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Structure of Soft Skills of Future Social Workers

Summary

The article is dedicated to the research of soft skills structural units and their formation of future social workers, as well as the issue of their professional growth and development. Professional skills consist of specific knowledge and abilities important for performing a particular job and that can be mostly identified, evaluated and measured. Until now, there was a perception that hard or functional-technical skills were the only skills needed for career growth and development. However, a study carried out at Harvard University shows that 80% of career achievements are determined by soft (social and communication) skills and only 20% by functional and technical skills.

Since the labor market currently requires diverse professionals, higher education institutions face new challenges. One of these challenges is to create pedagogical conditions for the development of soft skills, including those of future social workers.

The professional competence of a social worker involves three groups of skills, namely hard skills, soft skills and meta skills. We suppose that the mechanism of their formation in the conditions of professional training should be focused on the development of all components of soft skills, and their development provides the necessary professional qualities, the implementation of abilities, and the realization of values in social work. In accordance with the characteristics of future social workers in the development of «soft skills», its characteristic features and peculiarities are clarified, including: creating an informal environment for the formation of social leadership in higher educational institutions; filling the educational program with options for «soft skills», activities aimed at increasing the practice-oriented training of future specialists, the use of active and interactive techniques, forms, methods and means of developing the «soft skills» of social workers.

The results of the study include the definition of the concept of «soft skills», the identification of their general characteristics, the outlining of groups of soft skills, and the description of their main components. It was found that the most in-demand flexible competencies are: teamwork, critical thinking, leadership, creativity, meeting deadlines, responsibility and discipline, as well as communication skills, emotional stability, ability to work in stressful situations, adaptability to a new team or working conditions, conflict resolution, critical and creative thinking, public speaking skills, reliability, flexibility, responsibility, priority setting, planning, adequate perception of criticism and readiness for improvement, and professional etiquette proficiency.

Keywords: higher educational institutions, vocational education, social work, professional skills, professional skills, lifelong learning

1. Introduction

The issue of personal development remains one of the most pressing in the 21st century. After all, improving one's knowledge, skills and abilities makes it possible to solve new social problems. Ukraine is also facing an acute problem of developing the social sphere and professional development of social workers, which will allow it to effectively overcome the consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

In the structure of the personality of a future social worker, we have identified the following professional skills: hard skills, soft skills and meta skills.

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The next stage of our research is to determine the structure of soft skills of social workers, which is the main purpose of this article.

During the writing of the article, the following methods were used: theoretical (induction, synthesis, generalization, specification) and empirical (study and analysis of regulatory documents in the field of vocational education (Pro zatverdzhennya standartu spetsializovanoi osvity naukovooho spryamuvannya, 2019; Pro povnu zahal'nu serednyu osvitu, 2020), pedagogical documentation and results of scientific activities of higher educational institutions, testing).

2. The concept of soft skills

After analyzing the approaches of researchers to the interpretation of soft skills, we suggest the following definition of «soft skills» of a social worker.

«Soft skills» of a social worker are a set of non-specialized, interconnected, acquired, difficult to track, variable, situational, closely related to the nature of the social and psychological skills of a specialist that contribute to the implementation of highly effective professional social work and successful career growth. They hold a key place in the professional structure of a social worker's personality. Let us consider this statement in more detail (Mykhailyshyn, Mandro, 2021, p. 263).

While analyzing a number of information sources, we have identified the following general characteristics of «soft skills»:

- acquired, uncertified, difficult to track, social and psychological skills that a future specialist obtains through training and self-improvement and uses to perform successful professional activities;
- those that are measured by quantitative indicators, the level of their formation is checked by visual demonstration;
- those for the development of which the right hemisphere of the brain is responsible;
- variable and situational;
- those that are designed to help professionals find the best way to perform tasks that are not described in their job responsibilities;
- those that include stress tolerance, conflict resolution, creativity, critical thinking, goal setting, leadership, motivation, emotional intelli-

gence, communication, decision making, planning;

- personal qualities that contribute to effective and harmonious interaction with other people;
- the use of different models of behavior;
- skills are closely related to a person's character rather than professional knowledge;
- skills that include social, intellectual, communication, volitional and other competencies (Muravyova, Mar'yanko, Osadcha, 2021, p. 111; Mykhailyshyn, Mandro, 2021, p. 264).

