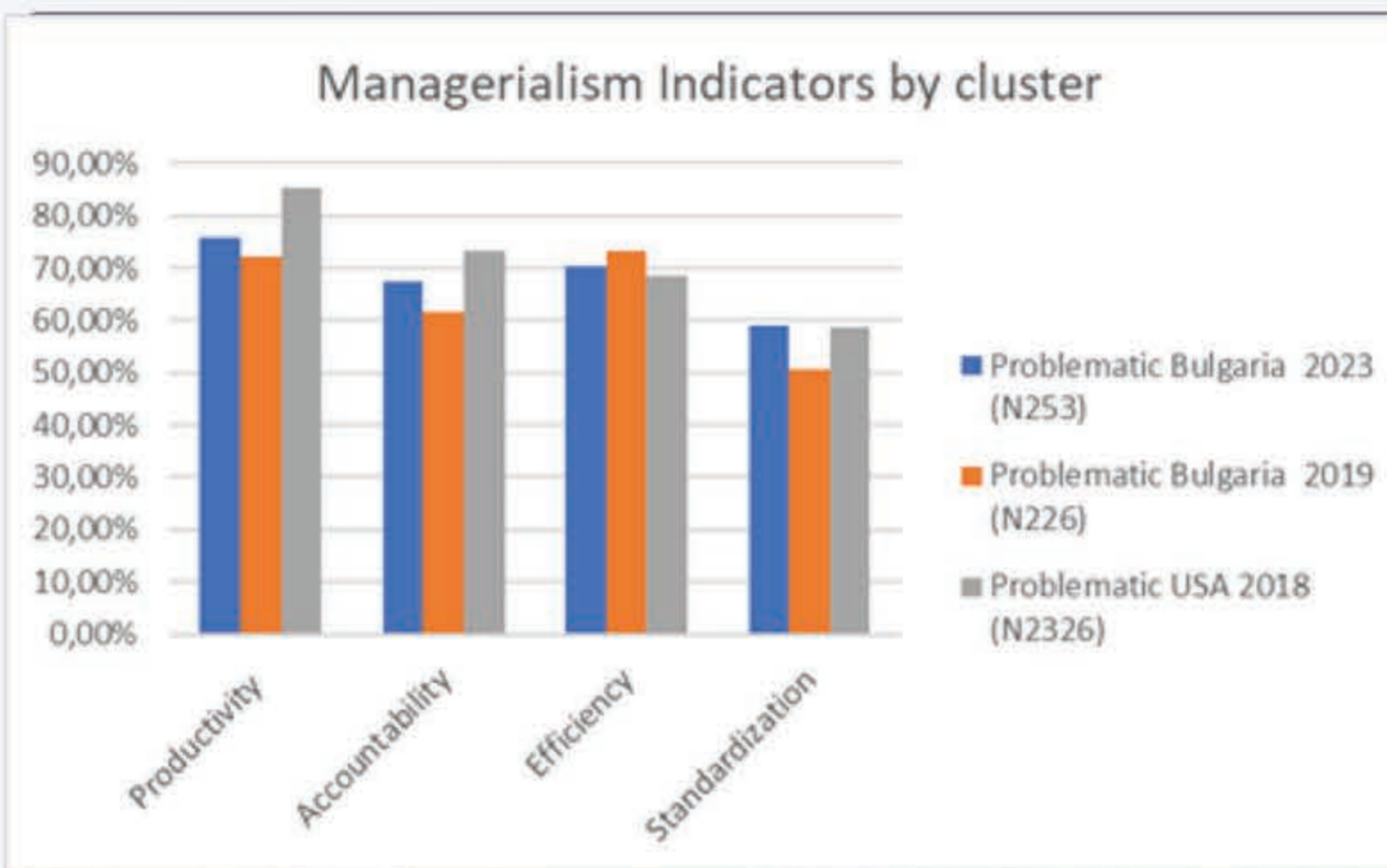
For the purposes of the second phase of the project, the questionnaire of **Abramovitz, M., Zelnick, J. Human Service Workforce Study, 2018** was translated, adapted to the Bulgarian context, tested and implemented.

The Bulgarian version of the questionnaire contains 44 questions and statements, addressing the following areas: introductory questions, how the social services are provided by the organizations, working conditions issues, work satisfaction, quality of the work, well-being, demographics.

All statements are grouped into 4 **research variables - productivity, accountability, efficiency, and standardization, addressing 45 managerialism indicators.**

The indicators of Managerialism used in this study were selected from empirical studies of the impact of Managerialism within human service organizations in the US and internationally.

Fig. 1 Summary results



The respondents were answering to the questions by using 4-level rating scale – major problem, minor problem, not a problem, doesn't happen here.

The questionnaire in online format was distributed to various social services organizations across the country. A total of 253 managers and social work professional have participated in the survey implemented in the end of 2023.

The results from this study were compared with Bulgarian data from 2019 with 226 respondents and a US data from 2018 with 2326 respondents using the same research instrument.

RESULTS

The summary of the empirical findings are presented on Fig. 1.

The **Productivity** cluster includes five questions related to the pace of work, which is identified as problematic by a significant percentage of the surveyed social work professionals in the USA and Bulgaria.