Every day, a social worker faces the problem of processing a large amount of information, solving complex problems and making important decisions, as well as the need to communicate and find a common language with clients, management, colleagues, public authorities, employees of law enforcement agencies, social service institutions, healthcare institutions, social protection institutions, educational institutions, public, children's and youth organizations, leisure facilities, lawyers, etc. Considering the specifics of professional responsibilities, the following groups of «soft skills» should be distinguished:

- communication skills (public speaking, presentation, personal brand, self-presentation, negotiation, conflict resolution, storytelling, interpersonal communication, business ethics, professional ethics, intercultural competence, networking)
- management skills (leadership, team building, motivation, project management, organization /efficiency, goal setting, result orientation, planning, time management/resource management, social activity, mentoring/facilitation, control)
- personal effectiveness skills (emotional intelligence, empathy, solving complex situations, lifelong development, stress resistance, quick response, effectiveness under risk, client focus, creativity, reframing, initiative, innovation)
- information processing skills (flexibility of thinking, critical thinking, data search/analysis/synthesis, media literacy, observation, prudence, analytical thinking, logical reasoning, monitoring, trends in the professional field, processing of large amounts of information, establishing relationships);
- strategic skills (tactical thinking, strategic thinking, decision-making, ingenuity, image, alternatives, priority, systemic thinking, structural

thinking, research thinking, problem-oriented thinking) (Forostovs'ka, 2020; Holovan, 2012, p. 58; Povstyn, Kozyar, 2019, p. 124).

3. Components of soft skills

Based on the classification of «soft skills», we suggest that the main components of the structure of «soft skills» that are important at the current stage of development of the theory and practice of social work and will be relevant in the future are:

- orientation to changes in the field of social work;
- management of knowledge and resources of social work;
- ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of professional activity;
- application of communication tools in the performance of professional responsibilities;
- management for the effectiveness of social work;
- complex solution of problem situations and determination of prospects;
- unbiased processing of information (Nakhod, 2018, p. 133; Tymoshenko, 2016, p. 110).

The first component – orientation to changes in the field of social work – focuses on social needs and priorities. Its main indicators, according to the theoretical analysis of our study, include: willingness to work in the social sphere; realization of the importance of «soft skills» values for social work; need to enrich professional experience; desire for social changes in future professional activities; setting up for a positive outcome; desire to achieve goals and solve problems of professional activity; the desire for creative success in future activities.

The second component – management of knowledge and resources of social work – justifies the ability to constantly acquire the necessary knowledge and effectively use it to improve the resources of social work, to self-education, using innovative techniques and methods. The content of this component reflects the characteristics of human consciousness and its results, which are formed on the basis of the synthesis of constantly acquired knowledge, skills and abilities that characterize the ability of specialists to effectively manage resources in professional activities. Among its main indicators are: knowledge about «soft skills» and their effective management; ability to acquire «soft skills» and lifelong learning;

familiarity with the use of innovative technologies, methods and resources of social work; knowledge of socially significant problems of social work; understanding of the importance of developing «soft skills».

The third component – ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of professional activities – focuses on the need for social workers to cope with a large volume of cases on time and work for results without the risk of overload and harm to health. The main indicators include: the ability to empathize; commitment to life-long development; ability to solve difficult situations; ability to endure stressful situations without causing unpleasant consequences for personal activities and the environment; ability to respond quickly and efficiently; prompt identification of customer needs; implementation of brand new ideas; ability to rebuild destructive perception, behavior and thinking; ability to start a business independently.

The fourth component – application of communication tools in the performance of professional duties. Its main indicators include: ability to speak and make presentations in public; ability to create a personal brand and self-presentation; the ability to negotiate and resolve conflicts; ability to create stories to convey the necessary information in order to influence the emotional, motivational, cognitive spheres of the listener; knowledge of business and professional ethics; ability to communicate with representatives of other cultures and nationalities; ability to involve people in solving particular tasks through acquaintances.

The fifth component – management for the effectiveness of social work. Its main indicators include: leadership qualities; ability to build an effective team to achieve a common result; ability to plan, organize and manage resources for the successful achievement of goals and completion of social project tasks; effective planning and organization of professional activities; ability to set and achieve goals; result orientation; organization of time to complete current tasks; civic engagement and focus on solving social problems.