Regarding the indicator "I have too much work", 67.1% of the surveyed social workers in Bulgaria in 2019 answered affirmative that this is a problem for them. For a third of the respondents, this is not perceived as problematic. In 2023, there is a certain increase in the relative share of social workers for whom the availability of a lot of work is problematic – 70.4%, which usually negatively affects the physical and mental status of each worker or employee.

In the United States in 2018 the indicator "I have too much work" is perceived as problematic by 89.4% of the respondents. More than 77% indicate increased requirements when working with documentation; 65.9% reported an increased emphasis on measurement-based assessment; 65.7% report using performance-based measurements and more than 60% practice using evidence-based models. They worry that "the growing focus on measuring, achieving metrics, and routinizing social service delivery is pulling practitioners away from building relationships with clients, the hallmark of their professional practice".

The neoliberal ideas of austerity of public funds have an impact in the direction of the requirement for the implementation of more activities with the same number of people, which definitely saves resources for the employer (organization, agency, etc.) That is why 77.7% of the respondents in Bulgaria in indicated it in 2019, and this percentage increased to 84.2% in 2023. Which does not lead to an increase in the quality of services, because people in need receive less human attention and the opportunity to communicate with a supporting professional. The difference of more than 6 points is indicative of the pressure that exists at the formal and informal level to intensify some social services and bring them closer to business-oriented activities.

The data from the survey show that if the "focus on doing more in the same amount of time" in Bulgaria was identified as a problem by 77.4% of the survey participants in 2019, in 2023 this relative share increased by about 5 points and is already 81.8%. In the United States, this is problematic for 85.2% of respondents included in the survey in 2018.

In recent years, those working in the field of social work seem to have accepted as inevitable the increase in the time that should be spent on working with various documents (filling, drafting, etc.). In 2019 - 78.4% of those surveyed cited it as a problem, which dropped slightly in 2023 to 76.9%. We are witnessing an increase in the "document flow" in all areas of social services in order to increase transparency and accountability, but here, too, opinions are sometimes divided – does this "eat up" the valuable time for trusting communication between the client and the professional? In the United States 83.5% of the surveyed social workers believe that this is a problem for the different fields of social work.

Tracking the values of the **Accountability** indicator "the time spent working with documentation takes away from the time spent directly working with customers" shows a higher degree of perception of this as a problem in our country compared to the United States. And if in 2019 this was indicated by 82.4% of the surveyed social workers, and in 2023 - by 84.7%, then for the United States the value is slightly lower - 79.4%.

Placing greater emphasis on work results is an indicator that has always been relevant in social work as supporting the social inclusion of clients through various positive social measures and adequate social programs. In the current study, the lowest values for this indicator given by social workers in our country stand out - only 48.2% define it as a problem in 2019, it decreases to 32.3% in 2023.

The empirical data of the study show that the variable **Efficiency** of management in the studied social work organizations is rather defined as insufficient, both in the study in Bulgaria and in the one conducted in the United States. In addition, in our country it can be said that efficacy is steadily problematic, visible from the comparison between the data of the two studies, where for 2019 it is 70.3%, and for 2023 it increases to 73.2%. It should not be forgotten that this period also includes the time of the special working conditions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. In particular, problematic areas in efficiency are indicated - the number of staff is insufficient in relation to the volume of work, inadequate funding of the services provided, a shift in focus from the quality of social services to efficiency, and the last one is the replacement of highly paid specialists with those with lower pay.

The least problematic by the studied persons is considered to be the variable **Standardization** in all three studies. However, it is outlined by over 50% of the respondents, which, according to the terms of the methodology used, indicates a problem in the management of social work organizations both in Bulgaria and the United States.

The following more pronounced problem areas are also noted here: lack of sufficient time in customer evaluation, increase in the degree/routine of work, low share of IT technologies used for monitoring and control at the workplace.

In the second survey in Bulgaria, there was a little less than a 10% decline in the number of people who participated in the survey, who identified standardization as a problematic in management. This means that there is a positive development in this direction, the reasons for which should be investigated by subsequent research.

CONCLUSION

In general, respondents' assessments of managerial practices under the indicator "productivity" show dynamics over time – in a positive or negative aspect. The different dimensions in the perception of the indicators in 2019 and 2023 still show a certain uncertainty in the assessment and a clear desire not to neglect the quality of services at the expense of new and unusual principles for social practice.

The four conceptual clusters on which this study unfolds: productivity (or acceleration), accountability (measurement counts), efficiency (saving costs/placing greater emphasis on saving money), and relationship building (the basis of social work practice) show some real concerns and anxieties in the social worker's workplace.

Improving the quality of social work services has a direct relationship with the motivation of workers with different target groups. In this regard, feeling too much focus on producing reports and reducing direct communication with clients can reduce motivation to work, due to fatigue and not seeing the benefits of overdoing it with requirements for descriptions of results, which are sometimes difficult to diagnose in the short term.

Therefore, in this aspect, it is essential for the preservation of the mission of any social work organization to find a measure on the part of the management in taking into account the process and the final result, i.e. a measure between the procedural and the final diagnosis.



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