The sixth component – complex solution of problem situations and determination of prospects. Its main indicators include: ability to think under conditions of time pressure and psycho-emotional stress; solving tactical problems; ability to think strategically; ability to make decisions and find alternatives; appli-

cation of structural and systemic thinking; ability to research thinking, ability to problem-oriented thinking.

The seventh component – unbiased processing of information – focuses on the phenomenon of mass learning and the universal availability of potentially useful information. Here are its main indicators: ability to think thoroughly and make independent decisions; media literacy; ability to search, analyze, synthesize data; ability to observe; use of analytical and logical thinking; ability to process large amounts of information; establishing relationships.

4. Basic competencies of social workers

Based on the index analysis of the relevant components of «soft skill», the basic competencies that future professional social workers should possess are identified (Vysotchenko, 2020, p. 13; Yermak, 2019, p. 113).

The first component of soft skills is «Orientation to changes in the field of social work». The basic competencies in this regard include the ability to adhere to state standards of professional activity; ability to approach professional tasks motivatedly; ability to define and build a system of values in professional activity; ability to embrace social change as an opportunity for the future development of the field of social work; ability to implement changes in accordance with the challenges of our time; ability to strive and succeed in professional activity; ability to focus on achieving the goal.

The second component of soft skills is «Management of knowledge and resources of social work». The competencies include: ability to acquire contemporary knowledge in the field of social work regarding the specifics of soft skills; ability to find opportunities for rapid learning; the ability to apply knowledge to the provision of social services; the ability to find effective methods for resolving social problems; the ability to ensure a high level of professional experience in the application and implementation of social work theories and technologies; the ability to improve professionally; the ability to think positively.

The third component is «Ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of professional activity». The competencies include: ability to empathize; ability to find opportunities for lifelong learning; ability to

think systematically, apply creative abilities to form fundamentally new ideas and creative problem resolution; ability to strive and desire to learn new things, experiment and create innovations to improve social work; ability to think positively; ability to be proactive; ability to be client-oriented; ability to be stress-resistant; ability to quickly respond and effectively resolve problems.

«Application of communication tools in the performance of professional responsibilities» is the fourth component of soft skills. The main competencies are: ability to communicate fluently and effectively in the state language, particularly in the realm of public communication; ability to organize professional communication in the public sphere (conversation, discussion, negotiations, public speaking, etc.); ability to observe business and professional spheres; ability to find a common language with representatives of other cultures and nationalities; ability to interact interpersonally; ability to involve representatives of different professions to resolve specific problems; ability to conduct a discussion in order to achieve a common understanding of the issues; ability to persuade and manage conflicts.

The fifth component of soft skills is «Management for the effectiveness of social work». The following competencies are at the core: ability to manage own professional activity; ability to cooperate effectively and establish effective interaction with clients, partners and colleagues; ability to implement social and project activities; ability to organize and conduct social events; ability to use social work resources appropriately; ability to engage in socially significant and mentoring activities; ability to develop and implement innovations in social work; ability to generate new ideas in the field of social work.

The sixth component is «Complex solution of problem situations and determination of prospects». The main competencies include: ability to stress resistance; ability to anticipate and predict changes in the social sphere as a whole and possible changes in the socio-economic status of certain social groups and individual vulnerable groups of clients, to plan activities considering these changes; ability to make decisions and identify alternatives; ability to study a social object as a systemic model; ability to apply scientific evidence-based methods of resolving professional problems.

«Unbiased processing of information» is the seventh component of soft skills. Ability to use information and communication technologies; ability to think critically, analytically and logically; ability to express oneself and communicate through media, consciously perceive and critically interpret information, distinguish reality from its virtual simulation (understand the reality constructed by media sources, comprehend power relations, myths and types of control they cultivate) are among the core competencies.

5. Conclusions

Thus, our approach to determining the structural components of future social workers' «soft skills» is conditional and requires a study of the content and functional aspects of «soft skills», particularly the criteria that substantiate the dynamic structure of «soft skills» indicators. Additionally, these criteria allow us to simultaneously assess the dynamics of its formation and structural changes, which is associated with the construction of a structural and functional model of soft skills formation and the implementation of organizational and pedagogical conditions that can reveal not only the level of its formation, but also the specificity of the profession for social workers in the context of soft skills development. This gives prospects for further research in this area of study.

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